

The Decline of Documentary Publishing: The Role of English-Canadian Archives and Historical Societies in Documentary Publishing

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To many archivists the possibility of publishing some of the documents in their custody is an entirely academic question. They are not publishing documents, they do not plan to publish documents, they have neither the time nor the funds to publish documents.

— J.K. Johnson

Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson is telling the sombre truth about the state of documentary publishing in Canada.¹ Virtually none of the archives in the country regularly publishes historical documents, few historical societies are involved in such publishing, and only a small number of independent scholars are active in historical editing. It seems an accepted state of affairs that Canadian archival institutions will not involve themselves in publications projects. Why, then, discuss the matter at all?

The issue is worth examining. Without an understanding of the decline of archival involvement in documentary publishing, one cannot properly judge the role of archives in this field. In this sense, one can compare the decline of documentary publishing to the decline of the passenger train. When the passenger train was all but obliterated as a common form of travel with the appearance of the airplane, people continued to discuss the character and condition of the railroad — even if only in an historical context. Such

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1 J.K. Johnson, "The Archivist's Role in the Publication of Documents," *Canadian Archivist* 1 (1967), p. 7.

I have defined "documentary publishing" as the printing, in paper form, in a book, journal, or other bound or unbound form, of edited or unedited, typed or typeset historical sources — primary materials such as letters, journals, diaries, or government records. Photocopying, microfilming, and computerized storage and retrieval are not considered publishing; they are discussed here as alternatives to traditional publishing. Calendars, indexes, and other descriptive tools, and histories based upon research with primary documents do not fall within this definition. Also excluded from this discussion are non-textual materials such as photographs, sound recordings, or cartographic archives, the publication of which can be quite different from textual publishing. The discussion here is limited to English language documents published in Canada outside of Quebec, as the French tradition in archives and publishing is too unlike the English to allow for a fair comparison.

discussion led to the preservation of railway depots, to conferences on railroad history, and to essays and books on the romantic history of the train. Like the passenger train, documentary publishing in Canada can be seen as a relic of the past, an activity eclipsed in importance by the diffusion of photocopies, microforms, and other reproductions. And like the conference on the railroad, an analysis of the nature and decline of archival involvement in documentary publishing, while it may not help restore the past, may illuminate the role of archives in such publishing over time and the current state of documentary publishing by archives. It is necessary, therefore, to examine not only the reasons for publishing — preservation and dissemination, for example — but also the economics involved, the developing technologies, and, ultimately, the changing roles of archivists and historians. As well, an examination of the issues involved in documentary publishing today may suggest the part archives could play in such activities in the future.

The subject of documentary publishing in Canada has been little studied; the role of archives in such publishing even less. The discussion here will focus on the activities of major institutions: provincial archives and historical societies as well as the Public Archives of Canada.² In Canada, there appear to have been three phases in the growth and decline of documentary publishing. From 1869 to 1930, archives and historical societies were young and developing; during these “golden years” the value of documentary publishing was not questioned. From 1930 to 1960, with the emergence of the professional archivist, documentary publishing began to decline. Archives turned their attention more and more to records management, acquisitions, and administration. Since 1960, documentary editing has continued its general decline, to the point that today it is rarely considered and is surpassed in importance by other archival activities.

The Early Years: 1869-1930

In the years before the Great Depression, historical editing was a popular pursuit, and both archivists and historians were active in the publication of documents. Between 1869 and 1930, more than fifteen book-length documentary publications were produced by archives and historical societies, not including the dozen or so published by the Champlain Society. As well, more than 200 documents were published in various newsletters, bulletins, and reports; half of these appeared in the Public Archives of Canada’s annual reports.

2 There are active several independent publishing programmes in Canada, involving various types of documents and at various stages of completion. The Selkirk Papers project, mentioned later, is apparently awaiting further financial assistance before continuing with the next volumes. *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, under the general editorial direction of George G.F. Stanley for the University of Alberta Press, appeared in 1985, the result of over seven years of research and editing. At \$250.00 per five-volume set, the publication is certainly aimed at the serious scholar or research library rather than the general public. Other major projects in Canada include *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, classified by the University of Toronto Press as “the first major editorial project undertaken in Canada”; *The Correspondence of Madame de Graffigny*, prepared by researchers from the University of Toronto and from Rutgers University in the United States, is being published by the Voltaire Foundation, Oxford; and there are other major projects underway, such as the publication of the Bertrand Russell papers at McMaster University and the Benjamin Disraeli papers at Queen’s University. In addition, several smaller historical societies are undertaking diverse publishing projects, from documentary editions to local histories, often as part of anniversary celebrations. An analysis of the history of documentary publishing across Canada, encompassing the activities of trade publishers, universities, local societies, and individuals, as well as major archives and historical societies, would be a most interesting study; however, it is beyond the scope of this particular paper.

Nova Scotia was the first colony to become active both in archival development and documentary publishing. Thomas Beamish Akins was appointed the first records commissioner in 1857; his edition of *Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia* was published in 1869, the first printed collection of documents produced in the country. The next such publication did not appear in Nova Scotia until 1908, when Archibald MacMechan, president of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, edited the *Original Minutes of His Majesty's Council at Annapolis Royal, 1720-1739*, for publication by the archives. Until 1930, the historical society included selected documents in its *Reports and Collections*.

The Public Archives of Canada also developed an early commitment to documentary publishing, when the first archivist, Douglas Brymner, began a policy of including selected documents as appendices to his annual reports. His successor, Arthur Doughty, expanded this policy, ultimately including full transcripts of important documents, sometimes more than 500 pages long. Included were "Documents Relating to the War of 1775: Sentiments of the Indians," in the 1904 report, and "Memoranda Relating to the Church in Canada, from the Earliest Times to 1837," one of ten documents in the 1912 report. Doughty also published full-length editions; his most notable work was the multi-volume *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada*, published over twenty years from 1907 to the mid-1930s.

In Ontario, documents were published by the Ontario Historical Society, founded in 1888, and by the provincial archives, established under the historical society's wing in 1903. In 1899, the historical society began to publish its Papers and Records series, including such documents as "The John Richardson Letters," prepared by E.A. Cruikshank in 1905, and "Collections of Historical Material Relating to the War of 1812," compiled by Frank H. Severance in 1913. E.A. Cruikshank, one-time president of the association and also keeper of military records at the Public Archives of Canada for many years, edited eleven entries for the journal between 1905 and his death in 1939. He also prepared *The Correspondence of Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents Relating to his Administration of the Government of Upper Canada*, published in five volumes between 1923 and 1931. The archives printed the occasional document in its annual report, including several sections of the "Journals of Upper Canada"; it stopped including documents in its reports after 1930.

New Brunswick's Historical Society was formed in 1874, and documents were included in its sporadically published journal, *Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society*. Included were "Documents Relating to Sunbury County — David Burpee's Diary," in the 1894 volume and several collections of "Historical-Geographical Documents Relating to New Brunswick," edited by W.F. Ganong. The society also published William O. Raymond's edition of *Winslow Papers, A.D. 1776-1826* in 1901. By the 1920s, however, the society was unable to publish its journal regularly, and its output was minimal.

In British Columbia, the provincial archives took the initiative in documentary publishing with the Memoir Series, begun in 1914. Included among its early publications were the *Minutes of the House of Assembly of Vancouver Island, August 12th, 1856 to September 25th, 1858*, published in 1918, and *Menzie's Journal of Vancouver's Voyage, April to October, 1792*, completed by C.F. Newcombe in 1923.

In Manitoba, the Manitoba Historical Society, which served as the province's archives for many years, led the way in archival, library, and museum collecting, but few documentary publications appeared. The *Transactions and Papers* of the society included the

“Original Letters and Other Documents Relating to the Selkirk Settlement,” prepared by George Bryce and C.N. Bell in 1889, and “Letters of a Pioneer, Alexander Rose,” also edited by George Bryce in 1903, after which the society floundered, finally succumbing to a steadily declining membership and decreasing government support.

The Champlain Society was formed in 1905 as a “society for the publication of historical works.”³ In 1907, the first volume appeared, a reprint of Marc Lescarbot’s book *The History of New France*, edited by W.P. Grant and H.P. Biggar. Two volumes followed in 1908 and one each year from 1909 to 1912. William Wood edited four volumes of documents on *The Canadian War of 1812*, in 1920, and W. Stewart Wallace contributed John McLean’s *Notes of a Twenty-Five Years’ Service in the Hudson’s Bay Territories*, in 1932.

Why did these fledgling archives and historical societies, which had minimal budgets and poor facilities, concentrate so much of their time and money on documentary publishing? There were many explanations.

In these early years, the Canadian academic community was growing. New universities appeared; old ones expanded. While the majority of “serious” scholars still left the country to study in the United States or England, some students were attracted to studying in, and even *about* Canada. Scholars faced long journeys — without the benefit of air transportation — to distant archives. Documentary publishing was seen as an important way to disseminate original sources to the growing research community.

There was another audience as well. University scholars did have some access to the originals, but for other students and the public in general, who could not spend as much time and money on research, access to the original documents was nearly impossible. The archives and historical societies, and especially the national archives, saw their task as providing the “stuff of history” to an interested public as well as to scholars. In 1905, Arthur Doughty wrote that “in a country of such vast proportions as Canada, it is not possible to render the accumulations of the Archives Department accessible to all those who are, or who might be interested in them. It is desirable, therefore, to bring some of the representative documents ... within the reach of the rapidly increasing number of both Canadians and others who are manifesting an interest in our history and institutions.”⁴ Doughty later added that “calendars of papers serve a useful purpose, but well-edited collections of documents are more welcome to those who seldom have an opportunity to examine the originals.”⁵ In British Columbia, E.O.S. Scholefield voiced the same sentiment, noting that “one of the most pressing obligations of the Department is the publication of original material in the form of bulletins, for it is only by such means that the resources of the archives can be made generally accessible.”⁶

Publishing was also important as a means of promoting national interest — indeed pride — in Canada’s history. In arguing for the publication of documents relating to the Acadian expulsion, Thomas Akins reasoned that “all papers that may in any way discover the motives, views and conduct of those engaged at the period in the settlement of the country, and which may tend to contradict or explain partial statements, or put in a new

3 The Champlain Society, *Annual Report* 1 (1906), pp. 3-4.

4 The Public Archives of Canada, *Annual Report* (1905), pp. xv-xvi.

5 *Ibid.* (1933), p. v.

6 Provincial Archives of British Columbia, *Annual Report* (1913), p. 6.

light, transactions hitherto considered harsh and cruel, should be given to the public.”⁷ The Ontario Historical Society, like many others, saw its job as preserving “a unifying ‘sentiment of nationality’ rooted in an understanding of the Upper Canadian past.”⁸ The Manitoba Historical Society saw its activities and publications as tools of education and civilization, showing both the new western society and the eastern establishment that “our North-West is destined to be one of the most important parts of the globe.”⁹

Another concern of archivists and historians was the fragility of the original materials, and publishing was perceived as a valuable way to protect the archival record. In 1921, E.A. Cruikshank of Ontario commented that “for the preservation of some documents, as exist only in manuscript form, printing is unquestionably the greatest service that an historical society can render to the state and the student.”¹⁰ Scholefield also argued for publication, saying that “if by any unhappy mischance, the originals were destroyed, the earliest pages of Parliamentary history of British Columbia would be forever lost. The documents in question deserve, therefore, very special consideration.”¹¹

Underlying this view of the preservative value of publishing was the notion that well-edited printed documents were as significant and accurate as, if not more valuable than, the actual records from which they had been drawn — to many they were the originals themselves in another form. Adam Shortt, editor of the Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada series, viewed these publications as comprehensive documents. He explained that “when this programme has been carried out, Canada will have a documentary history such as very few countries possess; and students of Canadian history, of whatever grade, will no longer have to go to secondary compilations for their facts, *but will be able to go to the primary documents themselves.*”¹²

At the turn of the century, there was no “paper boom,” records management was not entrenched, and archivists were able to devote much of their time to digging out and copying all the relevant records — the more the better. They had time to enjoy historical research and to edit and publish documents. Consequently, as both historians and archivists moved into new, unexplored fields of study, publishing their findings in documentary editions was an important, popular, and enjoyable activity.

Financial considerations did not hinder most publishing projects. While money was often scarce, and budgets regularly reduced, funds for publishing were usually left intact; indeed, many archivists and historians actively promoted their publishing programmes. In the 1879 Nova Scotia historical society annual report, for example, the editors wrote to “call the attention of the members to the mass of papers still on hand awaiting publication, and to suggest the formation of a publication fund.”¹³

In the first decades of the twentieth century, new technologies did begin to have a marginal impact on archival work. Photographic reproduction was first used in 1912,

7 Quoted in B.C. Cuthbertson, “Thomas Beamish Akins: British North America’s Pioneer Archivist,” *Acadiensis* 7 (1977), pp. 93-94.

8 Quoted in Gerald Killan, *Preserving Ontario’s Heritage: A History of the Ontario Historical Society* (Ottawa, 1976), p. 6.

9 Quoted in G. Friesen, “The Manitoba Historical Society: A Centennial History,” *Manitoba History* 4 (1982), p. 2.

10 Killan, *Preserving Ontario’s Heritage*, p. 182.

11 Provincial Archives of British Columbia, *Annual Report* (1913), p. 6.

12 “Notes and Comments,” *Canadian Historical Review* 1 (1920), p. 239. Emphasis mine.

13 Nova Scotia Historical Society, *Report and Collections* 2 (1879-80), pp. 3-4.

and the Dominion Archivist boasted that “by the use of photostat now in operation at the Archives, copies of documents can be made by photography at a great reduction of time and labour, with the additional advantage of an exact reproduction of every feature of the original.”¹⁴ In 1926, a microprinting device was first presented to the Canadian Historical Association. Arthur Doughty demonstrated the new machine, which “makes it possible to produce exact copies of historical texts in any quantity, and the copies may be so reduced in size that a whole number of *Punch* is contained on a single piece of paper.”¹⁵ In spite of these early innovations, however, the real impact of technology was still to come, and documentary publishing remained a central tool for the preservation of historical records.

Thus, up to the 1930s, archives and historical societies were active in the publication of primary sources, in order to distribute the documents themselves, in printed form, to a distant and expanding audience, and to preserve the fragile originals through duplication. The focus of documentary publishing began to change with time, however, as budgets tightened from depression and wartime restraint, as reprography techniques improved, and especially as an expanding historical profession and ever-increasing quantities of records forced historians and archivists to re-evaluate their roles in society.

The Emergence of the Archivist: 1930-1960

The Depression of the 1930s and the world war that followed hampered efforts by archives and historical societies to broaden some of their activities. Economic stringency forced many interruptions in publishing programmes, but documentary editing was still considered a vital form of dissemination and preservation, and much effort went into printing historical records. About two dozen monograph-length documentary editions appeared between 1930 and 1960 under the direction of a Canadian archives or historical society, as well as forty-four by the Champlain Society and its new associate, the Hudson's Bay Record Society. Another 180 or more documents appeared in journals, annual reports, and bulletins.

In Nova Scotia, the death of Thomas Akins in 1891 left the task of caring for the records to one government employee after another for forty years, until D.C. Harvey was appointed the province's first official archivist in 1931. Harvey advocated a strong archival publications programme, and works under his supervision included *Holland's Description of Cape Breton Island and Other Documents*, edited by Harvey in 1935, *Thomas Pichen, the Spy of Beausejour, An Account of his Career in Europe and America, with many Original Documents*, translated by Alice Webster and edited by John C. Webster in 1937, and *The Evolution of the Halifax Fortress, 1749-1920*, edited by G.M. Self and Phyllis Blakely in 1947.

At the Public Archives of Canada, Arthur Doughty continued to edit documents, including *The Elgin-Grey Papers*, in 1937, and more volumes of *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada*. Doughty's retirement in 1935 placed most of the archives' activities in limbo, however, and in the late 1940s the archives' publication policy began to shift away from documentary editing. Doughty's successor Gustave Lanctôt unofficially ended the policy of including documents in the annual reports in 1947, although he was active himself, editing *The Oakes Collection: New Documents by*

14 Public Archives of Canada, *Annual Report* (1912), p. 3.

15 Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1926), p. 18.

Lahontan Concerning Canada and Newfoundland, published in 1940. The next Archivist, W. Kaye Lamb, appointed in 1949, was also active as an historical editor, but at the archives he initially concentrated on acquisitions and microfilming.

In Ontario, E.A. Cruikshank completed *The Correspondence of the Honourable Peter Russell, with Allied Documents Relating to his Administration of the Government of Upper Canada*, published in three volumes between 1932 and 1936. The Ontario Historical Society also continued its *Papers and Records*, renaming the publication *Ontario History* in 1947. The journal contained an average of four documents per year; it published over sixty documents between 1930 and 1960. A landmark agreement in 1957 allowed the Champlain Society to publish documents relating to the history of Ontario, under the sponsorship of the Ontario government.¹⁶

The Champlain Society continued to publish its main series, although it was forced to halt production for some years during the Depression and completely during the Second World War. However, the society did publish such titles as *The Journal of Captain James Colnett*, edited by F.W. Howay in 1940, and *The Diary of Simeon Perkins*, edited by H.A. Innis in 1948. In 1935, the society secured the right to publish the documents of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the first twelve volumes included *McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters*, edited by W. Kaye Lamb in several volumes, and E.E. Rich's multi-volumed *The Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company*. In 1950, the Hudson's Bay Record Society became independent of the Champlain Society, and it continued to publish documents, one a year to 1959, including *Ogden's Snake Country Journals, 1824-26*, edited by E.E. Rich, with an introduction by Burt Brown Barker, published in 1950, and *Black's Rocky Mountain Journal*, also edited by E.E. Rich, with an introduction by R.M. Patterson, in 1955.

In 1934, as Provincial Archivist of British Columbia, W. Kaye Lamb drew upon the help of amateur historians such as Robbie Reid to create the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, a journal published by the archives in association with the historical society. Although the archives published two monographs between 1931 and 1960 — *The Overlanders of '62*, edited by M.S. Wade in 1931, and *The Journal of John Work, January to October, 1835*, edited by H.D. Dee in 1945, the bulk of documentary publishing at this time was in the journal, which included two to four documents per year from its creation in 1937 to its last issue, for 1957-58, published in 1962.

In Manitoba, several efforts were made to establish documentary publishing programmes, but it was not until W.L. Morton helped found the Manitoba Historical Society in 1944 that there was any significant development. The journal *Manitoba History* was initiated in 1946 and included four documents in each of its two volumes before it met a swift demise that same year. Only two documents were published in the *Transactions and Papers* from 1930 to 1960, and Manitoba's archives and historical society made little other contribution to documentary publishing at this time.

In this period, Saskatchewan developed an historical society and an archives. While the historical society, formed in 1936, appears not to have become involved in publications of any kind, the archives, established in 1945, immediately turned its attention to the dissemination of information. *Saskatchewan History*, the archives journal, included documents from its first volume in 1948, two to three per year, including "The

16 The Champlain Society, *Annual Report* 47 (1957), p. 4.

Lieutenant-Governor's Proclamations and Minutes" in 1948, and "Lloyd-George's Visit to the North-West, 1899" in 1950, both edited by Lewis H. Thomas. However, neither the archives nor the historical society produced any full-length editions.

In Alberta, the provincial historical society — formed in 1907 but not fully active until 1953 — was the province's leader in documentary publishing. Its journal, *Alberta Historical Review*, included documents, albeit irregularly, such as "A Letter from Fort Whoop-Up" edited by Hugh Dempsey in 1956, and "A Poem by Louis Riel," included in the 1959 issue.

New Brunswick's historical society included only three documents in its journal, two in 1930 and one in 1959, after which the journal, and the society, faded from view.

In the period from 1930 to 1960, documentary publishing seemed to be declining in importance; some archives and historical societies still extolled the virtues of publishing for dissemination and preservation, but changing technologies and harsh economies helped force a general retreat from active, planned publishing. The changing roles of the historian and archivist also affected the activities of historical societies and archives.

Dissemination was still important; there was a continuing assumption that scholars could conduct detailed research using published documents rather than the inaccessible or fragile originals. D.C. Harvey saw documentary publishing as an important part of his dissemination programme, about which he argued, "in addition to preserving the records of Nova Scotia's colourful history, our chief duty is to organize these records and to transmute them into written history as fully and as rapidly as possible."¹⁷ As Provincial Archivist in British Columbia, W. Kaye Lamb also considered publishing important, commenting in the first issue of the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* that the holdings of the archives were invaluable research tools: "Research students and others able to visit the Archives in person, have long been aware of this; but the department has lacked any means of making its resources known to a wider circle. It is hoped that the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* will go far to make good this deficiency. Important manuscripts, hitherto unpublished, will appear regularly in its pages."¹⁸ The Saskatchewan archives wrote of its publishing programme that "there is no point in merely preserving records unless such records are to be used."¹⁹ In Manitoba, the editors of *Manitoba History* noted that "in the archives of the Provincial Library ... there lie hundreds of documents, letters and records not easily accessible to the general reader. By means of this monthly publication some of the interesting material contained in these records will be made available."²⁰ The fact that this journal lasted only a year did not bode well for the success of documentary publishing in that province.

But reality — especially in the form of increasingly sophisticated technology and strained economies — forced archivists and historians away from documentary publishing. By the 1930s and 1940s, preservation of the original documents was no longer the worry that it had been in earlier years, and documentary publishing was no longer the best, cheapest, or easiest solution. The emergence of new conservation techniques and new forms of reprography eclipsed documentary publishing as a means of preservation. By the

17 Public Archives of Nova Scotia, *Annual Report* (1935), p. 7.

18 "Notes," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 1 (1937), p. 1.

19 Saskatchewan Archives Board, *Report* (1945-46), p. 13.

20 Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, *Transactions* (1952-53), p. 3.

1930s, microfilming had become such a growth area that articles, books, and even whole journals, were devoted to it.²¹ American archivist Christopher Crittenden wrote about microfilming that “formerly, it was a question of printing or nothing. Now, however, these cheaper methods would seem to make unnecessary the printing of certain large bodies of source materials which nevertheless ought to be reproduced in some way.”²² In the 1950s, W. Kaye Lamb proclaimed the advent of microfilming with great enthusiasm, announcing that “the overall result of the change from copying by hand to copying by photography promises to be startling ... at least a million pages of material should be received in Ottawa per annum, instead of approximately fifteen thousand pages as in recent years.”²³ Against a million pages, a three hundred page book lost its glitter.

Borderline economies during the years of the Depression and the Second World War had a major impact on every aspect of society, especially on academia and historical research. Coupled with the decreasing need to publish for preservation and dissemination, economics played its part in forcing the decline of documentary publishing. At the Public Archives of Canada, Gustave Lanctôt suffered from the restraints of the wartime economy, and his publication activities were restricted. In his last annual report, in 1947, Lanctôt commented that the report included fewer documents than usual, “owing to the increased cost of printing and the smallness of the departmental appropriation.”²⁴ In Ontario, wartime restraints forced the President of the historical society, C.W. Jeffreys, to take a drastic step, announcing that “I took it upon myself ... to clear out 1000 sets of the Simcoe Papers and have them chopped up for pulp I am prepared to urge further eliminations of the same kind with regard to some of our other publications and to be ruthless with regard to the library.”²⁵

Significant though changing technologies and economies were, the most important reason for the trend away from documentary publishing was the impact of the changing roles of historians and archivists. Historians were becoming more professional and “scientific” in their approach, and, at the same time, the wartime and postwar paper boom prompted a refinement of archival activities. As the demands on archivists increased, they were forced to reconsider their role.

The level of historical scholarship had continued to increase with time, as historians became more specialized, secured permanent university work, and increased their production of narrative and analytic histories based upon original documents and printed sources. In 1934, Duncan McArthur, President of the Canadian Historical Association, commented on the changes in the historical profession. He noted that “the volume of original documentary source-materials has become so great as to baffle completely the industry and the ability of the single working man. The investigator must be content with making himself familiar with a limited period or with a single phase of the larger development. Our scholars have accepted this limitation and have devoted themselves to intensive cultivation of the smaller plot.”²⁶

21 In the United States, a *Journal of Documentary Reproduction* was begun in 1938 as “a quarterly review of the application of photography and allied techniques to library, museum and archival science.”

22 Christopher Crittenden, “Publication Policies for Archival and Historical Agencies,” *American Archivist* 3 (1940), pp. 249-50.

23 Public Archives of Canada, *Annual Report* (1950), p. 14.

24 *Ibid.* (1947), p. x.

25 Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage*, pp. 217-18.

26 Duncan McArthur, “The Canadian Archives and the Writing of Canadian History,” in the Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1934), p. 14.

Increasing academic specialization meant that edited materials were no longer able to replace fully the original documents: the quantity of records involved had become too great for such a comprehensive treatment, and scholars felt they could no longer rely on printed editions of selected records. And so, rather than publish vast collections, editors were now concentrating on specific subjects and people or on limited bodies of records, such as *The Early West*, by Alberta's historical society, the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* publication "Gold Rush Days in Victoria, 1858-1859," and Nova Scotia's innovative work *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of Negroes in Nova Scotia Between the War of 1812 and the Winning of Responsible Government*, published in 1948. By shifting the focus of their publications, archives were accepting the changed, more specific perspective of the historian and were redefining their own role accordingly. By the 1950s, archivists had come to see themselves more as servants of the emerging historical profession rather than leaders of a broader research community.

As huge quantities of public and private documents landed on the doorsteps of the country's archives, and as historians required more and better documentation, archivists began to turn away from documentary publishing toward faster ways to disseminate information, such as calendars and descriptive guides. The historian G. de T. Glazebrook suggested that his colleagues no longer cried for printed originals but preferred calendars — they "welcome the short cut through masses of papers."²⁷ At the same time, the archivist was faced with literally tons of government documents generated during and after the Second World War. Records management emerged as a vital part of most archival programmes. Even the historians recognized the paper burden archives were suffering; George Brown observed a "serious misconception ... that archives exist ... to serve historians or other individuals interested in historical inquiry: that they are, in other words, little more than an antiquarian's happy hunting ground. On the contrary an archives should first of all be a public records department for the preservation of the non-active records of the government."²⁸ The changing needs of the researcher, the growing quantity of original documents, tightening budgets, improving technological alternatives, and the increasing demands on the archivist were all leading archives and historical societies away from documentary publishing.

The Bitter End?: 1960-1984

In the 1960s and early 1970s, documentary publishing enjoyed a brief renaissance, only to decline more dramatically than ever in the 1980s. Twenty-seven full-length editions appeared between 1960 and 1984; only nine were published after 1975. Only about eighty documents were published in journals or reports, less than half the number published fifty years earlier. On the other hand, the Champlain Society produced over twenty volumes. The reasons for this fleeting resurgence and subsequent decline are varied; not only did the value of documentary publishing continue to decrease as technology improved, but economic restraints also restricted publishing programmes. As well, the relationship between the archivist and historian continued to change.

In 1955, C. Bruce Fergusson replaced D.C. Harvey as Nova Scotia's archivist. He followed in his predecessor's footsteps closely in the area of documentary publishing,

27 G. de T. Glazebrook, "Review of the *Report of the Public Archives for the Year 1935...*," *Canadian Historical Review* 18 (1937), p. 68.

28 George W. Brown, "The Problems of Public and Historical Records in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 25 (1944), pp. 1-2.

maintaining the appendices to the annual reports and continuing the bulletin series and monograph publications. Archival publishing reached its peak in Nova Scotia in these years, with more than a dozen major publications, including *Clarkson's Mission to America, 1791-1792* in 1971, and "*The Old King is Back*": Amos "King" Seaman and *His Diary* in 1972, both edited by Fergusson. With his retirement in 1977, however, publishing activities declined, and today the Public Archives of Nova Scotia concentrates on other activities. As well, the historical society stopped including documents in its *Reports and Collections* after Fergusson's edition of "Charles Rogers Ward, Editor of the Cape Bretonian," appeared in 1978.

At the Public Archives of Canada, documentary publishing emerged again under W. Kaye Lamb, who initiated the Papers of the Prime Ministers series. The first volume, *The Letters of Sir John A. Macdonald, 1836-1857*, edited by J.K. Johnson, appeared in 1968, followed in 1969 by volume two, covering 1858 to 1861, after which the series disappeared. The centennial of the archives in 1972 sparked a considerable amount of public relations and publicity activities. One of the publications, a catalogue-cum-documentary publication entitled *Archives: Mirror of Canada Past*, promoted the concept of the wide diffusion of information. However, the division responsible for this new publishing programme soon shifted its attention to exhibition catalogues and inventories, annual reports and brochures. By the 1980s economic restraints were blamed for decreasing activity throughout government, and today the Public Archives actively publishes exhibition catalogues and guides to the holdings, but no documentary editions.

The dominance of Ontario's documentary publishing by the Champlain Society seemed to prompt the demise of documentary editing by the archives and the historical society. *Ontario History* continued to publish one or two documents each year to the early 1970s, when it stopped entirely, while the archives turned its attention to publishing a short annual report.

In British Columbia, the historical quarterly died after the 1958-59 issue; the historical society's publication still contains occasional short documents, but there have been few major publications. The archives published the *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1851-1871*, edited by James Hendrickson, in 1980, but this and its other publishing activities were not part of a particular plan or programme. The current Provincial Archivist, John Bovey, summed up the institution's activities: "There has been no on-going publications policy, in the sense of a precisely defined verbal statement ... since its establishment."²⁹

In 1960, the Manitoba Record Society was formed "to publish annually out of print books, records or unpublished manuscripts relating to the Red River-Lake Winnipeg Basin, Hudson Bay and the Province of Manitoba."³⁰ The first publication, W.L. Morton's *Manitoba: The Birth of a Province*, appeared in 1965. This was followed by three publications, in 1966, 1968, and 1971, and by Alan Artibise's edition *Gateway City: Documents on the City of Winnipeg, 1873-1913*, in 1979. In 1984, the first volume of the papers of Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk, was published by the society. The series, *The Collected Writings of Lord Selkirk (1799-1809)*, edited by J.M. Bumstead, was supported by the province and the University of Manitoba and by an anonymous donor, but activity was recently suspended for lack of definite funding. The Manitoba Historical Society

29 Letter to the author from John Bovey, 2 February 1984.

30 Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, *Transactions* (1958-59), p. 4.

again attempted a journal, *Manitoba History*, in 1980, which included one or two pages of documents in its "Documents" section. The archives, however, has not involved itself in documentary publishing.

The Champlain Society has continued to publish regularly, and its current production schedules are for one volume every eighteen months. The society's upcoming publications include *The Journals of Alexander Henry the Younger*, edited by Barry Gough in two volumes, and *The Reports of William Duncan of Metlakatla*, edited by Morris Zaslow. The Ontario series also continues to flourish, with volumes forthcoming on *The Bank of Upper Canada*, edited by Peter Baskerville, and *Upper Canadian Legislative Debates*, edited by S.F. Wise. The Hudson's Bay Record Society continued to produce one volume every two years, including *Hudson's Bay Miscellany, 1670-1870*, edited by Glyndwr Williams in 1975, and *Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-1851*, edited by Hartwell Bowsfield with an introduction by Margaret Ormsby in 1979. Bowsfield also edited two volumes of *The Letters of Charles John Brydges, Hudson's Bay Company Land Commissioner*, one spanning 1879-82, published in 1977, and one covering 1883-89, published in 1981. By 1985, the Hudson's Bay Record Society boasted a membership of close to 1400. However, in February of that year the Hudson's Bay Company Archives Research Centre announced that the Hudson's Bay Company, supporter of the various publications activities, was withdrawing support for the society, including its funding for the projected volume thirty-four. According to its newsletter, the company "had a very bad financial picture that required drastic cuts. It is unfortunately the case that the arts are the most vulnerable and, in the short term at least, seen as the least damaging thing to cut."³¹ The membership of the Hudson's Bay Record society decided to revive the society and continue publishing, focussing not only on the company records but also on other fur trade material. The new Rupertsland Record Society is to be "modelled upon the Champlain Society," a proven success at subscription publishing.³²

In Saskatchewan, the archives has continued to publish its journal *Saskatchewan History*, which has included short documents; after 1970, however, there was a marked decrease in its documentary inclusions.

In 1957, the Historical Society of Alberta published a collection of documents, in *The Early West*, edited by Hugh Dempsey. This publication was the society's only effort for twenty years, until Dempsey edited *The Rundle Journals, 1840-1848*, in 1977. By 1980, the Alberta Records Publication Board had been established, adding a certain permanence to the concept of documentary publishing. Its books included *The Formation of Alberta: A Documentary History*, edited by Douglas R. Owram. The provincial archives has concentrated on leaflets, guides, and finding aids, and the archivist has noted that "the overall focus of our publishing program is designed to reflect, improve and extend our programs and services."³³ One documentary edition, *The Letters of Louisa McDougall, 1878-1887*, edited by Elizabeth M. McCrum, was published by the archives as its first occasional paper in 1978, but there have been no such publications since.

The New Brunswick Historical Society's publication activities diminished by the late 1950s, and when the provincial archives opened in 1968 it carried a strong records management mandate. Consequently, little documentary publishing has taken place. As

31 Hudson's Bay Company Archives Research Centre, *Newsletter*, 1 (8 February 1985), p. 1.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Letter to the author from W. Brian Spiers, 31 January 1984.

the first Provincial Archivist, Hugh Taylor, noted, "the days are long past when an infinity of time can be spent on one collection while the rest of the records would remain gathering dust."³⁴ The archives has published three sections of the New Brunswick Census of 1851, the last appearing in 1975.

The Newfoundland Historical Society, originally founded in 1881, was not a successful enterprise until 1966, when it was reorganized under the presidency of Provincial Premier Joseph Smallwood. The society has published a series of pamphlets on local history since 1974 but has not entered into documentary editing. The archives, in existence since 1959, began to publish items in 1971, including *Newfoundland Coastal Tour 1883: Notes from the Log of H.M.S. Foam* and *The Seafishery Reprinted from Evening Herald, 1916*. There have been no publications since 1974, and as Provincial Archivist David Davis noted in 1984, "our policy is an ad hoc one and probably will continue so for some time."³⁵

Prince Edward Island's historical association, formed in 1882, and its archives, formed in 1964, have not devoted any attention to documentary publishing. The archives have concentrated its activities on organizing itself, and it has left publishing to the historical society, which in this case seems not to have had the time, inclination, or money to establish a publications programme. The archives of both the Yukon and the Northwest Territories are very new, the former established in 1972, the latter in 1979, and neither has turned to documentary publishing as yet.

Why is it that documentary publishing continued to decline in the 1980s? Why are the newest provincial archives and historical societies turning away from historical editing, not considering it as part of their mandate?

Society had quickened its pace — scholars wanted more documents, on more diverse subjects, and in less time. Airplanes unloaded researcher after researcher to provincial and federal archives, and those who did not fly could be served with interlibrary loans, photocopies, or the new wave of the future, computerized access. Microfilm grew as a major alternative; Edith Firth wrote that "our choice at the present time is between microfilm and book publication. Because of its relative cheapness microfilm would seem preferable for copying large collections indiscriminately and completely."³⁶

Largely as a result of this rapidly improving access to materials, and the sophistication of preservation and dissemination techniques, economic restraints hit documentary publishing hard. Phyllis Blakeley, Nova Scotia's Archivist in the early 1980s, wrote that "I would like to have an active publications programme but we have been under severe budgetary restraints since the summer of 1982 and the publications programme is one that can be postponed."³⁷ Edith Firth foreshadowed the changes to come when she wrote in 1967 that "in recent times the cost of book publishing has increased tremendously. No longer can the average historical society sustain a systematic programme for the publication of documents, particularly when it has other pressing demands upon its time and funds The main reason for the decline of document publication is that it is now economically impossible to produce a book with a probable sale of only a few hundred

34 Hugh Taylor, "The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick," *Acadiensis* 1 (1971), p. 79.

35 Letter to the author from David Davis, 30 January 1984.

36 Edith G. Firth, "The Publication of Documents in Canada," *Canadian Archivist* 1 (1967), p. 14.

37 Letter to the author from Phyllis Blakely, 24 January 1984.

copies.”³⁸ Robert Ruigh, an historian, also pointed to economics as a main factor in the decline of publishing, but he raised other points. “Undoubtedly the cost of printing — the economic factor — is the main deterrent to publication,” he wrote, “but the increasing volume of records, the lack of competent editors and the variety of demands made by researchers occasion grave doubts about the advisability of continuing the serial publications originated in the 19th century. Now, more than ever, there appears to be a discrepancy between the utility of a publication and the cost of its preparation.”³⁹

By the 1970s the serious researcher had developed such a narrow specialty that the small plots Duncan McArthur saw historians cultivating in the 1930s had become samples of dirt under a microscope. Fewer historians were writing the biographies of great men; if they were, they had every intention of travelling to Ottawa to use the original records. Moreover, it was far more difficult to produce documentary editions to satisfy the needs of scholars studying ethnic, social, sexual, labour, or industrial history, subjects which required a broad range of records from a variety of sources. Not only had historical research become more specialized, but it had also become more complex; traditional areas of study — political, military, and narrative history — were overshadowed by sophisticated new methodologies, from quantitative analysis and psychohistory to anthropological research. As a result, the grand editions of the past, such as the Prime Ministers’ papers, were *passé* by the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, editing was losing its appeal among scholars; by the 1970s, many scholars were criticizing documentary publishing and historical editing as second-rate. As J.M. Bumstead noted recently, “to edit — even brilliantly — a lengthy manuscript or a collection of papers is regarded by most ... as uncreative hackwork, requiring far less originality and imagination than writing a journal article, much less a real book.”⁴⁰

For archivists, editing was an expensive and time-consuming activity, no longer suited to schedules that included records management and scheduling problems, continuous and diverse research requests, and the ongoing tasks of acquiring new collections and appraising or arranging the multitude of records already in storage. Although some archivists may have wanted to edit documents, to immerse themselves in “pure history,” they saw that their editorial efforts had become ineffective.

Consequently, many archives, historical societies, and scholars acknowledged the relative purposelessness of traditional, comprehensive documentary publications. Many halted their publishing programmes entirely; others took a new approach, publishing selected materials — journals, letters, census returns — in an effort to attract the attention of the general public, lost in the academic shuffle fifty years before.

Wilfred I. Smith, Acting Dominion Archivist in 1968, focussed on the needs and desires of the general public, commenting that “although the chief function of the Public Archives is to provide a central resource collection of historical materials, its much broader use, through exhibitions, television, film, and other media should be promoted.”⁴¹ In 1972, he stated that a new programme for the dissemination of archival materials was being developed. “Instead of serving only adult historians and post-graduate students who can come to Ottawa,” Smith explained, “it would aim at taking archives to

38 Firth, “The Publication of Documents in Canada,” p. 13.

39 Robert E. Ruigh, “Aspects of Record Publication,” *Canadian Archivist* 1 (1967), p. 3.

40 J.M. Bumstead, “Clio and the Historical Editor,” *Acadiensis* 9 (1980), p. 92.

41 Public Archives of Canada, *Annual Report* (1959-69), p. 7.

the greatest number of interested Canadians by means of microfilm copies, exhibitions, facsimiles, slides, publications, and the mass media."⁴² Ironically, history was repeating itself, as the archives again attempted to interest the general public in their holdings.

Not all archives or historical societies pursued this path, however. Attractive and inviting presentations and publications for a general audience were entertaining and appealing, but how essential were they in light of the cost in time and money? Was documentary publishing the best means of interesting or informing the general public? Would not more people be attracted to an exhibit? Would they not prefer to see a television show using documentary film footage? Or hear a radio broadcast of oral history? Or buy a book of historical photographs? While many archivists saw documentary editing for the scholar as too expensive and time-consuming, published documents for the general public seemed less inviting and popular than other media and other approaches to history.

These diverse considerations contributed to the decline of documentary publishing. Add to them the varied roles of archivists today, the bounds of a limited and decreasing budget, and the availability of other forms of dissemination, and the effort often seems unworthy. As a result, as J.K. Johnson stated, the question of documentary publishing by Canadian archives is largely academic. They have asserted that they have no funds for documentary publishing, do not foresee engaging in such publishing for a long time to come, and may perhaps never resume it.

Today, documentary editing is an historical dinosaur, rarely done, rarely considered, and archives which are interested in it should tread carefully. Still, few archives in Canada have ever had planned programmes for historical editing and publishing. They should consider the question of their role in the area. Should they publish or not? For what purpose? To preserve? To provide? To profit?

The archives that chooses to publish for a scholarly audience must make some important decisions. First, it must decide *why* it is publishing for scholars. Is it providing historical documents not otherwise available? Or is it aiding historical knowledge by providing comprehensive editions of significant sources? If the archives sees its job only as disseminating information, then it might better serve its audience by providing microfilm copies than publishing letterpress editions. However, if the archives sees its job as conducting historical research, on a par with university-based historians, and sees documentary editing as a way of providing historical insight into the records, then it should choose the published book as its medium. When the archives makes that decision, it enters into a complicated and demanding world.

The first problem encountered is money. How will the archives fund such an extensive project? The research, annotation, and editing of the documents can be the most expensive and time-consuming part of the entire project. The archives needs not only staff and space but also a knowledgeable and capable editor to supervise or conduct the research. Most major editorial projects can take several years, and tens of thousands of dollars, to complete. Increasingly, historical editing projects are turning to the government — federal, provincial, or municipal — for financial support. However, archives are not eligible for the vast majority of government grants, either for research or publication, often because they are government agencies.

42 *Ibid.* (1971-72), p. 3.

Perhaps the archives does decide to pursue its project and does find the resources to complete this editing. It is then faced with the question of publication itself. If the archives decide to publish on its own, it is, in effect, a publishing company. It must assume responsibility for the production of the work, from manuscript to book, and deal with sales, marketing, distribution, and storage. The archives will have to hire staff or freelance help, or divert its own employees from their normal duties. It will have to be concerned with sales figures, marketing strategies, and shipping costs. Book publishing is expensive; one thousand copies of the average 250-page book will cost over \$2,000 to prepare for production, at least \$3,000 to typeset, and \$6,000 or more to print. If these costs come from the archives' budget, but the revenues find their way into the government's general account, the archives cannot even tell if its project is successful.

To avoid these publishing problems, an archives can turn production of its manuscript over to an independent publishing company. The archives then becomes the "author" of the book, entering into an author-publisher contract and leaving the problems of production, sales and distribution to the company. However, in today's unpredictable economic climate, few publishing companies will undertake large-scale projects such as extensive documentary editions without some form of subsidy, either from private or public funds.

There is one way to publish documentary editions which may at least recoup the investment, if not make a small profit. The Champlain Society successfully publishes scholarly, comprehensive, traditional editions of historical documents — the very items most archives, historical societies, even commercial publishers cannot afford to produce. Because the Champlain Society operates on a subscription basis, it sells all its books before they have been published. By establishing a membership list and charging each member a set fee, which includes the cost of the publication, the society guarantees that funds are available before production begins. Since the sole purpose of the society is to publish historical documents, it guarantees its success by selling memberships and sending its publications only to members. The society can determine quite accurately how many books are needed, thus keeping printing costs down. While it relies in part on government support, it is not dependent upon limited bookstore sales to return its investment. The production of a volume is no less expensive, but the society can determine the feasibility of each project before it begins.

Could an archives produce scholarly editions under a subscription system? There is no reason why it could not, as long as it could provide the product — the publication — that would be the basis of its membership programme. However, the archives, if a government-funded institution, might have difficulty selling publications edited by government-paid archivists on government time.

If an archives were to engage in a viable membership-sponsored publishing programme, its best approach might be to enter into a partnership with an historical society. The society could provide the manpower for editing and the staff to manage the membership lists. The archives could provide the records, the expertise and advice, and the institutional name. While this would be feasible, there are many who could argue that, in this case, the archives need not be involved in the enterprise at all but should leave the historical society to carry the responsibility for publishing.

The question of publishing for a scholarly audience is complicated, and in today's economic climate, it is no wonder that most archives have dismissed this level of documentary editing as beyond their scope. However, an archives can approach documentary

publishing from a different perspective: publishing for a general audience with the intention of producing popular editions of documents for entertainment and enjoyment. In this case, the motivation of the archives could involve raising its public profile within the community, interesting its citizens in their history, and, perhaps, generating some level of profit. Some of the problems related to this type of publishing are similar to those for scholarly publishing, but some of the solutions are different.

Editions for a general public need not be as comprehensive as for a scholarly audience; the archives can choose special documents, rather than compiling an exhaustive edition — a prime minister's letter to his son, for example, rather than his official wartime correspondence. The editing itself might be less extensive, taking less time. Rather than providing full identification of everything in the documents, the editor may only provide background information or identify key issues and events. The documents chosen can be as short as one or two letters or a diary entry; they need not claim to be all encompassing.

Funding is still a problem for archives. Just because their focus and potential audience have changed does not mean that their financial situation has improved. However, if the publication is less costly, can be produced faster, and has more sales potential, funding may be more easily available. Producing a pamphlet can cost a quarter or less of the expense of a hard cover book, and a magazine or journal can include advertising to offset expenses. Publications could be produced faster, as part of an exhibit, event, or anniversary, thus generating some sales. And the less complicated the project, the more can be done, and possibly the more money can be made. If the publishing activity breaks even or makes money, more funding might be available to direct into other publications or projects.

Money is not the only object at stake, though. An archives which engages in activities for the general public cannot but heighten public awareness of its existence, thus generating more users, more activity, perhaps more private donations, financial or archival. At the very least, the archives will be bringing a little piece of history to the public, making them more aware of their past.

There is no question that in 1987 archives are overwhelmed by the demands of government, historians, and genealogists; by the rapid changes in technology, media, preservation techniques, and archival theory; and by the constraints of shrinking budgets and expanding needs. Years ago, historical editing and publishing was the life force of archives, the way to preserve, disseminate, and illuminate the documents of Canada's history. Today, microfilm, computer technology, records management, and the changing needs of historians and archivists have all but eliminated comprehensive historical editing from the archival scene. Publishing for a general audience might help to bring the public back into archives, involve them in historical societies, show them a part of their society they might not otherwise have seen. Documentary publishing, for outreach and public relations rather than conservation and dissemination, might bring the archives more into the public light. But archives must weight the value of such publishing against the benefits of other media — radio, television, photographs. Archives must ask themselves, is it their role to publish for historians, to publish for the general public, or to publish at all?

It is appealing to think that documentary publishing may emerge again, in a new and revitalized form, for a new and different audience. Like the passenger train, documentary publishing is a relic of the past — but that does not mean everyone has to take the plane. Some of us would like to take the train once in a while, and make it a trip to remember.