

Book Reviews

Treasures of the National Archives of Canada. Toronto: UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, in cooperation with the NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA and the CANADA COMMUNICATION GROUP, 1992. 368 p. ISBN 0-8020-5022-0 \$50.00.

"In my opinion, too much goes to Archives, and anything that is in Archives gains a wholly ridiculous importance because of it. Judge a man by what he publishes, not by what he hides in a bottom drawer."

This view of archives, as presented by a character in Robertson Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1982), is one which this splendid volume seeks to overcome. Its preface points to the unflattering image of archives and archivists which is still far too widely prevalent: "quiet musty places .. peopled by élite scholars with white beards, who sift through mountains of paper in pursuit of some obscure matter to be interpreted in an article for a learned journal."

Instead, archives of today are often at the forefront of technological developments, hold records in a great variety of formats, and are alive to the requirements and interests of a variety of users. Public perceptions lag a long way behind the reality, and archivists need to take positive action to stress the potential of their collections to inform, educate, and entertain. *Treasures of the National Archives of Canada* therefore aims to enhance the image and reputation of this major collection and more broadly of archives as a whole.

The volume follows a showcase approach. Apart from its introductory material and an informative essay at the end on preservation, it is divided into chapters focusing on different types of records: cartographic, architectural and engineering; documentary art; philatelic; government; manuscripts and private records; moving images and sound; photographic. One chapter pulls together genealogical sources, a response to the ever-growing interest of family historians in original material. Visually attractive, unusual, or historically significant items have been selected according to these chapter themes and are reproduced in high-quality full-colour photographs, with informative and accomplished captioning to explain their contents and context.

The immediate impact of this approach is to reveal the great diversity of the National Archives's holdings. Just a few of the numerous items illustrated range from cartographic gems of the early sixteenth century to recruiting posters from World War I, philatelic designs for the three pence "beaver" (1851) and the endangered cougar (1976), records about the establishment of the first National Park at Banff Hot Springs (1885), a report about Jewish settlements in Saskatchewan (c. 1900), lists of immigrant children from Bernardo's homes in the United Kingdom (1910), images from *The Butterfly Dance*, a Flaherty Brothers' motion picture shot in 1896-7 and from the colour film of the royal visit to Canada in 1939, and a photograph of Ben Johnson's record breaking 100-metre sprint at Seoul in 1988.

The genealogical section draws together a sample of documentary material of value to the family historian; rather than concentrating on treasures, its aim is to show that "an ordinary scrap of paper, a poorly shot photograph, or a seemingly uninteresting military file often provide important information to the family researcher." The uses to which, for example, a baptismal record for the French colony of Acadia in 1686, a return of chimneys swept in Quebec in 1777, 1851 census returns for Northumberland County, or 1925 day-school returns for Ross River, Yukon Territory, can be put are clearly explained; and there is clearly scope for further publications in this area to provide guidance on methods and techniques of genealogical research.

Many more themes emerge across the chapters and reveal the richness and value of the collections for subject-based research in other areas. The National Archives is clearly a mine of information about native Canadians; included in this volume are, for example, a 1773 map of Newfoundland by John Cartwright giving significant archaeological evidence about the Beothuk; a fine 1818 watercolour on ivory of Demasduit ("Mary March"), a Beothuk woman; a celebrated petition on birchbark from the Chippewa Indians of Wabigon to Lord Lorne, the Governor-General, in 1881; an early daguerreotype, taken in the 1840's of an Ojibwa chief, Maungua-daus; and a recent photograph of the broadcast crew of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation on location.

Canada's emergence as a nation is chronicled directly and indirectly in many of the examples chosen. The ledger recording the expenses of the officials who travelled to London to oversee the passage of the British North America Act (1857) giving Canada its status as a dominion, is reproduced as is the magnificent but rain-bespattered Constitution Proclamation of 1982. Canada's architectural heritage is represented by, for example, a plan of the remarkable gothic revival Parliament buildings at Ottawa, largely destroyed in 1916, a design for an 1887 villa in the Ottawa suburbs, and an outstanding photograph of the 1982 Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto.

Amongst many other themes to emerge from the records selected are Arctic exploration and the quest for the North-West passage, the settlements of New France, the opening up of the Canadian West, the building of the railroads, the promotion of the Canadian way of life to attract immigrants, and Canada's role in the two World Wars. All this suggests that it would have been equally possible to organize this volume on subject-based lines; and that a series of guides for readers on key themes in Canadian history would find a good market.

Treasures of the National Archives of Canada is designed and produced to a high standard; the excellence of the photographs and the imposing jacket design add to the impression that this is a work of quality. This is borne out by the contents: here is a book which reveals the value and fascination of a great archival collection.

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Archival Appraisal. FRANK BOLES, in association with JULIA MARKS YOUNG. New York and London: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1991. ix, 118 p. ISBN 1-55570-064-0 \$39.95 (pa.)

Tom Nesmith has noted that Canadian archivists tend to focus on fundamental ideas in archival theory, whereas Americans are often more concerned with technology, technique, and administration.¹ This difference is evident in two recent publications on appraisal. The Canadian, humanistic approach appears in articles by Terry Cook and Terry Eastwood in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Barbara L. Craig, ed.). The contrasting attitude of many Americans—that "em-pirical research regarding selection...practice may help resolve and clarify a number of issues that abstract theory cannot adequately address" (p. 14)—is the basic premise of *Archival Appraisal*.