

Until the profession is clear about what it means when it declares a unit of records to be a fonds, the application of RAD's rules will be subject to institutional whim and administrative convenience, rather than to the records themselves from whence, supposedly, comes our wisdom (see "Chief Source of Information"). The Committee has obviously recognized that the definition and application of the concept of fonds is vital to the use of RAD: they have commissioned a study on the issue.

In 1987 the Planning Committee issued "a call to action" on descriptive standards. That call needs to be reissued today. RAD is not another book on archives to be read and put on the shelf. There must be a professional and institutional commitment to adopt and use it as a tool of description. Although it is still incomplete, it is usable now. Only with use will the profession be able to review the work properly.

Keith Stotyn
Provincial Archives of Alberta

Records of Federal Royal Commissions (RG 33); Volume 1: Series 33/1 to 33/75. JAMES MURRAY WHALEN, ed. Ottawa: Government Archives Division, National Archives of Canada, 1990. General Inventory Series. Text in English and French. xxi, 180 p. ISBN 0-662-57217-3. Free.

The acquisition of federal government records considered worthy of long-term preservation is part of the mandate of the National Archives of Canada (NA). The Government Archives Division of the NA publishes a series of general inventories to inform government officials, researchers, and the general public of the rapidly growing extent and variety of such records. Each inventory covers one record group which is usually defined as any body of records of the Government of Canada or its predecessors that are "organizationally or functionally related by administrative continuity" (Introduction, p. xiv). This normally means that a separate record group is created for each department, branch, or agency of the Government of Canada that at any point during its existence maintained a separate and self-contained registry system. Record Group 33 (RG 33), however, does not conform to the usual definition of record group as applied to federal government records held by the NA. In RG 33, small bodies of similar records that have no administrative continuity (other than their identity as federal royal commissions) form one record group.

The purpose of *Records of Federal Royal Commissions* is to describe the records of federal commissions of inquiry since Confederation held by the Government Archives Division. Generally, it does not describe the records of the more recently appointed public inquiries available in the Government Archives Division scheduled to be published in volume II of the inventory which will contain an index to both volumes. The records in the record group are arranged by series; each series (i.e., RG 33/1, RG 33/2, etc.) contains the records on one commission. Although RG 33 is reserved for the records of federal royal commissions, it also includes some records other than those of royal commissions such as departmental investigations appointed under Part II of the Inquiries Act. Conversely, there are also records of certain royal commissions held by NA that have been placed in record groups other than RG 33. The lack of precision is partly because the federal government has so many ways to appoint commissions of inquiry.

In Canada, royal commissions are appointed almost exclusively under the Inquiries Act, first passed in 1868. However, there is confusion over precisely what a royal commission is because the federal government may appoint a commission under a number of statutes most of which are not entitled to the designation "royal." The records of RG 33 reflect some of this confusion and the record group contains several inquiries that are not strictly royal commissions. Of the seventy-five commissions listed in this volume, sixty-three were appointed under Part I of the Inquiries Act; three derived their authority from Part II; four were appointed under the Inquiries Act but the specific part of the Act is not apparent; and the remaining five were appointed under an unspecified statute.

Professor J.E. Hodgetts grouped topics investigated by royal commissions into four categories. The first category covers inquiries into unexpected major disasters or disturbances, or allegations of government misdoings or scandals such as the collapse of the Quebec bridge, 1907 (RG 33/6), the VE Day disorders at Halifax, 1945 (RG 33/57), and Bren gun contracts, 1938 (RG 33/66). The second category deals with commissions on conflict situations and on social or cultural issues such as national development of the arts, letters, and sciences, 1949 (RG 33/28) and broadcasting, 1955 (RG 33/36). The third category includes inquiries that examine aspects of the economy such as Canada's economic prospects, 1955 (RG 33/35) and energy, 1957 (RG 33/39). The fourth category includes commissions of inquiry where the Government of Canada investigates some aspects of the public service, irregularities in specific government departments, and charges against officials in a department such as administrative classifications, 1946 (RG 33/26) and government organization, 1960 (RG 33/46). In part I of the Administrative Outline, the editor has supplied a useful seven-page annotated chronology of legislation relevant to royal commissions in Canada beginning with the 1838 appointment by the British government of Lord Durham to inquire into the problems that resulted in rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada.

With few exceptions, commissions in this inventory are numbered in the order in which they were transferred to the NA. Where available, the following information is provided for each entry: RG 33 series number; the title used by the commission during its inquiry; a background summary of the circumstances leading to the appointment of the commission; the authority under which the commission was appointed; terms of reference; the names of the commissioner(s); the name of the executive officer appointed to direct the operations of the commissions; the records created by the commission including briefs or submissions, transcripts of hearings, exhibits, research studies, and finding aids; references to additional unpublished original material in other divisions of the NA; and the title, date of publication, and publisher of interim and final reports and of research studies.

From 1960 to 1985, Orders-in-Council establishing federal inquiries under Part I of the Inquiries Act usually contained a clause transferring records directly to the Dominion Archivist. This policy changed in late 1984. Since February 1985, most Orders-in-Council creating royal commissions have provided for the transfer of records directly to the Clerk of the Privy Council who subsequently has transferred them to the NA. The change in routing resulted from concerns about access to records after the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act (ATIP) came into force. Royal commissions were exempt from this legislation but, by having their records transferred to the Clerk of the Privy Council, the commissions came under ATIP. The records are

managed by the Privy Council Office and are subject to the records management policy of the Government of Canada as well as ATIP. Researchers who wish to consult records in RG 33 are advised to contact the Government Archives Division in order to confirm the accessibility and availability of the records.

It has been estimated that approximately 450 federal commissions have been appointed under Part I of the Inquiries Act since 1867. Their records constitute a valuable source of information because collectively they provide research data on a wide range of topics relevant to their respective inquiries. For example, written submissions by individuals and organizations and the transcripts of evidence presented at hearings of commissions reflect a cross-section of contemporary public opinion on a variety of issues of public interest and concern. *Records of Federal Royal Commissions (RG 33)* is an important finding aid for archivists, historians, social scientists, researchers, and librarians who will look forward to the publication of the second volume and index.

Brien Land

Ontario Legislative Library

Il computer in archivio. Atti del seminario su "L'automazione degli archivi storici di Enti Locali" San Miniato, 8-9 giugno 1989. Comune di San Miniato, Regione Toscana, 1990. 203 p.

La commune de San Miniato en Toscane a investi depuis plusieurs années des sommes et des ressources importantes dans l'automatisation de ses archives historiques. En juin 1989, la commune a organisé un séminaire de deux jours afin de comparer et de partager avec d'autres centres d'archives municipales leurs expériences respectives d'automatisation des fonds d'archives historiques. Les actes de ce séminaire sont réunis sous le titre *L'ordinateur aux archives*.

Par archives historiques on entend ici les fonds d'ancien régime, c'est-à-dire la période avant l'unification de l'Italie. L'automatisation dont il s'agit ici a trait à la préparation d'inventaires, la fabrication d'outils de repérage et de recherche. Par conséquent, la majorité des articles porte surtout sur l'utilisation de l'informatique pour l'étude des archives historiques et des problèmes que soulèvent les nouvelles techniques. Quelques articles traitent de la méthodologie et des coûts de l'automatisation. On aborde aussi, au delà du thème "historique," la question de l'automatisation des archives courantes, y compris les divers services d'enregistrement, ainsi qu'un cas particulier: l'informatisation des cartes provenant d'archives minières. On termine en jetant un regard sur l'informatisation en France, toujours au niveau municipal.

Parmi les problèmes exposés est revenu plus d'une fois celui des rapports entre techniciens de l'informatique et archivistes. La communication entre ces deux professions est bien souvent un dialogue de sourds. A cet effet revient à plusieurs reprises la nécessité de voir l'industrie de l'informatique s'adapter et se mettre au service des besoins archivistiques et non le contraire. Il appartient aux archivistes de découvrir ce que l'informatique peut faire pour eux et les règles qui la gouvernent. L'informatique risquerait alors d'influencer le contenu archivistique si ces règles étaient ignorées.

Deux écueils à éviter: d'une part la surestimation de l'instrument informatique qui empêche de voir que les problèmes de l'automatisation des archives sont avant tout des