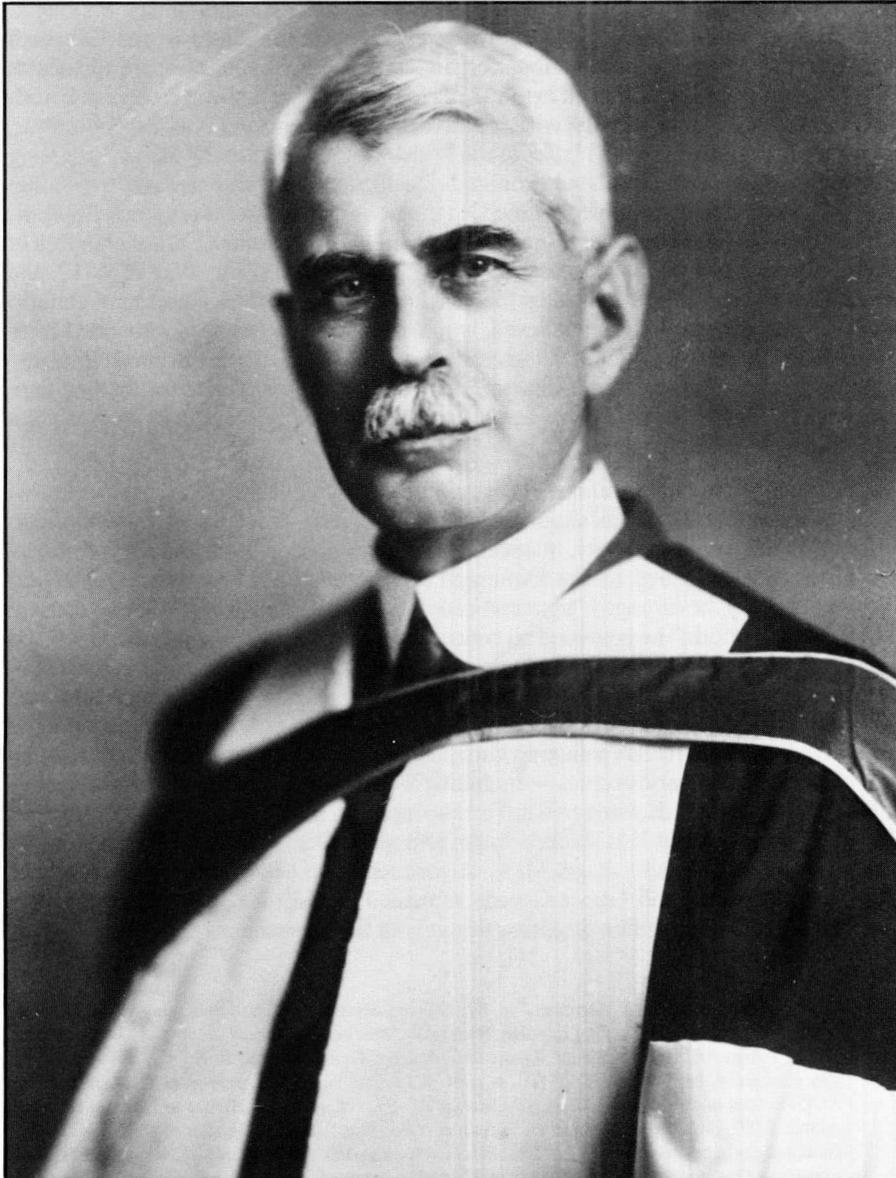


“Quaint Specimens of the Early Days”: Priorities in Collecting the Ontario Archival Record, 1872-1935

by DONALD MACLEOD

Images of a region's past reflect largely the history written about that past, and the archival resources available in turn exercise a pronounced influence over what history is written. In Ontario, fascination with things military, with pre-Confederation colonial politics, and with pioneer life and settlement occupied special places in archival collecting between 1872 and 1935. The documentation of local settlement, for one, played so prominent a part that it might readily be argued that more attention was paid to local identities than to the provincial identity as a whole, especially by the provincial archives. Archival collecting in Ontario, centred in the work of the Public Archives of Canada (dating from 1872) and the Ontario provincial archives (founded in 1903) did differ markedly from that in at least one other region. Archival work in the Maritimes concentrated almost wholly on the pre-Confederation period; in Ontario, archival institutions more frequently followed developments into the twentieth century. Moreover, in Ontario, intermittent attempts were made to document social life and, especially, the march of material progress won through corporate growth, agrarian enterprise, and various aspects of institutional modernization. Yet few relevant unpublished materials were acquired, eccentricities beset the later work of the Public Archives of Canada, and the broader spectrums of political, social, and economic change remained neglected. Other preoccupations dominated. Archivists for the most part turned a blind eye to the details of post-Confederation party politics, to economic and social policy as it evolved at the provincial level, to social and political dissent within provincial society, to new ideologies, intellectual systems, and social mentalities, and to urban social life in general, although here *some* exceptions appeared. Archival collecting reflected a muddy complex of instinctive conservative values, moderate regard for charitable works and social improvement, pronounced admiration for the Loyalists, Loyalism, and British military sagas, and a reverence for “old families,” local community, and the pioneer struggle.¹

1 Donald Macleod, “Our Man in the Maritimes: ‘Down East’ With the Public Archives of Canada, 1872-1932,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 86-87; Ontario, *Annual Report of the Bureau of Archives* [hereafter, including annual reports of the Department of Public Records and Archives, *ROA*], 1903, p. 8; George W. Brown, “Provincial Archives in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 16, no. 1 (March 1935), p. 14. For a discussion of the Loyalist myth in imperialist ideology see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto, 1970), especially chapter 3.



Alexander Fraser, 1860-1936. Courtesy: Archives of Ontario, S 435.

To be sure, practical considerations were also significant in archival collecting, as is illustrated by the early work of the Archives Branch of the federal Department of Agriculture, which in 1912 became the Public Archives of Canada. Protracted institution-based acquisitions of archival materials began in 1872 with the appointment of Douglas Brymner, associate editor of the Montreal *Daily Herald* and editor of the Canadian Presbyterian Church's denominational organ, as Archivist. Some measure of success followed. Major projects initiated in the 1870s for transcribing archival records in British repositories bore fruit, especially, with copies of the Haldimand and Bouquet collections, and of more importance for Ontario, of the British Colonial Office "Q Series," covering the years 1760 to 1840. This latter promised rich documentary sources for conventional narrative accounts of pre-Confederation Ontario politics. Brymner was enthused specifically by the various documents relating to clergy reserves, the Roman Catholic Church in Upper Canada, Six Nations settlement on the Grand River, the War of 1812, the "Naturalization Question," and land settlement in general — all stock elements of Ontario history. Such records, Brymner believed, would combat a pervading ignorance of early "domestic politics." R.G. Hunter remarked in 1889 in a letter to Brymner that the publication of transcribed documents in Archives Branch reports had for the first time established a "connected chain of evidence" regarding the Family Compact and struggles for responsible government.²

The search extended to sources in Ontario as well. Brymner believed the documentation of provincial as well as national (termed "general") history to be the Dominion archives' mandate. Accordingly, in 1882 Brymner announced proposals that all papers and publications acquired by the Dominion archives, and not bearing specifically on "general" history, be arranged "systematically" first "according to provinces," then by "subjects and periods;" he possessed no concept of the modern rules of provenance. If the history of a country in existence only since 1867 was to be understood, the preceding history of its component provinces required documentation. A trip by Brymner to Toronto in 1872 to view government records was followed a year later by the printing of about five hundred circulars soliciting knowledge of private collections and by visits by an archives' agent to various cities — including Detroit — to produce a rough inventory of Ontario sources. Finds uncovered in Toronto included large caches of land records and United Empire Loyalist lists stacked in government offices.³ The Dominion archives possessed one natural advantage. Many departmental and political papers of the old provinces of Canada and Upper Canada remained in federal hands in Ottawa after Confederation, though "often dispersed throughout the departments ... in every stage of

2 Macleod, "Our Man in the Maritimes," p. 87; Duncan McArthur, "The Canadian Archives and the Writing of Canadian History," Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1934), pp. 8-10; Canada, Public Archives of Canada, *Report on Canadian Archives* [hereafter *RCA*], 1894, p. v; *RCA*, 1896, p. vi; *RCA*, 1898, p. iii; *RCA*, 1891, p. x; *RCA*, 1892, p. vii; Public Archives of Canada [hereafter PAC], Records of the Public Archives of Canada, RG 37, vol. 127, J.H. Hunter to Douglas Brymner, 1 March 1889. Both the Haldimand and Bouquet collections related to the immediate post-Conquest period and consisted, respectively, of 232 and 30 volumes. Haldimand, of course, was Guy Carleton's successor as Governor in 1778 and had before been Governor of the Trois Rivières district. During the Seven Years' War, his friend, Colonel Bouquet, had fought with the British army in America and, subsequently, against Indians during Pontiac's Rising. The Q Series contained nine hundred volumes and covered the years 1760 to 1840.

3 *RCA*, 1882, p. 1; *RCA*, 1881, p. 1; John Hall Archer, "A Study of Archival Institutions in Canada" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1969), p. 58; Canada, *Report of the Minister of Agriculture*, 1873, p. 170; PAC, RG 37, vol. 104, [illegible] to Brymner, 3 November 1873.

insecurity.”⁴ As the work of the archives proceeded, Brymner also established an elaborate series of contacts with individuals and associations. Collegial relationships developed with persons prominent in historical circles such as Thomas Hodgins, “historiographer” for the Ontario Department of Education, Janet Carnochan, President of the Niagara Historical Society, and James Bain, Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Library. Exchanges followed of unwanted historical publications and of information regarding existing and potential archival collections. As well, Brymner approached various local historical societies, formed increasingly in the 1890s, for reports regarding proposed collections and for regular transfers of society proceedings. Overtures to “local notables,” such as Judge Jacob Pringle of Cornwall, opened doors to municipal offices and court-houses and won the occasional ally able to exercise moral influence in persuading local historical “investigators” to assist the archives.⁵

Brymner nonetheless faced many impediments. At no time during his tenure did funding of the Archives Branch exceed \$12,000. Although Brymner was much concerned with the need to accumulate “complete and comprehensive” records, circumstances often dictated otherwise. In 1885 Brymner learned that a number of Archdeacon John Strachan’s papers were to be donated to a college library, possibly Trinity College. “The great drawback to the attempts to form a National Collection,” he wrote one of the principals, “is the natural love for local institutions” thanks to which “documents that would naturally illustrate each other are scattered and become practically lost.”⁶ Equally, attempts to persuade private donors to deposit lists of Loyalist ancestors with the archives, creating a “general collection” whereby the disparate lists could be “connected” and ancestral relationships traced, foundered on public indifference.⁷ Even more daunting difficulties were the effective jurisdictional limits placed on the Dominion archives in light of the British North America Act. Often, at best, Brymner was reduced to making feeble attempts to have preliminary lists of Ontario court and municipal records begun. Some reactions were understandable. An attempt in August 1885 to persuade Ontario Premier Oliver Mowat to have all local registry office records inventoried by provincial office inspectors was rebuffed five months later, Mowat refusing to authorize the “labour of years” and “enormous expense” required.⁸ Other responses were less justified. Despite agreement by Mowat in 1882 that the Archives Branch should acquire a full set of Ontario departmental reports and legislative publications, Brymner faced frequent bureaucratic indifference requiring, for example, anxious approaches to provincial legislators for help

4 Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Records of the Archives of Ontario, RG 17, 16, vol. 12, Alexander Fraser to A.C. Garden, 20 June 1924; Departmental Commission of the Privy Council on the State of Public Records, quoted in Archer, “Archival Institutions in Canada,” pp. 81-82.

5 PAC, RG 37, vol. 107, Thomas Hodgins to Brymner, 12 July 1884; vol. 187, Brymner to Janet Carnochan, 28 March 1898; vol. 185, Brymner to James Bain, 19 November 1896; vol. 117, James Coyne to Brymner, 6 May 1891; vol. 181, Brymner to Judge [Jacob] Pringle, 7 January 1885 and 8 January 1885.

6 Ian E. Wilson, “Shortt and Doughty: The Cultural Role of the Public Archives of Canada, 1904-1935,” (M.A. thesis, Queen’s University, 1973), p. 28; PAC, RG 37, vol. 181, Brymner to D. McInnes, 18 September 1885.

7 *RCA*, 1887, p. vii; *RCA*, 1884, p. x.

8 PAC, RG 37, vol. 108, T.F. Brough to Brymner, 12 January 1885 and 17 January 1885; vol. 181, Brymner to Sir Oliver Mowat, 27 August 1885; PAC, RG 37, vol. 110, E.F.B. Johnstone to Brymner, 30 January 1886. Three years earlier Brymner had suggested that lists of the locations of provincial government records be provided by the provinces to compensate researchers partially for the problems posed by the dispersal of records; *RCA*, 1882, p. 3.

through a friendly Toronto alderman. Only as acquisitions became more regular did a wider variety of publications become available: Bureau of Industry reports, government insurance reports, the report of the 1897 Royal Commission on the Mineral Resources of Ontario, annual reports of the Sheep Breeders Association of Ontario, and other such publications.⁹

Additional factors in archival collecting, however, were contemporary historiographical outlooks. Certainly, by the 1880s Brymner was aware that only a wide range of documentation would provide the foundation for "authentic history." State papers "form but a very small part of the real history of the country," he told a Brantford man in 1884. The Archives Branch sought "all papers bearing on the social, ecclesiastical, political, industrial, or in a word, any form of the life of the Country or the people." Changes "in the mode of writing history," he declared two years earlier, now made papers documenting "social progress" much more important in the "eyes of historians." As "political history is now traced to the source from which it springs," close attention "to the social life of the various classes of the community" was demanded.¹⁰

The range of records actually collected was nevertheless somewhat more narrow. In practice, Brymner's notion of social history largely resolved itself into chronological narratives of the growth and settlement of local communities. Records reflecting a fascination with the "Military System of Canada" often dominated acquisitions: orderly books, Stormont Militia rosters, rifle association proceedings, and the like. So, too, did local histories, records relating to the romantic events of the Mackenzie rebellion, and papers regarding the Six Nations Indians, Indians in general, roads and canals, land settlement, the War of 1812, and other standard topics of pre-Confederation political and rural pioneer history. Strong influences in collecting were a pervading Loyalist mentality and associated interest in charting the early development of pioneer communities.¹¹

The types of records that donors made available also limited the range of acquisitions. These records reflected current historical interests. Research questions directed at the archives dealt repeatedly with such subjects as Joseph Brant, militia membership, military fortifications, pioneer and military ancestors, and the War of 1812. Brymner was not blind to the importance of trade statistics, for example, to the "commercial historian" or to the value of studying the early history of banks. Yet breadth of historical documentation was confined mainly to the Dominion archives' growing newspaper "fyles" and an expanding library collection. This came gradually to include Canadian and American historical society proceedings, transactions of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, pamphlets pertaining to general questions of "political economy," pamphlets published on "both sides" of provincial "Equal Rights" questions, and various publications relating

9 PAC, RG 37, vol. 179, Brymner to Thomas Hodgins, 14 July 1884; Brymner to F. Yeigh, 21 July 1882; Brymner to Mr. Alderman Hallum, 5 March 1883; vol. 185, Joseph Marmette to the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, 27 October 1893; vol. 187, Brymner to J. Howard Hunter, 2 February 1900; vol. 123, A. Blue to Brymner, 9 January 1897.

10 *RCA*, 1881, p. 13; PAC, RG 37, vol. 179, Brymner to T.S. Thurston, 7 August 1884; *RCA*, 1882, p. 6.

11 *RCA*, 1882, p. 6; PAC, RG 37, vol. 179, Brymner to Col. Otter, 23 February 1883; vol. 187, Brymner to H. King, 24 March 1898; vol. 110, I.G. Pringle to Brymner, 24 October 1885; vol. 189, Brymner to John H. Thompson, 15 June 1898; vol. 119, H. Jarvis to Brymner, 2 August 1892; *RCA*, 1879, pp. ix-xiii; PAC, RG 37, vol. 179, Brymner to G.L. Burton, 12 April 1883; Brymner to Grant Powell, 2 October 1882.

to the “underground railroad,” agriculture, transportation, natural theology, botany, geology, and biography.¹²

The techniques employed by Brymner’s successor, Arthur Doughty, were in most respects unremarkable. Like other contemporary archivists, Doughty established close ties with historical societies, systematic exchanges of unwanted materials with other repositories, frequent contact with historians, and warm collaborative relationships with other custodians of historical collections such as L. Hannifray Irving, archivist for the Canadian Military Institute. Remarkably, in part through networks of contacts, in part through his own individual efforts, in part through other means, Doughty did manage to quadruple the Dominion archives’ holdings within four years of becoming Dominion Archivist in 1904. Yet the quality of acquisitions relating to Ontario by no means matched the quantity. Many, for example, were seeming “orphans,” with little organic relationship to larger collections: the eighty-second annual report of the St. Andrews Society of Toronto, an article on the Good Roads Association of Ontario, linen blueprints of Westmeath and Ross Townships, student rolls from Upper Canada College, a listing of Ottawa Snowshoe Club members in 1870, and other often useful, but fragmentary records.¹³ Doughty’s professed belief in “scientific history,” in the necessity to create a “higher order of historical literature,” and in the eventual emergence of “ultimate history” did little to encourage creation of a clear, consistent, and comprehensive policy on acquisitions.¹⁴ An enthusiast’s eclecticism, tempered only by budget and other circumstances, predominated. The only apparent pattern was Doughty’s evident regard for the “ancient” record and the record documenting Ontario’s military past, old families, pioneers, politics, and political heroes, tempered sometimes by an expressed interest in contemporary documents, “comparatively unimportant at present, which will, however, possess interest in the future.”¹⁵ Otherwise, a singular lack of coherent policy prevailed. This was an important factor in the work of Public Archives of Canada agent James Mitchell.

Unlike other collectors of archival materials working in Ontario, and following his practice in other regions, Doughty relied largely on an agent to track down archival materials. This at first promised some system in archival collecting. Shortly after becoming Dominion Archivist, Doughty sent archives employee Robert Laidlaw to visit universities, libraries, and private collectors across the province, locating a variety of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century manuscript collections. While the only major acquisitions relating to Ontario were purchases of Askin family papers and papers of the

12 Wilson, “Shortt and Doughty,” p. 4; PAC, RG 37, vol. 112, H. Van Koughnett to J.C. Taché, 30 May 1889; vol. 116, Ferguson O’Brien to Brymner, 19 December 1889; vol. 123, Richard Walken to Brymner, 23 January 1897; Justus A. Griffin to Brymner, 22 March 1897; vol. 129, W.A. Marcellis to Brymner, 10 August 1900; *RCA*, 1883, p. 9; *RCA*, 1900, pp. xxii, xxxvi-xxxvii; PAC, RG 37, vol. 179, Brymner to John Ross Robertson, 7 April 1883; *ibid.*, Brymner to Thomas Galbraith, 23 March 1883; vol. 185, Brymner to the Reverend Mr. Caven, 24 April 1895.

13 PAC, RG 37, vol. 84, Clarence M. Warner to Doughty, 28 February 1912; vol. 100, “Duplicate List No. 32,” The Library, University of Western Ontario, July 1930; vol. 81, L. Hannifray Irving to Doughty, 27 October 1907; vol. 200, Doughty to Professor W.P.M. Kennedy, 24 April 1922; vol. 197, Doughty to A. McMurphy, 19 May 1919; vol. 205, Doughty to R.R. Miller, 3 July 1930; vol. 200, H.P. Biggar to *anon.*, 24 April 1923; vol. 196, Doughty to Professor A. Young, 4 July 1917, *RCA*, 1930, p. 8.

14 *RCA*, 1905, p. xiii; Wilson, “Shortt and Doughty,” pp. 37, 137.

15 PAC, RG 37, vol. 191, Doughty to Lois Saunders, 24 January 1911; *RCA*, 1913, p. 16; *RCA*, 1926, p. 13; *RCA*, 1908, p. 8. Doughty quoted from *RCA*, 1904, p. xliii.

Honourable Charles Jones,¹⁶ seven years later Doughty set out to repeat his strategy, this time on a more permanent basis. In 1915 Doughty hired James Mitchell, editor of the *Goderich Star* and Secretary of the Goderich Board of Trade, as the Public Archives agent in Ontario. Pressures exerted by Member of Parliament E.N. Lewis, acting in alliance with Member of Parliament Richard Blain and Supreme Court of Canada Justice Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, appear to have influenced the selection and perhaps even encouraged the creation of the new office. Mitchell's qualifications were vague, to say the least. Lewis could only say that Mitchell was "a gentleman of good address," "an educated gentleman of the student type," and of suitable "temperament and business habits;" Blain said that Mitchell was a "gentleman of literary turn." Once hired, Mitchell was essentially cut adrift. His training consisted of a week's visit to the Archives in Ottawa. Mitchell was in a constant state of insecurity as to what materials he should be pursuing. "I began the work," he wrote Norman Fee of the Archives in 1916, "with, I confess, an inadequate idea of what it required." He was seeking evaluation and advice. Little would be forthcoming. The problem, of course, was largely Doughty's failure to establish even a rudimentary acquisition policy. Doughty met requests for consultation with vague reassurances: Mitchell should use his "own judgment and take what steps" he thought desirable. Detailed monthly reports of finds received little comment.¹⁷

Through resourcefulness, Mitchell did partially compensate for lack of direction. Mitchell informed Doughty in 1917 that he made it "a rule" whenever he saw relevant items in the various newspapers to which he subscribed "to write someone connected with the item to see what it might lead to," thus producing a "considerable correspondence." He was a frequent participant in historical society meetings and tenacious in tracking down materials through often vague leads acquired during repeated tours around the province. He was also active in suggesting new techniques for gathering material. In September 1915 he reported marked enthusiasm "in almost every county I have visited" for the idea of circularizing Ontario newspaper editors asking that "marked copies of their papers" be sent the PAC whenever special articles appeared dealing with subjects of historical interest. In his monthly report for July 1917 Mitchell suggested that he periodically sit down to record interviews with aging pioneers. Much "interesting data," he contended, "was passing away" with the "Passing of the Pioneers."¹⁸

Good intentions did not always produce systematic results, nonetheless, and many, if not the majority, of Mitchell's finds were fragments of larger series, widely available published materials, or mere ephemera and curiosities. They comprised an eclectic mix of discoveries. These included such items as "Old and Souvenir issues of newspapers," a printed Court of Requests bill for the recovery of small debts, a pamphlet compilation of

16 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," pp. 108-9, 137; *RCA*, 1908, p. 8; Canada, *Report of the Department of Agriculture*, 1908, pp. 46-51. The Askin Papers consisted of the private and general correspondence of Charles Askin and John Askin, a merchant at Mackinac and Detroit, covering the years 1779 to 1840. The Charles Jones Papers included old maps and plans, military records, and letters of John Strachan, Ogle R. Gowan, Sir Allan Macnab, and others.

17 PAC, RG 37, vol. 20, E.N. Lewis to Charles Fitzpatrick, 11 March 1915; C.F. to *anon.*, 12 March 1915; Lewis to *anon.*, 3 June 1914; Richard Blain to Doughty, 11 March 1915; Mitchell to Norman Fee, 31 October 1916; vol. 197, Doughty to Mitchell, 18 July 1919.

18 PAC, RG 37, vol. 20, Mitchell to Doughty, 2 January 1917; *ibid.*, "Report for July 1917," James Mitchell. See also other monthly reports of James Mitchell, PAC, RG 37, vols. 20 and 21. Mitchell was making reference to an inspirational poem entitled "Passing of the Pioneers," which he included with his July report.

despatches from Lord Glenlg to Bond Head, a watercolour of Amherstburg in 1812, antiquarian pioneer histories and recollections, the contents of a library containing memoirs, county gazetteers, and "Ontario political speeches and pamphlets," and copies of *The Whizz-Bang*, a contemporary Canadian satirical magazine.¹⁹ Mitchell's reasoning ranged from the sound to the eccentric, as did most of his acquisitions. "Two short sketches in ms. of ex-slaves" were acquired, appropriately, because the "subject of ex-slave settlement in Canada is now being studied and written up."²⁰ Yet a pamphlet history of London was valued merely as "a model of letter press and engraving" and for "its literary tone and references to public men."²¹ A collection of "Indian Literature and Legend from Brant Reserve" included valuable ethnographic information regarding "festivals of the year."²² On the other hand, a letter of administration was sent to Ottawa not because of its historical value but as a "quaint specimen of documents of the early days."²³ Eighteen issues of "Hamilton Institute" *Papers and Records* that Mitchell acquired were "valuable and interesting" from both "a historical and scientific standpoint."²⁴ But Mitchell and Doughty both thought that a "hand-drawn and coloured" map showing troop placements at the Battle of Waterloo should be preserved "even if not belonging to Canadian history."²⁵ A pamphlet regarding the centenary celebrations of an old Glengarry County church together with a church register and "an old original church book" alone promised to make a "complete" record of the congregation.²⁶ Another document was a list of medals, "very interesting relics which speak most eloquently of the transitory character of earthly glory."²⁷ A historical article from the Guelph *Mercury* described the Guelph Winter Fat Stock Show, whose growing fame, Mitchell contended, made it "worthy of a printed permanent record."²⁸

Some of Mitchell's finds were of obvious value to the scholarly researcher. Characteristically, however, Mitchell's collecting often centred on matters dear to the antiquarian and amateur historian: the Upper Canadian militia, local settlement, and other such subjects. While Mitchell also sought material relating to "Health, Social Welfare, Trade, Etc.," most of this material was published: a pamphlet printed by the Kitchener Manufacturers' Association containing "a short sketch of the agitation which led to the formation of the Association," a souvenir history of the Dominion Orthopedic Hospital, telling "the story of this great and worthy work," and leaflets dealing with "The Liquor Question," race track wagering, and "Modern Cults." Interesting manuscript collections

19 *Ibid.*, vol. 317, Mitchell to Doughty, 5 December 1923; Mitchell to Doughty, 13 October 1924; "List and Description of Books, Pamphlets, Etc. from the Library of the Late G.R. Patullo, Esq. of Woodstock, Sent in to the Department of Public Archives, July 1922," [Mitchell]; "Books and Newspapers Gathered from Various Sources," Mitchell, [July 1925]; vol. 20, "Report for Month of August, 1917," Mitchell.

20 *Ibid.*, vol. 21, "Report of Material Gathered for Month of May 1919," [Mitchell].

21 *Ibid.*, vol. 20, "Report for October 1916," [Mitchell].

22 *Ibid.*, vol. 317, "Statement of Matters in Hand or Completed at Date May 1st., 1925," [Mitchell].

23 *Ibid.*, Mitchell to *anon.*, 24 August 1922.

24 *Ibid.*, vol. 21, "Memo of Material Sent into Public Archives Department for Month of June 1920," [Mitchell].

25 *Ibid.*, vol. 317, "Memo Re Special Material Now Sent In and Other Matters in Progress," [Mitchell, 1924]; Mitchell to Doughty, 13 October 1924.

26 *Ibid.*, "Description of Material Sent in for the Public Archives Department for Month of July 1923," [Mitchell].

27 *Ibid.*, vol. 20, "At Thamesville," [Mitchell, 1915].

28 *Ibid.*, Mitchell to Doughty, 27 September 1915.

such as the papers of John Reginald Gourlay, writer and naturalist, and some twenty-four letters relating to Upper Canadian “business conditions” in 1827 and 1828 were much rarer acquisitions. Mitchell himself admitted in 1924 that the “items and partial collections” he had sent to Ottawa might well, without thorough integration with other records, remain “so fragmentary and disconnected as to be very imperfect and almost useless for historical reference.”²⁹

Moreover, in 1917 Mitchell embarked on a new, unorthodox, and ultimately misguided project: the creation of artificial collections of documents, several consisting, curiously, of ephemera connected with recent ceremonial occasions, but most bearing on social, political, and economic questions of the day. These “compilations” would not consist of “disconnected” fragments. Instead, all those materials believed necessary for completeness were to be carefully assembled from disparate sources to make a virtual documentary “history.” Nowhere else, Mitchell contended, would such complete bodies of information, their component materials chronologically arranged, be available.³⁰

One such compilation was Mitchell’s collection on the founding of Ontario Hydro. The idea had its origins in engineering papers and reports acquired from the manager of the Ontario Power Company in 1915. At that time Mitchell had remarked that a “complete list” of publications and other documents should be constructed “that will tend to make up the complete story of the early days of the ‘Electric Age’ in the Province of Ontario.” “A generation hence,” he argued, “will see this power used to an extent and in a variety of ways as yet but dimly comprehended, and everything that will tell the story of its early development and growth will be good and valuable material.” By October 1917 he had a firm plan to present to Doughty. His “correct history” of the “Hydro Electric Movement” in Ontario would be “made up,” he said, “of letters to the press, editorials, correspondence with many individuals and the municipalities, and pamphlets, etc., with the final report, making a large collection of matter.” His plan was to “prepare the news items and reports from the newspapers in scrapbook form, adding the correspondence where it would fit in, [including] the reports, pamphlets, etc... [and] arranging all the material in such chronological form or order as would make the history complete.” Already Mitchell had secured the support of two leading lights in the “Power Movement,” E.W.B. Snider and D.B. Detweiler. He had promises of a scrapbook from another public power advocate and the assistance of a man familiar with the Cataract Power Company. In November Doughty wrote Mitchell to give his approval for the plan, so long as Mitchell did not actually set out to “write up the history.” A year later Mitchell announced that a substantial collection had formed, its coverage beginning with the first public meeting at which “organized municipal action” was advocated and ending with the introduction of hydro-electricity into Kitchener, a period from 1902 to 1910. He was awaiting only a minute book kept during the “second stage” of the agitation to make the story complete.³¹

29 *Ibid.*, vol. 317, “Description of Material Sent in to the Public Archives Department for the Month of July 1923,” [Mitchell]; vol. 21, “Report for Month of March 1918,” [Mitchell]; “Report of Work Done and Material Gathered for the Month of October 1920,” [Mitchell]; “Index of List of Publications by Department of Social Service and Evangelization of the Methodist Church of Canada Sent in to the Department, December 1st, 1920,” [Mitchell]; vol. 317, Mitchell to H.P. Biggar, 5 March 1923; vol. 20 “List of Books Gathered in London,” [Mitchell, 1915]; vol. 317, “Report as to Condition of Matters in Hand, 15 October 1924,” [Mitchell].

30 *Ibid.*, Mitchell to Doughty, 9 December 1918; “Statement of Matters in Progress, April 1922,” [Mitchell].

31 *Ibid.*, vol. 20, Mitchell to Doughty, 30 December 1915 and 27 October 1917; vol. 196, Doughty to Mitchell, 14 November 1917; vol. 317, Mitchell to Doughty, 9 December 1918.

This was only the first of a number of collections, some relating to issues of more broadly national significance such as Ku Klux Klan recruitment in Canada and the Equal Rights Movement, others pertaining more purely to Ontario, ranging from a compendium of materials regarding the bilingual schools controversy in Ontario to a collection of materials stemming from United Empire Loyalist celebrations held in Belleville in 1924. A “history” of the “Deep Waterways Movement” for construction of the “Georgian Bay Canal” and deepening of the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes waterways system was five years in the making.³² Another compilation, regarding Roman Catholic agitation for school assessment reforms, was actually created as the campaign developed and deliberately designed to be impartial. According to Mitchell, he had approached “both sides” for information and accumulated a sizeable amount of material, including “official copies of Pastorals issued by Bishops” and “some of the more worthwhile letters on the subject which have appeared in the daily press.”³³

The rationale behind compilations varied. One collection, following closely the unveiling of a memorial to one Joseph Scriven, was promoted by Mitchell’s desire to “honor” Scriven, composer of the hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”³⁴ Another collection documented the Bonne Entente Movement of the First World War, whose members organized exchange visits between Ontario and Quebec to promote goodwill. Mitchell argued that the movement’s history deserved preservation because of the movement’s special place as an “attempt for better understanding.”³⁵ Often as well, Mitchell, bereft of serious direction from Doughty, set out on his own to select just what contemporary issues would “become history” on the basis of no more sophisticated criteria than the amount of “public discussion” which had arisen. Some of the documents obtained were at least marginally relevant to modern historical scholarship. Nevertheless, combined with the mixed success of his more conventional archival activities, Mitchell’s decision to concentrate enormous amounts of time on narrow avenues of pursuit — consisting mainly of material already available publicly — significantly limited his contribution to the documentation of Ontario life.³⁶ The contribution of the PAC was thus also accordingly diminished.

By Mitchell’s time a provincial institution had joined the field of archival collecting. Nevertheless, it, too, produced a mixed record. In 1899 James Coyne, President of the newly formed Ontario Historical Society, began lobbying for the creation of a provincial archives. As a first step, a committee chaired by Andrew F. Hunter, local historian and amateur archaeologist, and George Pattullo, leading figure in Liberal circles in Southwestern Ontario, secured promises from the Deputy Registrar-General of Ontario, Dr. D.H. Bryce, for improved departmental care for records of vital statistics and for public access for purposes of genealogical research. Three years later in 1902 Pattullo and

32 *Ibid.*, Deputy Keeper of Public Records to Mitchell, 15 June 1920; Mitchell to Doughty, 15 October 1915; vol. 20, “Description of Material Sent in to Public Archives Department, 10 August 1925,” [Mitchell].

33 *Ibid.*, vol. 21, Mitchell to William Smith, 25 February 1922.

34 *Ibid.*, “Detailed Report for Month of May 1920,” [Mitchell].

35 *Ibid.*, Mitchell to Doughty, 26 December 1918; R.C. Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto, 1974), p. 265.

36 *Ibid.*, vol. 21, “Statement of Special Cases,” [Mitchell], January 1919; vol. 317, Mitchell to Doughty, 15 October 1924.

Hunter, assisted by a fellow OHS member, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Charles Canniff James, renewed the society's demands. Especially pressing, James and Hunter thought, was the need to preserve "early municipal records, records of township meetings, rolls of early inhabitants, etc." While Coyne's proposal was that the archives be a state-supported agency managed by the OHS on the model of the Wisconsin Historical Society, it was not to be. In July 1903 an order-in-council appointed journalist Alexander Fraser Provincial Archivist, reporting directly to the Provincial Treasurer. The Ontario Bureau of Archives was to be a full-fledged government agency, with Fraser as its head until his resignation in 1935.³⁷

Fraser's appointment in all likelihood owed much to Ontario Premier George Ross's pronounced admiration, a shared interest in Scottish culture, and an appreciation of the influence Fraser exercised as a leading figure within Scottish-Canadian social organizations. For three years Fraser had been actively lobbying for appointment as archivist; in January 1902 he even quietly sought Coyne's discrete collaboration in the matter. As early as 1900 Ross had been receptive to the idea, believing that a provincial archives might buy favour with local historical society members. By 1903 cabinet opposition to the expenditure had dropped away, and creation of the new office was possible.³⁸

However, Fraser's appointment resulted in a man with neither archival nor library experience nor broad background in Canadian history becoming Provincial Archivist. A native of Scotland, born in 1860, Fraser had earned a Master's degree from the University of Glasgow and emigrated to Canada at the age of twenty-six on the advice of Canadian High Commissioner in Britain, Sir Charles Tupper. He joined the editorial staff of the *Toronto Mail* and served there fourteen years. Subsequently, he was editor of *Massey's Magazine* and the *Presbyterian Review*; he also edited the *Scottish Canadian* without salary for some twenty-one years and *Fraser's Scottish Magazine* for five. Business ventures included partnership in an insurance firm and an ill-fated attempt to sell wines made from Canadian grapes in Scotland in the late nineties. While evidence points to a capacity to make enemies in private, a formidable social expertise eventually helped bring appointment as aide-de-camp to the lieutenant-governor in 1921. The *Toronto Star* later called him "the closest thing to the perfect secretary this generation has seen."

Fraser's political involvements were wide-ranging. Indeed, in the light of a subsequent failure to explore fully the possibilities for documenting post-Confederation political, social, and economic life, Fraser's interests reveal elements of irony. As a trustee on the Toronto Collegiate Institutes Board in the 1890s, Fraser championed technical instruction in the schools and improved teacher salaries. Later, during World War I, he served on the Board of Governors of the federal Bureau of Scientific and Industrial Research, subsequently speaking to Canadian Clubs and Rotary Clubs across Western Ontario on behalf of the Royal Canadian Institute's "movement" for scientific research. Though eventually an active advocate of religious tolerance, Fraser participated in the Equal Rights Association in the late eighties and early nineties and, on becoming Provincial

37 Gerald Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage: A History of the Ontario Historical Society* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 101-5; AO, Records of the Ontario Historical Society [hereafter OHS], vol. 3, MU 5422, G.R. Pattullo and A.F. Hunter to G.W. Ross, February 1902.

38 Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, p. 105; AO, Alexander Fraser Papers [hereafter AFP], vol. 2, MU 1064, Letterbook, 1891-1913, Fraser to Mr. Gillespie, 8 October 1900; Fraser to Andrew Pattullo, 19 October 1900; University of Western Ontario [hereafter UWO], James Coyne Papers [hereafter JCP], Box 4018, Fraser to Coyne, 2 January 1902.

Archivist, occasionally championed Native interests in land claims questions. These various activities helped develop pronounced political aptitudes.³⁹

His most prominent social connections nevertheless lay elsewhere. By the mid-nineties he had won wide recognition in Scottish-Canadian social circles in Ontario and various Scottish organizations such as the Caledonian Society, a leading Toronto businessman's association. A promoter of Scottish immigration, he eventually helped place well over four hundred Highland families on Canadian homestead lands and in 1891 was a principal founder of the 48th Highlanders, a militia regiment whose history he later wrote (a minute chronicling of names, dates, and regimental events). Perhaps his closest identification was with the Sons of Scotland, a benevolent society whose acting chief he became in 1891 (after only two years in the society) just as internal squabbling broke out over legal and financial questions. For some months he held the organization together, then criss-crossed the country organizing "local camps" as the organization recovered. In 1897 he became Grand Chief officially and served for twelve years with the support of prominent Ontario and Montreal Scotsmen, the "backing ... of which any fervent Scot would be proud," a biographer later wrote.⁴⁰

It was fortunate that Fraser possessed such stalwart social and organizational skills. Few of his literary and scholastic accomplishments fitted him specifically for appointment as Provincial Archivist. Gaelic culture and Scottish history largely dominated his non-journalistic writings. Much of his scholarly reputation, extending eventually into the United States, rested squarely on these interests; his work was characterized by schematic categorizations of literary traditions, a minute knowledge of the bagpipes, Scots regalia, and Gaelic vocabulary, and exhaustive cataloguings of names, dates, and events. In 1887 he organized the Gaelic Society of Canada to promote Gaelic language and literature, and in 1913 was made an honorary Doctor of Laws by St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. His work in Canadian history prior to becoming archivist was mostly amateurish, unanalytical, often descending into hagiography. His output included *Picturesque Toronto*, published in 1896 in twelve quarto volumes, a history of the 48th Highlanders, written in 1900, *The Clan Fraser in Canada: Souvenir of the First Annual Gathering*, printed in 1895, and several other efforts on Scottish settlers in Canada. *The Last Laird of McNab*, completed in 1899, was his only near attempt at mainstream historical writing. Antiquarian chronologies of Scots achievement, infused occasionally with racial chauvinism, dominated his works. Subsequent writing showed a broader reach; it included a paper from 1922 on Quebec politics in the early nineteenth century (for which he claimed conscious attempts at impartiality) and, in 1907, a two-volume narrative

39 AO, AFP, vol. 33, MU 1095, "Notes of Some of the Work of Alexander Fraser and List of Some of the Works Published by Him," *anon.*, n.d.; "Alexander Fraser, Toronto, Canada," *anon.*, n.d.; vol. 4, MU 1066, Agreement, Alexander Fraser and William Banks, 10 January 1898; D. Mackintosh to Fraser, 22 February 1898; Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, p. 118; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 35, H.T. Dawes to Fraser, 1 June 1918; Fraser to F.M. Gaudet, 22 February 1922; AO, AFP, vol. 29, MU 1091, "Papers, Societies, and Associations," *anon.*, n.d.; vol. 6, MU 1068, Neil Robertson to Hon. Senator Macmillan, 23 July 1908; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 9, Fraser to Chief A. Crowe, 14 October 1912; 14, vol. 1, Lands and Mines, Fraser to Aubrey White, 15 October 1914.

40 AO, AFP, vol. 33, MU 1095, "Notes of Some of the Work of Alexander Fraser and List of Some of the Works Published by Him," *anon.*, n.d.; clipping, *Toronto Globe*, 10 February 1936; vol. 15, MU 1077, "Notes for the Use of Bro. McFarlane," D.M. Robertson, [c. July 1933]; Alexander Fraser, *The 48th Highlanders of Toronto, Militia Regiment* (Toronto, 1900).

history of Ontario — the entire second volume of which, however, consisted of sycophantic portraits of contemporary political, business, and professional figures.⁴¹

Fraser set out immediately to exploit his organizational abilities on becoming archivist. Wisely, he embarked on a fast education in archival practices by delving into available British and American publications on archival methods and earnestly circularizing library associations, state historical societies, and the American Historical Association's Public Archives Commission for advice on the organization of his office. A conference with faculty in the Departments of History and Economics at the University of Toronto was arranged to help formulate a plan of attack. Possibly as a result, attempts to establish a systematic acquisitions strategy shortly emerged. Within a year Fraser had completed a systematic survey of records in the various Ontario government departments by means of circulars addressed to each deputy minister requesting brief departmental histories and inventories of branch records. Fraser also canvassed legislative assemblymen for names of persons willing to serve as archives representatives at the constituency level. It was intended that volunteers would seek archival materials locally, report on relevant local developments, and keep the archives "in direct touch with their communities." The idea, eventually, was to have a network of agents reaching right down to the township level. Other strategies included tapping existing organizational structures. Fraser and figures prominent in the Ontario Historical Society predicted that local historical societies would become part of a larger cooperative movement in archival collecting, and Fraser soon set out to establish connections. The OHS itself had embarked on a small library and archive collection.⁴²

Over the years Fraser participated in a number of historical and like-minded societies as advisor, critic, go-between (in matters of government support), and confidant. These associations included the OHS, the Champlain Society, the Folk Lore Society of Canada, and finally, the Mohawk Valley Historical Society, which Fraser joined in 1921 although noting that he had already been forced to decline a "large number" of historical society memberships on both "this side" and "the other side of the Atlantic."⁴³ His involvements in numerous history projects included assistance in campaigns to preserve the Plains of

41 AO, AFP, vol. 33, MU 1095, "Notes of Some of the Work of Alexander Fraser and List of Some of the Works Published by Him," *anon.*, n.d.; clipping, *Toronto Globe*, 10 February 1936; vol. 2, MU 1064, Letterbook, 1897-1903, [undated memorandum], Fraser, pp. 415-16; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 36, Fraser to Capt. C.W. Scott, 20 October 1928; vol. 13, Fraser to R.F. Fleming, 5 October 1911; vol. 14, A. Lawrence to Fraser, 12 May 1925; *Toronto Globe*, 10 May 1913; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 7, Fraser to Janet Carnochan, 7 March 1922. See Alexander Fraser, *The Last Laird of McNab* (Toronto, 1898); Alexander Fraser, *The Clan Fraser in Canada: Souvenir of the First Annual Gathering* (Toronto, 1895), especially p. 10; and Alexander Fraser, *A History of Ontario* (Toronto, 1907).

42 AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 37, Fraser to Wm. MacDonald, 18 December 1903; H.V. Ames to Fraser, 1 July 1903; vol. 7, A.G. McCoughlin to Fraser, 20 February 1904; vol. 45, R.G. Thwaites to Fraser, 4 August 1903; *ROA*, 1903, pp. 8, 10ff; AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, "Memo for the Honourable the Minister," [Fraser], 1923; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 37, Fraser to W.E. Smallfield, 5 January 1904; 14, vol. 1, Attorney-General, Alexander Fraser to J.R. Cartwright, 31 December 1903; AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, C.C. James to George W. Ross, 16 July 1903; James H. Coyne to Ross, 20 July 1903; AO, OHS, B, Title Records of the Ontario Historical Society, MS 249, reel 1, Minutes of the Council, 26 June 1899; Killam, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, p. 118.

43 AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 4, Maynard S. Brown to C.C. James, 21 May 1913; S.F. Passmore, 20 January 1910; vol. 13, F.J. French to Fraser, 19 April 1916; AO, AFP, vol. 33, MU 1095, "Notes of Some of the Work of Alexander Fraser and List of Some of the Works Published by Him," *anon.*, n.d.; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 27, Fraser to Colonel John W. Vrooman, 25 April 1921.

Abraham, to raise a chair of history at Queen's University, to establish a Toronto municipal archives, to gather industrial exhibits for a historical museum in Toronto, and to plan centenary celebrations for the Battle of Queenston Heights and a monument erected in Orillia to Samuel de Champlain. Access to new collections and information regarding potential acquisitions were important benefits provided through contacts with historical societies and other associations.⁴⁴

Local and regional historical societies were nevertheless only bare organizational frameworks within a larger social network maintained right across Ontario by such figures in local history as Janet Carnochan and John Ross Robertson. These networks extended even into border states to historians and collectors interested in the early international histories of their regions. For years Fraser maintained a close relationship with Dr. Frank Severance of the Buffalo Historical Society, a mine of material regarding the Niagara Frontier. Another long friendship, with C.M. Burton, founder of the Burton Library in Detroit, began in 1904 with a request by Fraser that he be allowed to check Burton's library for Canadian materials. Loans for copying followed, and six years later Burton and Fraser were rooting happily together through Osgoode Hall in Toronto in search of late eighteenth-century civil and criminal proceedings.⁴⁵ Other persons to whom Fraser turned were journalists and educators who, as educated local figures with an intimate knowledge of their communities, were excellent funds of information and useful third parties in dealings with potential donors. Fraser even occasionally assisted hobby collectors, aware that arrangements for copying were possible and happy that documents and papers would be accumulated in one pair of friendly hands before "souvenir and antiquity hunters" struck.⁴⁶

The constraints under which Fraser operated were nonetheless considerable. For one thing, most local historical societies were hostile to the idea of compiling historical collections only to send them off to a "central depository." At a meeting in 1915 the Norfolk

44 *Ibid.*, vol. 10, Barlow Cumberland to Fraser, 13 January 1908; AO, AFP, vol. 10, MU 1072, R. Bruce Taylor to Fraser, 5 February 1919; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 14, Fraser to Mayor of Toronto, 6 September 1903; AO, AFP, vol. 9, MU 1071, Fraser to Hugh Macdonald, 11 March 1918; Alexander Fraser, ed., *Brock Centenary, 1812-1912* (Toronto, 1913), p. 28; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 4, *anon.*, to S.J. Rowe, 21 April 1932; vol. 21, Fred Landon to Fraser, 3 February 1912; AO, Niagara Historical Society Collection [hereafter NHSC], F-1, vol. 6, MS 193, reel 9, Fraser to Janet Carnochan, 23 August 1910. The many local Women's Institutes, numbering more than 1,100 by 1928, were special cases. Regional Institute historical committees, established in the mid-twenties under the sponsorship of the Ontario Department of Agriculture, were charged with making "collections of historical records and articles; compiling local and township histories of individuals, customs, developments, etc.; and co-operating with the Provincial Archivist." The histories were intended to follow general plans laid down by the archives. While some committee convenors were unsure as to how to proceed, Fraser reported in 1931 that the "accumulation of material under their hand is becoming formidable": Ontario, *Annual Report of the Department of Public Records and Archives* [hereafter, including annual reports of the Bureau of Archives, *RAO*], 1928, p. 5; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 1, Elizabeth Applebe to Fraser, 14 February 1926; *ROA*, 1931, p. vii.

45 UWO, JCP, Box 4018, John Ross Robertson to James H. Coyne, 28 November 1905; AO, NHSC, F-1, MS 193, reel 10, G.B. Krum to [Janet] Carnochan, 7 February 1922; AO, OHS, vol. 4, MU 5423, Janet Carnochan to David Boyle, 16 June 1904; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 5, Fraser to Frank H. Severance, 28 July 1911; Fraser to Robert W. Bingham, 4 April 1932; vol. 6, C.M. Burton to Fraser, 30 May 1904; Burton to Fraser, 26 February 1910 and 19 May 1910.

46 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, Fraser to A.E. Calnan, 11 May 1926; vol. 10, R.B. Orr to Fraser, 18 October 1932; vol. 19, Fraser to Harold Jones, 17 July 1917; vol. 4, Harry D.G. Blanchard to Ontario Government Archives, 1 March 1930; "List of Papers Loaned to the Ontario Archives by Harry D. Blanchard, 123 Deloraine Ave., Toronto on Oct. 10th, 1932"; vol. 12, Mrs. T.D. Fairfield to Fraser, 12 February 1914.

Historical Society refused one such proposal, arguing that the society's members were "trustees for the original owners of these papers" who had wished them housed locally in perpetuity for consultation "by the younger people coming on."⁴⁷ Moreover, relations between Fraser and the OHS varied. While C.C. James and others pressed the idea in 1903 of Fraser becoming OHS secretary, in a memorandum to George Ross, James voiced concerns that the work of the society might be absorbed by the archives. Another member reported fears expressed by local historical societies of being "swallowed up" by the archives; "local pride" and "independence" remained strong. Soon after Fraser finally became Secretary of the OHS in 1912, unquestionable failings in Fraser's otherwise sociable demeanour touched off strong personality conflicts between Fraser and other society officers. Fraser's jealous reactions when Sir Edmund Walker engineered the transfer of some choice office space from the government to the society exacerbated these tensions. Fraser considered the work of the archives — starved for both money and accommodations — far more important than that of the OHS. When the government cancelled its grants to the society in 1924, relations between the society and Fraser again worsened; A.F. Hunter suspected Fraser was the culprit.⁴⁸

Though ultimately less damaging to the preservation of archival sources, rivalries also developed between Fraser and the federal Archives Branch. Fraser's tenure opened with considerable hope expressed for cooperation between Fraser and Ottawa. In his report for 1903 Fraser listed the "copying and printing" of important Ontario documents residing in the Canadian Archives and other federal offices as a main function of the Bureau of Archives. Yet proposals made by Dominion Under-Secretary of State Joseph Pope in 1904 for an exchange of certain federal and provincial government records came to nothing. So did another suggestion, originating with Doughty, that the various "old provinces" employ a "young man" in Ottawa to make copies of Archives Branch indexes prepared as transcribed records arrived from abroad. By 1906 open differences began to appear when in October Doughty and Fraser met to discuss the disposal of some 600,000 early papers "belonging," Fraser claimed, "to the Department of Crown Lands of Ontario." Fraser demanded immediate transfer. Doughty argued that the papers should either remain in Ottawa permanently or be shipped to Toronto only after completion of indexing by the Dominion Archives Branch and careful negotiations as to their disposal.⁴⁹

47 Brown, "Provincial Archives in Canada," p. 4; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 23, A. McCall to John A. MacDonald, 28 January 1915.

48 AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, C.C. James to George W. Ross, 16 July 1903; vol. 5, MU 1067, James H. Coyne to Ross, 20 July 1903; Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, pp. 118, 196.

49 *ROA*, 1903, p. 8; AO, AFP, vol. 2, MU 1064, Fraser to Joseph Pope, 12 October 1904; AO, RG 17, 15, vol. 1, Doughty to Fraser, 28 June 1904. Fraser held that "all papers pertaining to provincial matters" belonged with the provinces: "Whatever the home and place of origin of a document, there it should be." Doughty might argue with some justice, that the "scientific investigation of Canadian history" dictated that there be "one centre for all Canadian historical material." Yet the contention that "there should be no hiatus in the Dominion collection which the Province can supply" had its obverse: "there should be no hiatus in the Provincial records which the Dominion can supply." Dominion and provincial archivists were duty-bound, Fraser argued, to act upon the observation that true historical understanding entailed a close study of social change. Provincial records were crucial "so far as contact with the life of the people is concerned and expressed in matters of settlement, development, home and country, communal and provincial life." "Each province has its own distinctiveness," Fraser continued, "and nothing would endanger that distinctiveness more than that their peculiarities and special interests should be subordinated to Dominion necessities and their aspirations and life seen through Dominion spectacles." Centralization of records might mean that the "local ambition so essential to healthy rivalry in a large territory would be stifled at the very fountain of its inspiration — patriotic pride in its character and prosperity and history": *ibid.*, "Memorandum on Archives," Alexander Fraser, October 1906.

Neither side would retreat, and the pattern emerged of uneasy, sometimes strained cooperation between Fraser and Doughty.⁵⁰

Of much greater long-term consequence was the limited support given Fraser by provincial authorities. Although Fraser's constituency representatives uncovered a few private papers and newspaper collections in the first few months of activities, there is no evidence that the scheme lasted beyond the year. Fraser was thrown back on his own meagre resources. Fraser's only assistance during his first year came from a clerk obtained from the legislative staff. Three years later Fraser was compelled to plead for a small appropriation for manuscript purchases at a time, he complained, when "American state offices" were "draining the province" of materials. The staff then consisted merely of Fraser, an assistant, and a stenographer. By 1914 three clerks had been added to relieve the pressure from incoming materials, but of necessity Fraser still worked unassisted on the collection of records, at the same time handling all Bureau correspondence personally. As late as 1927 the staff had increased only by one. In 1931 three more full-time, but merely temporary employees were added. Much of Fraser's time was exhausted by his duties at Government House. An elaborate fire-proof vault was installed in the Parliament Buildings basement in 1905 to which Fraser could point proudly in persuading Merritt family members that papers created by their noted ancestor, William Hamilton Merritt, would be in safe hands. In 1909 the vault resisted heat, smoke, and water from a fire in buildings above, but by 1912 was congested and virtually inaccessible, forcing Fraser to

50 AO, AFP, vol. 5, MU 1067, Fraser to Doughty, 22 November 1908. John Archer's claim that frequent trips made by Fraser to Ottawa "apparently" indicate that the relationship between Fraser and Doughty blossomed into "personal friendship" may be open to question; see Archer, "Archival Institutions in Canada," p. 201. Both institutions could be mutually helpful. Doughty occasionally assisted Fraser with research inquiries and Fraser, for instance, offered to sponsor H.P. Biggar of the PAC as speaker at Empire and Canadian Club meetings. Doughty, however, was rarely willing to relinquish anything other than duplicates to Fraser, often even for copying. This became the excuse in 1910 to refuse Fraser the loan of some papers from the Q Series, it having not yet been determined, as was thought, that this was largely a duplicate of the PAC's "G Series:" PAC, RG 37, vol. 192, Doughty to Alexander Fraser, 2 March 1909; vol. 60, Fraser to H.P. Biggar, 20 April 1923; vol. 192, Doughty to Fraser, 10 March 1910. In July 1921 Fraser learned from the Deputy Minister of the Department of Lands and Forests, W.C. Cain, that a PAC archivist, James Kenney, had been attempting to block a Bureau of Archives acquisition of Lands and Forests papers by surreptitiously writing Cain to suggest that Professor W.P.M. Kennedy, hired temporarily by Fraser to manage the acquisition, lacked the competence to handle the documents. No one in the provincial archives had the "technical and practical training" in archival practices to oversee the classification of the records, Kenney wrote. "Trained historian[s]" were not "trained archivist[s]" and had done much "pernicious" damage in the past. AO, RG 17, 14, vol. 1, Lands and Forests, Fraser to W.C. Cain, 6 May 1921; *ibid.*, Kenney quoted in Cain to Fraser, 27 July 1921. Little seems to have deterred Doughty from occasional buccaneering in the province, resulting, for example, in a number of William Hamilton Merritt's papers, parcelled out in batches by their owner, going to Ottawa in 1921, thus breaking the collection; PAC, RG 37, vol. 203, Doughty to Mr. Justice Campbell, 3 May 1927. When two years later W.C. Milner of the PAC wrote Fraser to ask for support in battles over the acquisition of Maritime provincial papers for the federal archives, Fraser regretted that he could offer no assistance: "We reckon that the Province of Ontario is very much indeed out of pocket annually by the fact that papers and documents of an official capacity pertaining to our Province ... are not in our custody." AO, RG 17, 15, vol. 1, Fraser to W.C. Milner, 28 August 1923. For more on federal-provincial disputes over the custody of Maritime records see Macleod, "Our Man in the Maritimes."

pile material, including the Merritt Papers, in boxes in the open basement.⁵¹ A “fire appliances inspector” reported in 1914 that the draught from a stairwell and elevator shaft nearby the Archives offices would swiftly create an inferno from a lighted match dropped in the “mass” of paper littering the office floors.⁵²

Precise copies of the type produced by a photostat machine might well have been a powerful argument in persuading reluctant donors to part with papers, but in 1920, four years after Fraser first applied for an appropriation, he had still not received the equipment. By 1921 “the natural and continual accumulation of material” and the danger that the poorly buttressed floor of the Bureau’s office might collapse from the weight of paper had forced the removal of “many tons of papers” by architect’s orders to the west basement of the Parliament Buildings, where they were “boxed up, inaccessible, and in danger from damp.” Provincial Treasurer Peter Smith reported that during rainstorms water leaked onto hastily covered documents in the office upstairs.⁵³ Attempts by Fraser in 1932 to see the archives “secure in a site” that could be expanded later were quashed when the government refused to allow occupation of a house which had previously been occupied by the former federal Minister of Finance, Sir Thomas White. The archives was instead given the top seven floors in the East Block of the Parliament Buildings. The fifteenth floor served double duty as a picture gallery and observation deck and was useless for storage. The King’s Bench papers, alone, filled the “sixteenth floor,” a cramped aerie reached by narrow stairs. Annual budgets had risen slowly from \$2,300 in 1905 to \$6,650 in 1910, \$13,725 in 1921, and \$19,700 in 1931, but they were still inadequate. In 1932 the depression forced cutbacks severe enough to require the staff to accept salary reductions.⁵⁴

Another difficulty was the weak hold the archives exercised over the disposition of government records. In the 1903 Bureau of Archives report Fraser emphasized his professed mandate to receive “papers and documents of historical interest, from all branches

51 AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 35, H.H. Robertson to Fraser, 24 December 1903; vol. 5, Fraser to Isabelle Moore, 23 February 1904; Moore to Fraser, n.d.; 14, vol. 2, Provincial Treasurer, “Memorandum for the Honourable the Provincial Treasurer,” *anon.*, 14 February 1906; Fraser to T.W. McGarry, 1914; Archer, “Archival Institutions in Canada,” p. 207; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 26, Fraser to Dr. Hamilton Merritt, 3 February 1906; vol. 14, Fraser to R.W. Geary, 4 September 1909; 14, vol. 1, Provincial Secretary, Fraser to Assistant Provincial Secretary of Ontario, 9 March 1912.

52 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, Public Works, Inspector of Fire Appliances to R.P. Fairbairn, 14 October 1914.

53 *Ibid.*, 16, vol. 33, Fraser to John C. Greene, 19 October 1916; AO, AFP, vol. 10, MU 1072, [Fraser] to E.C. Drury, 28 November 1920; AO, RG 17, 14, vol. 2, Provincial Treasurer, Peter Smith to E.C. Drury, 16 May 1922. A special problem was a large skylight beneath which some “100,000” papers were stored. The glass was badly cemented with tar. The cracks leaked abominably and the panes constantly threatened to come loose. “I may say,” Fraser remarked, “that we have spikes of prism glass from five to seven inches long, with a point as sharp as any lance, which, if falling on a vital part with the force with which they come down the long distance from the roof, could not help but prove fatal;” *ibid.*, Public Works, Fraser to R.P. Fairbairn, 2 June 1921. During hot weather the tar dripped down onto the documents below: interview with Professor J.J. Talman, 6 March 1986.

54 AO, RG 17, 14, vol. 2, Public Works, E. White to Fraser, 12 August 1932; Fraser to White, 17 August 1932; vol. 1, Dept. of Education, “Memorandum to Professor D. McArthur,” James J. Talman, 15 April 1935; Archer, “Archival Institutions in Canada,” p. 207; AO, RG 17, 14, vol. 1, Prime Minister, “Memorandum for Deputy Minister,” Geo. S. Henry, 5 January 1933; Provincial Treasurer, *anon.* to G.J.L. Jones, 3 February 1932. Matters only worsened after Mitchell Hepburn’s accession to the premier’s office in 1934. James J. Talman, who succeeded Fraser in 1935, after Fraser’s resignation was secured by the new government, was forced to contend with the loss of over half his staff; see Archer, “Archival Institutions in Canada,” p. 208.

of the Public Service,” and in a letter to Doughty five years later he asserted the need to require deputy ministers to provide complete “detailed lists” of all departmental records. “No paper” should be destroyed without the express permission of the Provincial Archivist, he argued; the archives was in part a “record-office” and material from “all the departments of Government and Courts of Justice” should be transferred to it, “properly grouped and classified” so that “inter-department” access was possible “and the continuity of document or subject in its journey from one department to another ... preserved.”⁵⁵

Yet Fraser lacked the legislative means to prevent the destruction of government records of archival value and compel transfer to the archives of those departmental papers he considered worth permanent preservation. Authority to receive records instead rested on the good will of chief justices and deputy ministers. Even in discovering what records existed, Fraser was often thrown back on his own devices, as in the case of the Osgoode Hall records, a never-ending task. Fraser did acquire a substantial body of government records including, for example, pre-1841 Legislative Council minutes, current reports of the Department of Agriculture, pamphlets on Northern Ontario from the Department of Education, early land board minutes, surveyors’ journals, and from the Provincial Secretary’s office reports regarding early railroads. In 1915 Attorney General I.B. Lucas proposed legislation to dictate transfer of select Osgoode Hall documents to the archives, although the bill was left to die on the order paper.⁵⁶

By 1922, however, it was apparent that the Bureau’s status as a creature of order-in-council was no longer adequate. Characteristically, in December 1921 Fraser was forced, for lack of legislative powers, to permit the return of minutes of the General Sessions of the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville to the County Clerk. In April 1922 Fraser began campaigning for an archives act, drafting rough versions of the bill for the consideration of deputy ministers and Supreme Court judges. As Fraser noted in an official memorandum in early 1923, it had been decided back in 1903 that an act embodying the scope and duties of the archives should wait until experience had shown how the archives would work best with government departments. In the meantime, Fraser reported, the archives had proven itself with the collection of more than 14,000 “square feet” of material, including private manuscripts, some 100,000 documents of “rare value” from the Department of Crown Lands, and a sizeable body of “rare old Municipal Records.” Close contact with the research being carried out in university departments of history and economics had helped guide archival collecting, Fraser claimed. Now, however, it was necessary to have a bill that “would remove any doubts in the minds of Deputy Ministers and Heads of Branches ... as to their right to transfer material to the Archives.” The archives, Fraser maintained, ought finally to be recognized as “an Office of Record and a clearing-house for Government papers.”⁵⁷

55 *ROA*, 1903, p. 8; AO, AFP, vol. 5, MU 1067, Fraser to Doughty, 22 November 1908.

56 AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 28, Fraser to Sir Charles Moss and Sir John A. Boyd, 23 February 1910; 14, vol. 1, Lands and Forests, Fraser to W.C. Cain, 6 May 1921; 16, vol. 5, C.M. Burton to Fraser, 26 February 1910; Fraser to Burton, 3 May 1912; 16, vol. 20, Fraser to Senator J. Kerr, 5 December 1910; *ROA*, 1905, pp. xii-xiii; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 26, Fraser to Sir William R. Meredith, 13 May 1915.

57 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, Fraser to M.M. Brown, 8 December 1921; Brown to Fraser, 12 December 1921; Fraser to Brown, 13 December 1921; 14, vol. 2, Provincial Treasurer, Fraser to Peter Smith, 20 April 1922; 16, vol. 27, Fraser to Hon. Mr. Justice Middleton, 22 April 1922; AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, “Memo for the Honourable the Minister,” [Fraser], 1923.

A letter campaign brought messages of support from judges, businessmen, senior civil servants, professors of history, and presidents of "National and Patriotic Societies." W.C. Cain, Deputy Minister of the Department of Lands and Forests, lamented the fact that in times past the archives had had to rely on the "grace and sympathy" of those in charge of records. Protection of the "obscure and obsolete documents cluttering ... the shelves and pigeon holes of the Service" required expertise in "the examination and chronicling" of government records. Legislation was now required to establish the "permanency" of the archives "beyond peradventure" and to solidify its powers; by no other means, he concluded, would the "fag ends and disjointed data" that made up the historical record be preserved for "posterity." Legislative status, argued F.V. Johns of the Assistant Provincial Secretary's office, would also ensure the "public confidence" necessary to secure institutional and family papers in private hands. G.M. Wrong of the University of Toronto contended that full development of the archives' potential was necessary to preserve Ontario's scholarly heritage; "the best Canadian students" were leaving to take graduate degrees in history in the United States. The province was obliged, he believed, to furnish "as full facilities as possible" to train promising young historians in Ontario and thus "prevent their drifting into the intellectual life of the United States."⁵⁸

In 1923 Fraser secured his act. The Bureau of Archives became the Department of Public Records and Archives, with Fraser as its deputy minister. Henceforth, no government records were to be destroyed without Fraser's permission and all those records demanded by the Provincial Archivist were to be turned over within twenty years of ceasing to be in "current use." The only limitation was an amendment demanded by Cain; ministerial signature was required prior to the transfer of respective departmental records. There are some indications that the act had teeth. It was applied successfully, for instance, to enforce retrieval in 1928 of old Attorney-General's records which had strayed into private hands and to win quick formal agreement in 1923 from Minister of Labour W.R. Rollo for the acquisition of Department of Labour records. Yet Rollo's decision was not seemingly acted upon. Fraser was still forced to rely on the good offices of judges and friendly personnel in the Attorney-General's office to dislodge court records from local repositories and elsewhere. Often the archives met stiff resistance from government officials to the transfer of records. No provisions were made for inventorying departmental records. In November 1934 it was reported that local clerks of the peace were still regularly destroying such important archival records as Court of Quarter Sessions minutes in apparent ignorance of the Archives Act. And finally, despite passage of the act, no new government records programmes were established. Acquisitions continued to be concentrated, as they had been from the beginning, on certain types of records, particularly

58 *Ibid.*, attachments to "Memo for the Honourable the Minister;" "Memo. re Proposed Act to Provide for Preservation of Public Archives," W.C. Cain, 31 January 1923, F.V. Johns to *anon.*, 22 February 1923, and "Memorandum of Points Submitted by Professor Wrong," 1923.

municipal records, pre-Confederation land records, and early court records, especially local court records.⁵⁹

To be sure, Fraser had begun his tenure as archivist with broad ambitions. His first annual report had stressed the acquisition of documents having in the “widest sense” a relation to the “social” as well as the “political” history of Ontario and to “its agricultural, industrial, commercial, and financial development.” The Bureau of Archives was intended to document the broad spectrum of “our civil, political, religious, social, and material history.” “Several correspondents” had “urged” the documentation of Ontario’s “business development,” and he was embarking on a collection of “papers, maps, pamphlets, reports, surveys, etc.” relating to the construction and promotion of railways and canals, as well as collections relating to electric power and transit. This was just one step towards making a comprehensive “gathering together of facts” available to “students of economics” concerning “the Industrial — including the interests of capital and labour — the Commercial and the Financial Institutions of the Province.” His survey of government records had revealed numerous sources of potential value in documenting the economic life of the province and its “social ‘atmosphere’ and environment.” The Bureau of Labour housed “statistics and other data regarding the conditions of the people, the relations between capital and labour, [and] facts relating to trade, commerce and industry.” The publications of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm provided a detailed “history” of “practical culture” as it developed “year by year” in the province. Criminal accounts in the hands of the Attorney-General’s department threw a “vivid light” on early “conditions” in the province, “particularly in unorganized territory.” And a “treasure-house” of information existed in the custody of the provincial treasurer, whose public accounts records had been called “the barometer of [the] country’s success.”⁶⁰

A generous grasp of what constituted the historical record was appropriate. In the years that followed, Fraser was asked periodically to answer a daunting variety of research requests: for early explorers’ routes, the original name for Balsalm Lake, the exact date when the cholera epidemics of 1832-34 began, names of early officials, information regarding pioneering professor of agriculture George Buckland, data relating to the origins of a recently discovered powder-horn, and so on. Fraser was also approached on occasion to suggest sources for academic projects such as graduate theses on early Ontario education and the economic history of the Port of Oswego.⁶¹

59 Archer, “Archival Institutions in Canada,” p. 205-6; RG 17, 14, vol. 1, Lands and Forests, “Memorandum for Colonel Fraser,” W.C. Cain, 3 March 1923, and attached draft recommendation, W.C. Cain, 30 April 1923; 16, vol. 8, Fraser to Rose E. Clarke, 18 October 1928; 14, vol. 1, Dept. of Labour, [minister’s directive], W.R. Rollo, [1923]; 16, vol. 27, Fraser to Mr. Justice Middleton, 26 January 1933; 16, vol. 18, Fraser to Judge Huycke, 20 September 1933; 14, vol. 1, Education, J.J. Talman to Professor McArthur, 7 August 1934; interview with Professor J.J. Talman, 6 March 1986; AO, RG 17, 14, vol. 1, Education “Memorandum for Professor Duncan McArthur,” *anon.*, 26 November 1934; 16, vol. 5, Fraser to Perkins Bull, 2 October 1933; AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, “Memo for the Honourable the Minister,” [Fraser], 1923; AO, RG 17, 14, vol. 1, Lands and Forests, Fraser to Aubrey White, 23 January 1906; Brown, “Provincial Archives in Canada,” p. 14.

60 *ROA*, 1903, pp. 8-11, 17, 19, 26.

61 AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 15, Fraser to Mrs. Forsyth Grant, 20 May 1913; vol. 21, G.E. Laidlaw to Minister, Crown Lands, 1 November 1915; vol. 14, Fraser to R.W. Geary, 12 March 1923; vol. 41, R.B. Thompson to *anon.*, 27 January 1921; *ROA*, 1915, p. viii; AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 45, F.K. Zercher to Fraser, 5 October 1932; vol. 12, G. Evans to Fraser, 24 June 1921.

Nevertheless, one distinguishing characteristic of Fraser's search for "economic" records was a heavy reliance on printed material. Exceptions did include attempts in 1906 to acquire papers and plans produced by the engineer Kivas Tully for the Georgian Bay Canal Company and, in 1905, to acquire the Grand Trunk Railway's unpublished accident records to add to what became a "large collection" of railway maps and literature. In a letter to industrial magnate Joseph Flavelle in 1921, Fraser remarked that early railway companies were of considerable interest to "the students of political science in the university." Concern for "students in the university" sometimes also prompted Fraser to seek old business ledgers and account books and privately advertise the archives' interest in "records of business transactions." When in 1929, on the initiative of two unidentified University of Toronto professors, the Toronto Board of Trade began exploring the idea of a secure repository for the "archives of old firms," Fraser waxed enthusiastic.⁶²

Ordinarily, however, Fraser exhibited a marked preference for documentation of an "official," consolidated nature such as offered by government, business, and institutional publications — in contrast to the raw, undigested information offered by unpublished business records which were, in all probability, less readily acquired. Such attitudes manifested themselves, for example, in an eagerness to acquire annual "statistical numbers" of the *Monetary Times* (which was styled a "quick balance sheet of the Country's progress") and reports printed in connection with a meeting of British Empire Chambers of Commerce in Toronto in 1920. An early enthusiasm for documenting "Societies and Institutions" in practice meant acquiring such materials as trade indexes, as well as annual reports, and membership lists published by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, journals of the Canadian Bar Association, and annual year books of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario.⁶³ Typically, Fraser's efforts overall to provide for the rising study of "political economy" consisted largely of attempts to create "complete" collections of the publications of "great companies" and industrial organizations. The "student of industrial history" was to be served by such materials as a pamphlet "historical sketch" of the Massey-Harris firm, Toronto Industrial Commission booklets describing the city, "its amenities, and industries," promotional publications produced by the Grand Trunk Railway, and a "splendid address" by Bryon E. Walker of the Canadian Bank of Commerce on "The Industrial Future of Canada."⁶⁴

A largely unreflective acceptance of material progress as the governing feature of the age greatly shaped Fraser's outlook on social and economic change, producing a ready acceptance of the published output of corporate enterprises and organizations as adequate records of economic development. Unpublished materials permitting a closer, perhaps less partisan analysis of the complexities of developmental processes seemed less vital.

62 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, Charles P. Baird to Fraser, 13 September 1906; vol. 14, Fraser to H.B. Moore, 28 July 1905; Fraser to J.D. Macdonald, 9 January 1908; vol. 13, Fraser to Sir Joseph Flavelle, 17 November 1921; vol. 2, Fraser to Mr. Armstrong, Flesherton, 29 August 1924; vol. 14, Fraser to Aaron Gifford, 2 September 1924; vol. 41, F.D. Tolchard to Fraser, 5 November 1929; Fraser to Tolchard, 7 November 1929. One of the professors may well have been Harold Innis; see Tolchard to Fraser, 5 March 1931.

63 *Ibid.*, vol. 27, James S. Salmand to Fraser, 24 January 1912; vol. 41, F.D. Tolchard to Fraser, 1 December 1920; vol. 1, [Fraser] to *anon.*, 22 December 1903; vol. 6, Fraser to H. Macdonald, 30 August 1917; vol. 7, Carswell Company to Provincial Archives Department, 2 December 1930; vol. 19, L. Hoskin to *anon.*, 15 April 1905.

64 *Ibid.*, vol. 8, Fraser to H.R. Charlton, 7 March 1905; vol. 26, Fraser to Thomas Findley, 18 December 1920; vol. 41, Fraser to Main Johnston, 3 February 1931; vol. 43, Fraser to Miss Creighton, 28 December 1908.

Typically, banks were for Fraser “cornerstones” of the financial growth of the province. “The history of financial enterprise” was for him an essential component of “any adequate or comprehensive” account of “the settlement and development of the Province.”⁶⁵ Annual bank reports, shareholders’ lists, consolidated financial reports, and any monographs on general financial issues that became available constituted, for Fraser, the raw materials of well-documented banking history.⁶⁶

Certainly, various conservative instincts did not blind Fraser to contemporary reform issues of a respectable stamp. This would not have been in character with the taste for moderate reform he displayed in connection with his political life. Fraser did seek, on occasion, materials relating to social welfare, public health, and other social issues: bulletins of Toronto’s “Medical Officer of Health,” a film made in 1916 documenting the progress of a mass petition for prohibition, and in the 1930s, Toronto relief and unemployment publications. His documentation of religious life not untypically included such worthwhile acquisitions as minutes of the Toronto branch of the Evangelical Alliance for the Dominion of Canada, dating back to 1889, religious tracts such as Robert Fleming Gourlay’s *A Manual for Individual or Family Worship*, published in 1856, and confirmation addresses delivered in 1927 before Toronto’s Holy Blossom Hebrew congregation. Nevertheless, what the documentation of social and cultural life often meant in practice was a small, but valuable collection of local newspapers, scattered acquisitions such as publications of the Ontario Society of Artists, and miscellaneous memorabilia of social affairs such as an order of service for the marriage of Girl Guides’ President Princess Mary, printed on linen.⁶⁷

In the last analysis, traditional interests, tinted by imperialist fascination with the British connection, remained paramount. Fraser’s activities served social and economic history much less well than they did the old standards of Upper Canadian history: the War of 1812, Six Nations Indians, the Rebellion of 1837, and the growth and settlement of local communities in general. Despite exceptions, Fraser’s correspondence was dominated by questions relating to these very same subjects, especially land grants, pioneer settlement, and early towns. Far more indicative of Fraser’s interests than acquisitions relating, for instance, to contemporary social movements were militia lists dating from 1812, a patriotic history of the Fenian Raids, prints and photos of leading Six Nations Indians, a paysheet for militiamen employed in suppressing the rebellions, and a town plan for Niagara-on-the-Lake containing “detailed outlines” of fortifications.⁶⁸ Characteristically,

65 *Ibid.*, vol. 43, Fraser to Sir Edmund Walker, 21 July 1920.

66 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, A. Laird to Fraser, 27 February 1908; vol. 6, Fraser to Manager, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Toronto, 20 December 1932; vol. 32, Fraser to the Manager, Penny Bank of Ontario, Toronto, 21 December 1932; vol. 28, The Manager, Bank of Montreal, to Fraser, 21 December 1932; vol. 43, Fraser to Sir Edmund Walker, 29 March 1923.

67 *Ibid.*, vol. 16, Fraser to Charles J. Hastings, 16 February 1918; vol. 33, A. W. Laver to Fraser, 12 March 1932; vol. 38, Barbara M. Finlayson to Office of Provincial Archives, 19 September 1925; Fraser to Finlayson, 22 September 1925; vol. 37, Fraser to C.E. Silcox, 24 November 1933; vol. 12, Fraser to Margaret Farmer, 23 March 1926; vol. 19, Ferdinand M. Isserman to Fraser, 15 June 1927; vol. 30, Robert E. Gagen to Fraser, 6 March 1905; vol. 6, Florence M. Marlow to Fraser, 14 February 1923; Fraser to Marlow, 22 February 1923.

68 *Ibid.*, vol. 37, A.J.G. Shaw to Fraser, 20 September 1913; vol. 38, Fraser to Colin J. Stalker, 18 November 1916; Speight and Von Nostrand to Fraser, 11 January 1933; vol. 14, A. Gilkinson to Fraser, 11 July 1922; Fraser to Gilkinson, 13 July 1922; vol. 7, R. Carroll to Fraser, 3 March 1908.

Fraser told an archivist writing from the Dominion Archives Branch in 1908 that he was “specializing” in collections regarding the War of 1812 and “Rising” of 1837.⁶⁹

Notably, Fraser, like Mitchell, appears to have thought that archives not only served as repositories of information, but also had memorial and commemorative functions. One indication is the frequency, especially in later years, with which Fraser sought speeches, commemorative scrolls, jubilee newspapers, official ceremonial prayers, souvenir pamphlets, and other memorabilia connected with events such as Remembrance Day, the Simcoe Town Reunion of 1924, and a cornerstone-laying at the Hamilton Mountain Hospital in 1915.⁷⁰ Another indication is the effort Fraser put into gathering a large collection of materials relating to World War I, created as the war progressed. “War historical material” included posters, advertisements, and other literature published for the Victory Loan, files of a newspaper produced by patients at the Ontario Military Hospital, an account of “Special War Services” held in a Toronto cathedral, a copy of the cathedral’s “Honour Roll,” a letter regarding contributions by Robert J. Simpson employees to the Patriotic Fund, and a report on the Kapuskasing Detention Camp, part of “a minute record of the Internment Work.”⁷¹ Some acquisitions had an obvious documentary value. However, Fraser also acquired “souvenirs” of the war — enemy munitions and weapons, book marks depicting Canadian Corps badges, collections of original badges, including one such collection purchased in 1931 for \$1,000 — as well as items entirely unrelated to Ontario’s wartime experience such as Belgian and American army recruiting posters and a history of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment’s tragic wartime experiences.⁷²

The same marked tendency to view archival collections as a means of memorializing as well as documenting past events was evident also in the most striking feature of Fraser’s acquisition activities: his pronounced interest in documents regarding the province’s pioneer experience and the growth of individual communities. Inadequate staffing, chronic underfunding, and a tenuous control over the final disposition of public records forced hard decisions. Fraser chose clearly in the face of limited resources, to concentrate on those records most useful in local history: characteristically, court and municipal records that documented the social conditions and administrative backbones of early communities, and land records that placed early settlers within towns, townships and counties. Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions, assessment rolls, early municipal minutes and by-laws, and Crown Lands township papers were all, in addition to other such records, prime archival materials in Fraser’s eyes.⁷³ Acquisitions from private sources

69 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, Fraser to Dr. Campbell, 24 November 1908.

70 *Ibid.*, vol. 14, Fraser to Colonel Herbert A. Bruce, 7 March 1934; vol. 16, S.H. Kenty to Fraser, 28 September 1915; vol. 9, Peter L. Brown to Fraser, 14 September 1927; Fraser to the Reverend John J. Coulter, 26 June 1930; vol. 32, Fraser to Manager, Pearce Publishing Company, 28 February 1931.

71 *Ibid.*, vol. 22, John S. Leonard to Fraser, 6 April 1921; vol. 25, Fraser to Lt.-Col. Macpherson, 11 January 1917; vol. 7, *anon.* to Father Casey, 29 April 1918; vol. 42, Fraser to J.W. Mitchell, 18 November 1918; vol. 37, Fraser to Richard Fudger, 20 March 1916; vol. 13, Fraser to Frederick Foster, 8 June 1916.

72 *Ibid.*, vol. 29, Fraser to Captain Kenneth Murray, 11 September 1916; vol. 9, Fraser to Messrs. Cowan and Company, 28 November 1920; vol. 3, unidentified clipping attached to Fraser to S.S. Bailey, 20 April 1931; vol. 22, Fraser to Professor A. Ledoux, 27 May 1918; vol. 3, W.T. Bates to Fraser, 11 June 1918; vol. 18, Fraser to Major J. Howley, 8 March 1926.

73 *Ibid.*, vol. 25, Fraser to D. George McMartin, 19 October 1910; vol. 36, J.J. Talman to E.H. Lancaster, 27 August 1934; vol. 24, Fraser to J.B. McKillop, 8 March 1907; vol. 9, Fred Cook to Fraser, 11 November 1903; vol. 28, Fraser to Alexander Morris, 24 November 1913; vol. 2, Fraser to W.J. Bellamy, 19 July 1922; 14, vol. 1, Lands and Forests, Fraser to W.C. Cain, 6 May 1921.

and materials acquired for the library betrayed the same fascinations and included church histories, typescript interviews with the descendants of original pioneers, newspapers documenting “county matters,” a diary describing life in pioneer Orillia “and environs,” local histories aplenty, and a romantic novel based on historical research, entitled *The Queen’s Bush* (replete with a gothic gallows scene).⁷⁴ Printed copies of United Empire Loyalist records were acquired for the archives’ “U.E. Loyalist Collection.”⁷⁵ The numerous papers of “old families of the Province” were considered valuable not only as “relics of past generations” but also as “memorials to all time of the families concerned.”⁷⁶

Repeatedly Fraser emphasized the importance of the archives in “rescuing from oblivion the memory of pioneer settlers,” preserving permanently “the data of towns, counties, organized communities in a common centre,” and documenting the “early settlement of Ontario — pioneer experience — mode of living.” For Fraser, the province’s history could be broken down into five periods, in several of which settlement was a main theme. The years of the French Régime were relatively uninteresting. However, the primary feature of the period 1763 to 1791 was “the Loyalist immigration, with its accompanying settlement” and conditions shaping the establishment of government. The period to 1841 again centred on “the progress of settlement,” as well as constitutional developments, the War of 1812, “Rising of 1837,” and growth in municipal, educational, and commercial institutions. The “prominent events” of the United Canadas were “immigration, settlement, and migration.” Finally, Fraser had “little to say” on the subject of the post-Confederation era.⁷⁷ Seven of the fifteen widely popular annual reports that Fraser published between 1903 and 1933 were given over entirely to the printing of materials relating directly to local history and settlement. Transcripts from early legislative journals filled six others. Prime requisites in 1926 for applicants seeking to be senior clerks or assistant archivists in the archives were honours graduation in history, familiarity with the “constitutional development of Upper Canada,” and “an aptitude for local history.”⁷⁸

Many of Fraser’s contemporaries shared his enthusiasm for local history and the pioneer past. Indeed, the materials Fraser collected could not have failed to have been influenced by the interests society members evinced and the direction they and their associates exercised in assisting Fraser in tracking down archival acquisitions. Nearly three-fifths of the papers and documents published in the Ontario Historical Society’s *Papers and Records* prior to 1920 related to pioneer settlement, pioneer families, and the genealogical records of early settlers. Other prime topics were, characteristically, Indians, explorers, the Mackenzie Rebellion, and War of 1812. Only in the twenties did less standard interests begin to find expression: Black settlement in Ontario, Upper Canadian legal history, certain aspects of early economic development, more broadly conceived

74 *Ibid.*, 16, vol. 26, *anon.* to the Reverend F.H. Mason, 25 July 1933; vol. 25, Fraser to George S. Henry, 15 June 1934; vol. 24, Fraser to Judge Macgillivray, 27 November 1922; vol. 40, Fraser to J. Thomson, 19 October 1914; vol. 8, David Clapp to Fraser, 29 October 1919; vol. 3, Fraser to John Bale, Sons and Danielson, Limited, 16 June 1932.

75 *Ibid.*, vol. 24, Fraser to Henry F.B. McFarland, 23 April 1917.

76 *Ibid.*, vol. 7, Fraser to Caroline Carroll, 23 September 1908.

77 *ROA*, 1903, pp. 9-10; *AO, RG 17, 16*, vol. 33, Fraser to Lt.-Col. Ponton, 9 November 1909; *ROA*, 1906, p. x; *AO, AFP*, vol. 4, MU 1066, “Memo for the Honourable the Minister,” [Fraser], 1923.

78 *AO, RG 17, 14*, vol. 2, Provincial Treasurer, “Memorandum for the Honourable the Treasurer of Ontario, Re: Vacancies in the Staff of the Department of Public Records and Archives,” Fraser, 15 December 1926. See also *ROA*, 1904-1933.

studies of political history. In fact, as early as 1900 the Women's Canadian Historical Association of Ottawa had abandoned the "study of general Canadian history, except in so far as it was necessary as a background for the proper unfolding of local history."⁷⁹

The small archival collections maintained by local historical societies and the OHS reflected the same fascinations with pioneers and pioneer history. "The collecting of documents, letters, and recollections from the early settlers and their descendants" was considered a prime mandate of the OHS.⁸⁰ In February 1900, for example, James Coyne wrote the Minister of Education, begging custody of early land board records containing "in consecutive form the history of settlement" in the regions "first occupied by the pioneers." By 1909 the OHS collection contained a mix of materials ranging from old deeds and diaries to account books, mining reports, and publications relating to various subjects from Indians to volunteer fire companies. Local interests predominated. Enthusiasms for charting the sagas of local regions even extended elsewhere to an occasional attempt to preserve an ongoing record of contemporary developments, "authentically and clearly set forth." The Thorold and Beaverdam Historical Society in 1905 engaged a volunteer "historian" to record the "events and doings" of the town and township in chronological order in a heavily bound ledger. Characteristically, the University of Western Ontario announced plans in 1934 to collect photographs, prints, and biographies of pioneers in the London area, who were considered responsible for laying the foundations "for our present social and economic progress."⁸¹

Leaders within the historical community had similar ambitions for the provincial archives. Writing George Ross in 1903 in support of the new Bureau of Archives, Coyne urged the acquisition of Crown Lands records in particular. C.C. James thought that Fraser should seek "statutory authority" to collect "early municipal records," and after first documenting the 1760 to 1783 period in archives publications, devote his entire efforts to the United Empire Loyalists, British immigration, and township development. James Bain championed archives reports which "took up the settlements from the home countries in detail, obtaining the original lists of settlers, and tracing the history of the township and of its families to the present day." Twenty years later, in backing passage of the Archives Act, an official in the Attorney-General's office stressed the need, especially, to speed acquisitions of papers bearing on both "the settlement of the country" and "local social conditions."⁸²

The local historical society movement that had emerged after 1887 reflected obsessions with ancestor worship, or what Gerald Killan has termed "concomitant considerations of social prestige," and "a bewildering complex of nationalist aspirations and pride, doubts

79 Ontario Historical Society, *Annual Report*, 1900, p. 39. See also Ontario Historical Society, *Papers and Records*, 1899-1935.

80 H.C. Rogers, "Presidential Address," Ontario Historical Society, *Annual Report*, 1907, pp. 18-19. See also AO, NHSC, F-I-1, MS 193, reel 7, Minute Books, vol. 2; and "List of Articles Loaned and Presented to Niagara Historical Society, 1896," vol. 1.

81 UWO, JCP, Letterbook, 1892-1902, James H. Coyne to Hon. R. Harcourt, 12 February 1900; Ontario Historical Society, *Annual Report*, 1909, pp. 24, 89, 97, 118ff; AO, OHS, vol. 19, MS 259, Scrapbook of the Ontario Historical Society, 1897-1927, clipping from *Thorold Post*, 23 June 1905; vol. 15, MU 5434, W.J. Brown to J. McE. Murray, 8 November 1934.

82 AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, James H. Coyne to George Ross, 20 July 1903; C.C. James to Ross, 16 July 1903; James Bain to Ross, 21 July 1903; "Memo for the Honourable the Minister," [Fraser], 1923, and attachment: "Memorandum for the Honourable the Attorney-General," anon., n.d. See also *ibid.*, vol. 5, MU 1067, John Gravy to Fraser, 18 January 1904.

and apprehension.” The perceived epic endeavours of Loyalists and pioneers to transplant the British connection onto the northern soil and carve civilization out of the forest primeval served important inspirational functions for the middle-class readers and practitioners of local history. “The early struggles and heroisms of the ‘first days’ ” documented in local history served to excite patriotic and imperialist feelings in a manner similar to the romantic events of the War of 1812 and its heroes, Brock and Brant.⁸³ Not only was the Loyalist migration and settlement important as “the real commencement of the history of Upper Canada and Ontario,” as James Bain remarked in 1903, but also local history seemed valuable as a means of developing nationalist sentiments. History should reach the “masses” and appeal to “our national pride and patriotic aspirations,” proclaimed then Minister of Education George Ross at a meeting of the Pioneer and Historical Association of Ontario in 1898. The role of local historical societies was promoting “love of the land.” Janet Carnochan remarked in a letter to James Coyne in 1897. And an address of the OHS directed to prominent members of Ontario society declared in 1899 that local history played a special role in creating loyalty because in local communities one found the rich sources of distinctiveness that separated Canadians from peoples elsewhere. Settlement patterns had largely determined the cultural shape of the province. The prominent role that distinct groups of diverse settlers from the United States and abroad had played in peopling their respective communities had bequeathed a rich cultural mosaic, and “even to this day” the province’s population possessed “local features quite as marked as those which characterize some nationalities in the old world.”⁸⁴

Moreover, to those who argued that Canada was too young to have a history, local history provided a reply. R.G. Thwaites of the Wisconsin Historical Society argued that youth was actually an advantage. Canada had a compressed history: “You had two and a half centuries ago nothing here, to-day you had everything, much of it within the memory of men now living. The old settler, who had seen all this grow up, felt, experienced it within his lifetime, was older by far than the fabled Methusaleh.” Nostalgia, romanticism, and what Gerald Killan has termed a “didactic urge to perpetuate the traditions of past generations” motivated proponents of local history. It is “not unusual,” contended Andrew Pattullo in the Ontario legislature in 1899, “to find one versed in mythology, in the misty history of Oriental lands, of European countries and all lands, indeed, except our own.” Local history would do much to promote the realization that there was “as much in the early life of this country ... worthy of pride as in the records of any other country, ancient or modern.” The archaeologist David Boyle contended that the lives of the “noble pioneers” who had “transformed the wilderness of this province into smiling fields” made the history of the province “as intense and romantic as the trials of any empire.”⁸⁵

83 Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, pp. 35, 96-97.

84 AO, OHS, vol. 4, MU 5423, Barlow Cumberland to *anon.*, 11 October 1907; AO, AFP, vol. 4, MU 1066, James Bain to George W. Ross, 21 July 1903; AO, OHS, vol. 19, MS 259, Scrapbook of the Ontario Historical Society, 1897-1927, George W. Ross quoted in Pioneer and Historical Association of the Province of Ontario, “Report of Special Meeting Held in Toronto on March 30th, 1898;” UWO, JCP, Box 4018, Janet Carnochan to James H. Coyne, 7 September 1897; AO, OHS, vol. 19, MS 259, Scrapbook of the Ontario Historical Society, 1897-1927, “To Members of Dominion and Provincial Parliaments, Municipal Councillors; Professors and Teachers; Professional Men in General; and Intelligent Persons of Every Kind,” [1899].

85 *Ibid.*, R.G. Thwaites quoted in unidentified clipping dated February 1899; Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, p. 8; *ibid.*, Andrew Pattullo quoted in unidentified clipping, [1899]; *ibid.*, David Boyle quoted in unidentified clipping dated June 1903.

Local history was growing rapidly in stature, Fraser reported in 1928. It was the leading edge in history. “Every year,” he said, brought new jubilees and centennial celebrations and “the pioneer is everywhere coming into his own.” Newspapers were printing local history. Local historical societies were expanding vigorously, and the “teaching profession” as a whole was awakening to the possibilities offered by “the annals of school section or township.”⁸⁶ David Boyle told members of the Victoria County Historical Society in 1903 that by “carry[ing] the children all over the world” before attempting to implant a “knowledge of local history,” the schools taught history “upside down.”⁸⁷ Local history was not mere antiquarianism, its advocate contended. Local history was history of “the *life of the people*” — true social history, Fraser contended.⁸⁸ The stories of the pioneer farmer and mechanic should not “give way” to the history of the “soldier and politician,” argued the Chatham *Daily Planet* in 1913.⁸⁹ Historians of the future, Deputy Minister of Education Duncan McArthur predicted in 1935, “are not going to be content with ... political history based on the available records, but are going to write from the economic, social, and personal point of view.” They would depend heavily on the “accumulated work of the local historian” and his “carefully prepared histories of families, businesses, roads, churches, mills, societies.”⁹⁰ The agenda was obvious.

A due concentration on the demands of local history had valid justifications, not by any means always those of mere blind parochialism or quaint romanticism. If there was also a strong emphasis in archival work on the “ancient” record pertaining to early Upper Canadian politics and military exploits, this also made a degree of sense. Age meant rarity and increased chance of irrevocable loss, and an objective analysis of the events shaping constitutional change awaited the enlargement of meagre documentary resources. Moreover, many urban phenomena had not yet acquired the patina of age. Modern historical specializations such as labour history and women’s history did not yet exist, and related writing was non-existent. Some historiographical interests, such as history of science, are even more recent phenomena. And Fraser and Mitchell, especially, *did* set out in their own limited way to document what appeared to be the contemporary moving forces behind material progress and urban growth: industry, transportation, and corporate finance. Many of the records collected originally for local history — such as land records — have turned out to have applications in innovative new species of social history, such as population studies.⁹¹

Yet the scope of archival collecting remained remarkable in its narrowness. Rarely did archivists live up to their stated intention to document the full range of social, political, and economic development. Books, pamphlets, and scattered journals and newspapers were only partial substitutions for the unpublished papers of businesses, institutions,

86 ROA, 1931, p. 5.

87 AO, OHS, vol. 19, MS 259, Scrapbook of the Ontario Historical Society, unidentified clipping dated June 1903.

88 AO, RG 17, 16, vol. 33, Fraser to Lt.-Col. Ponton, 9 November 1909. Underlining in original.

89 AO, OHS, vol. 19, MS 259, Scrapbook of the Ontario Historical Society, clipping from the Chatham *Daily Planet*, 12 September 1913.

90 Duncan McArthur, “The Ontario Archives and Historical Societies,” Ontario Historical Society, *Papers and Records*, 31 (1936), pp. 8-9.

91 See, for example, David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto, 1981).

associations, and modern political figures. Such were the attitudes of archivists — seemingly oblivious, for example, to the existence of social tensions and bound also by affections for the familiar and familial rural past — that wider options in archival policy were not acted upon. The consequences are considerable; they include serious gaps in post-Confederation government and political papers, lost opportunities to document early reform organizations, major weaknesses in collections relating to science, technology, and industry, and the irrevocable loss of whatever historical writing might otherwise have been stimulated by broader archival resources.