

An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession

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RÉSUMÉ W. Kaye Lamb, qui fut le quatrième Archiviste fédéral du Canada de 1948 à 1969 ainsi que le premier Bibliothécaire national et un historien prolifique, a déchaîné une révolution archivistique au pays. Rejetant plusieurs des idées d'Hilary Jenkinson et la plupart des approches de ses prédécesseurs, Lamb était conscient d'établir au Canada une nouvelle profession pour les archivistes et une nouvelle vision des archives. Cette modernisation a eu trois principales directions : mettre l'accent sur les archives totales en renforçant l'évaluation (et la destruction) systématique et exhaustive des documents, s'attaquer aux documents d'archives du gouvernement et y établir la gestion des documents et, enfin, étendre de façon significative les services aux chercheurs et le programme public. Tous ces projets étaient soutenus par le désir de Lamb de « garder le passé au goût du jour » afin de satisfaire les besoins culturels pressants du pays et de soutenir la création après la guerre d'un état moderne efficace. La vision des archives inspirée par Lamb – et les idées qui sont sous-jacentes – forment la toile de fond de l'intense débat dans les trois dernières décennies sur la nature de la profession d'archiviste et ses fonctions. Mieux comprendre les idées de Lamb permet donc de jeter la lumière sur le présent de notre profession et ses directions futures ainsi que de célébrer un des ses géants historiques. Cet article est fondé sur les écrits et les documents personnels de W. Kaye Lamb, entre autres sur un mémoire non-publié sur sa carrière historique auquel l'auteur a pu accéder pour la première fois.

ABSTRACT W. Kaye Lamb, fourth Dominion Archivist of Canada, 1948–69, as well as its first National Librarian and a prolific historian, ignited an archival revolution in the country. Rejecting many of the ideas of Hilary Jenkinson and most of the approaches of his predecessors, Lamb knew he was establishing in Canada a “new profession” for archivists and a new kind of archives. His revolution to modernize archivy had three major thrusts: enhancing total archives by augmenting more systematic and comprehensive appraisal (and destruction) of records, embracing archival government records and establishing records management, and significantly expanding researcher services and public programming. All were driven by his desire for “keeping the past up to date” to meet the pressing cultural needs of the country, and to support the post-war creation of an efficient modern state. The archives that Lamb inspired – and his ideas underpinning them – form the backdrop for much of the intense debate of the past three decades about the nature of the archival profession and its functions. Understanding Lamb's ideas thus sheds light on the profession's present and future directions, as well as celebrate one of its historical giants. This study is based on Lamb's own writings and personal papers, including first-time access to an extensive unpublished memoir of his archival career.

Introduction

An archival revolution occurred in North America in the two decades after 1950.¹ The archival profession was transformed, and so too were archival institutions and their collections. The focus shifted from a semi-antiquarian enthusiasm for collecting the personal papers of heroic figures of a distant or pioneering past to a more scholarly, systematic, and professional approach for acquiring the records of contemporary society and especially managing effectively those of their burgeoning governments. The role of the archivist also changed in description and services. The passive keeper of old treasures preserved primarily for academic historians, and minutely catalogued or calendared, was transformed into a scholar archivist serving a broader range of users. The archive was no longer one of passive neglect on the one hand, in terms of government records, or of aggressive, but idiosyncratic collecting of private papers, on the other. Now, the archive would be actively shaped in more balanced fashion, with the vast amount of available documentation being excluded by the archivist. More than the spirited acquisition of treasures, the archivist now practised “the fine art of destruction.”² More than guardian of the past, the archivist now became its active co-creator.

This revolutionary change was perceived at the time, and indeed so named by the fourth Dominion Archivist of Canada, W. Kaye Lamb. A few weeks before his retirement in early 1969, Lamb asserted before the Society of American Archivists that “there are revolutions in the world of archives ... taking place ... the great part of them in my working lifetime....”³ Lamb was altogether too modest, for this revolution was not merely something he detected

1 I would like to thank the following readers who corrected some foibles of style and especially errors of interpretation in an earlier draft: Tom Nesmith, University of Manitoba; Tim Cook, Canadian War Museum; Robert McIntosh, Library and Archives Canada; and my two co-authors for a forthcoming history of the Public/National Archives of Canada: Ian Wilson and Glenn Wright, both of Library and Archives Canada; as well as the two anonymous assessors for *Archivaria*. The present interpretation, however, remains my sole responsibility. I should clarify, too, that this article is about Lamb’s ideas, not the history of the Public Archives of Canada in this period, except as that may illustrate his ideas and influence, and thus the primary sources are Lamb’s own professional writings, not the administrative records of the PAC that, for this present purpose, are considerably less relevant.

2 W. Kaye Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction,” in Albert E.J. Hollaender, ed., *Essays in Memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chichester, 1962), pp. 50–56. Interestingly, Lamb’s third successor, the seventh National Archivist of Canada, Ian Wilson, returned to this theme: see his “The Fine Art of Destruction Revisited,” *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000), pp. 124–39 (with the assistance of Richard Brown).

3 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), W. Kaye Lamb fonds, MG 31-D8, vol. 42, file 42.2 (hereafter Lamb fonds), Untitled draft speech (“The Third Revolution”) to the Society of American Archivists annual conference, Ottawa, n.d. (1 or 2 October 1968), p. 1. This is a typescript prepared (and edited by Lamb) from a tape recording of his actual speech. For the supplied title and date, see *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 October 1968, p. 5.

when looking back at the end of his archival career. Rather, Lamb himself was a chief revolutionary. The archival revolution was shaped significantly by his personal vision, expressed through his continual articulation of its main attributes, and made convincingly practical by his innovative direction as the head of the Public Archives of Canada.⁴ It was a revolution the consequences of which could not be avoided. “We are all so busy with our own particular jobs that we have not realized fully the way in which our profession as a whole has both expanded and developed, particularly in the last 20 or 30 years,” Lamb warned. “In many ways it has become virtually a new profession.”⁵

The revolution in archives was not unique to Canada. Lamb recognized that similar profound changes “have taken place and reached different stages in different times, in different places, according to local circumstances.”⁶ The United States, in particular, under such famous archivists as T.R. Schellenberg, Margaret Cross Norton, and Lester J. Cappon, shared in the same period many of these developments, and Lamb borrowed from such international colleagues, but with important qualifications. He also built on indigenous traditions as much as he invented anew. The result that he stitched together, however, was something uniquely Canadian. The archival revolution in Canada, therefore, did not so much chart a course that other archives around the world followed, although Canada did enjoy an international presence and reputation for many years based on Lamb’s innovations. Rather, Lamb’s revolution in Canada encapsulated in one time and one place this “new profession” that many other archives in the Western world would also embrace, according to their own circumstances, some parallel to Canada, some later on.⁷

4 Founded in 1872 as the Archives Branch in the Department of Agriculture, the Public Archives of Canada was created as a distinct national entity in 1903. The institution was renamed the National Archives of Canada in 1987, and since 2004, it has become a constituent part of Library and Archives Canada, which contains the merged National Archives and National Library.

5 W. Kaye Lamb, “The Changing Role of the Archivist,” (Presidential Address to Society of American Archivists) *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966), p. 4.

6 Lamb fonds, “The Third Revolution,” p. 1.

7 For an analysis of parallel developments in the historical evolution of archives in the United States, from collecting treasures of an heroic past to managing modern records, see James M. O’Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1990), especially ch. 2; Luke Gilliland-Swetland, “The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscript Traditions in American Archival History,” *American Archivist* 54 (Spring 1991), pp. 160–75; and Richard J. Cox, *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal* (Lanham, MA and Oxford, 2004) and Lester J. Cappon and the *Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship in the Golden Age of Archival Theory* (Lanham MA and Oxford, 2004). Analogous developments occurred in Britain with the Grigg Report and in Australia under Ian Maclean, both a few years later, but, alas, archivists generally, and ironically, have not been very inclined to write the histories of their own profession and institutions. On Australia, see several essays in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* (Clayton, 1994).

As a symbol, then, of the mid-century transformation of the archival profession, Lamb's revolutionary framework very much defined (and reflected) the nature of international archivy that came to prevail from the mid-century well into the 1990s. And of course, in many ways, Lamb's legacy is with us still. No small portion of the innovative archival theory and practice of the past decade or so has, perhaps unknowingly, been devoted to challenging or confirming the central tenets of Lamb's archival revolution. Lamb's ideas thus warrant closer attention by archivists concerned with the present as much as with the history of their own profession.

An Unlikely Revolutionary: Of Theory and Practice

Kaye Lamb at first glance seems an improbable revolutionary. Stocky, balding, sporting thick-rimmed glasses and wearing conservative business suits, Lamb was the quintessential senior bureaucrat, one of the "Ottawa men" who efficiently ran the expanding Canadian state in the booming post-war generation. "Dr. Lamb is stamped," one contemporary observer noted, "with the Ottawa pattern that makes it impossible to differentiate the bank manager from the senator, a national librarian from ... a businessman...."⁸ An intimate of ministers and deputy ministers, Lamb knew how to work the system to get results through personal contacts, strategic luncheons, and returned favours, while contributing to the new agenda of designing effective administrative tools for governing a rapidly expanding modern Canada in the post-war years.⁹

Consistent with these characteristics, Lamb is best remembered in archival circles as a great builder and skilled administrator, not as a revolutionary archival theorist, or indeed as a theorist at all. During his twenty years as Dominion Archivist, from 1948 to 1968,¹⁰ he rescued the Public Archives of Canada from the doldrums of the Great Depression and the Second World War, with their long years of eroding budgets, staff reductions, and depressed morale. In 1953, he also founded the National Library of Canada, and from 1953 until 1967 was simultaneously National Librarian as well as Dominion Archivist. As the crowning pinnacle of his career, he gave both institutions a

8 "Personality Parade," an interview with Kaye Lamb, *Brandon Sun*, 27 May 1964.

9 On this trend, see J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935–1957* (Toronto, 1982); and John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto, 1965), Ch. 14 "The Federal Bureaucracy." The Public Archives of Canada was of course not at the centre of this government-wide development, but Lamb understood fully its ethos and was closely connected with many senior bureaucrats and politicians, through personal friendships and regular lunches at the prestigious Rideau Club.

10 Although Lamb left the Public Archives for Europe in November 1968, by using accumulated holiday leave, he did not officially retire until January 1969, despite the 1968 date usually cited to conclude his tenure. Similarly, at the other end of his career there, although appointed in September 1948 and working at a distance, he did not arrive in Ottawa to take up his duties directly until January 1949.

new, imposing, purpose-built headquarters in a prestigious location in downtown Ottawa; he also built the first four federal record centres, two in Ottawa, and two others across the country where concentrations of federal government activity (and thus records) were most intensive. He has rightly been lauded for launching microfilming as a major archival acquisition methodology, inaugurating systematic records management for government records, creating a legal deposit system for all Canadian publications, and starting the Canadian national union catalogue for libraries. He was also widely praised for his scrupulous historical research and many publications on West Coast shipping, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and especially the exploration and fur trade in his beloved Pacific Northwest. His superb administrative abilities also brought him to the presidency of the Canadian Library Association, Canadian Historical Association, Royal Society of Canada, Bibliographic Society of Canada, Society of American Archivists, Champlain Society, and Society of Archivists (Great Britain), as well as those of local and provincial associations, plus eleven honorary doctorates and the Order of Canada, his country's highest civilian award.

J.W. (Jack) Pickersgill, a federal cabinet minister long responsible for the Public Archives and veteran Ottawa insider, who knew Lamb's work in detail, summed up his friend's career as follows: "meticulous and highly effective as an administrator, zealous and practical as an innovator, both tactful and persistent as a collector of historical material, bold as a planner of both buildings and operations, patient and generous as an advisor of those engaged in research and a willing, intelligent and informed critic of historical writing."¹¹ There is little hint here, or in the inherited archival image of him, that Lamb wrote over a dozen articles for Canadian, British, American, and international journals on archival issues, let alone official reports in Canada and abroad. And one can search almost in vain for citations to his writing in archival literature. Even those few authors whose work focuses on the history of the Public Archives of Canada in this period tend to emphasize the many administrative and managerial changes that occurred in Lamb's period, but not on the thinking and motivation of the architect behind them.¹²

11 J.W. Pickersgill, "Kaye Lamb in Ottawa," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83), p. 8 (this entire special issue of *Archivaria* was a festschrift, entitled "Archives and Libraries: Essays in Honour of W. Kaye Lamb," of which I remain very proud to have been the General Editor).

12 See, for example, William G. Ormsby, "The Public Archives of Canada, 1948–1968," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83), pp. 36–46; Bernard Weilbrenner, "The Public Archives of Canada, 1871–1958," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 11 (April 1961), pp. 101–13; Danielle Lacasse and Antonio Lechasseur, *The National Archives of Canada, 1872–1997* (Ottawa, 1997); or Ian Wilson, "The National Archives 1872–1997: 125 Years of Service," *The Archivist* 113 (1997), pp. 28–39. Exceptions to this are brief passages on Lamb in Tom Nesmith, "What's History Got To Do With It?: Reconsidering the Place of Historical Knowledge in Archival Work," *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004), pp. 7–8; and Jay Atherton, "The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897–1956," *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979), pp. 53–58.

Perhaps one reason why Lamb is perceived as a builder rather than thinker is that he himself shunned theory in favour of practice. Born in 1904, raised in New Westminster and Vancouver, educated in history at the University of British Columbia, Lamb later did his doctoral work, also in history, for the London School of Economics. His historical studies reinforced his pragmatic outlook. He rejected the notion that history could “reveal ultimate truths – the meaning of life and the universe, no less. ... I have few philosophical bones in my body, and I have never expected history to give ultimate answers. I have tended to equate history with experience, which surely has value, whether for an individual or a nation.”¹³ Returning home, he soon found himself appointed in 1934 as the Provincial Librarian and Archivist of British Columbia, and pondering how to approach these two new tasks. He had some library experience, having been employed for a year in the library at the University of British Columbia, and found it relatively easy to supplement this experience with published works on library management. Such was not the case for archives. Lamb’s thoughts here are instructive:

I was very much on my own, and there seemed to be no one to whom I could turn for advice. Ottawa [and staff at the Public Archives of Canada] might have helped, but I lacked the financial means to get there. Hopefully I turned to Hilary Jenkinson’s *Manual of Archives* [sic] *Administration*, the only publication in the field available to me – indeed, I believe that at the time it was the only publication of the kind in English. But it took such a narrow view that it was of little or no assistance; in Jenkinson’s view only official documents that had been continuously in official custody were entitled to be designated as archives. It was obvious that he would have looked upon the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, with its small collection of official records and its much larger accumulation of historical manuscripts, transcripts, etc., as being little better than an archival dog’s breakfast.

Reflecting later on this brush of concrete Canadian archival reality against Jenkinson’s classic archival theory, Lamb concluded that “I have never been much of a theorist; I tend to look for practical solutions to practical problems.”¹⁴ While this was certainly true, as he sought those solutions over a long

13 Lamb fonds, vol. 18, file 18–6 to 18–11 (continuous pagination throughout all six file folders: 618 pages of text, plus a 32-page topical index), typescript memoir: “Keeping The Past Up To Date: 35 Years with Manuscripts and Records,” (hereafter cited as “Lamb Memoir”), September 1984, p. 19. While written after the events described, this memoir, as with everything Lamb produced, is based on careful research from his daily journals and documents created as Dominion Archivist. But for brief passing references, the entire memoir covers only his archival career, with relevant educational background; there are only passing references to his role as National Librarian, his accomplishments as a prolific historian, or his personal and family life. I acknowledge with much gratitude the kind permission of Ms. Elizabeth Hawkins, Kaye Lamb’s daughter and donor of his papers, to consult this still-restricted, invaluable source.

14 Ibid., p. 67.

career, patterns began to emerge and, with his keen intelligence and enormous energy, he was able to recognize these and so articulate them into a coherent body of ideas about archives and their mission in the modern world. Although this may well not have been “theory” in the sense of a series of universal dictums everywhere holding true, which Lamb clearly eschewed, it was certainly more than mere pragmatism, for Lamb formulated over his long career a consistent set of ideas and concepts about “the archive.”

Despite the paucity or irrelevance of archival theory when Lamb began his career in 1934, he knew that change was in the air. He was part, and soon the leader, of a new generation of archivists. From Douglas Brymner and Arthur Doughty as Dominion Archivists from 1872 until 1935, or such provincial archivists as Alexander Fraser in Ontario, R.E. Gosnell in British Columbia, even Pierre-Georges Roy in Quebec, the most prominent archivists in Canada had earlier been journalists, with an inspired avocation for history and for working with historians. “It was not until the 1930s,” Lamb observed, “that trained historians took over.” The first was D.C. Harvey as Nova Scotia’s first Provincial Archivist in 1931, followed in 1934 by Lamb himself in British Columbia and J.J. Talman in Ontario, and soon by Gustave Lanctôt at the Public Archives of Canada and A.S. Morton in Saskatchewan. South of the border, also in 1934, the National Archives was finally established in Washington, followed before the end of the decade by the creation of the Society of American Archivists and the appearance of its influential journal, *The American Archivist*. Yet despite this growing professionalization, there were still only four provincial archivists in Canada when Lamb started in 1934, and he doubted “if there were more than a dozen individuals in Canada who were officially designated as archivists....”¹⁵ The cutbacks of the Depression and Second World War delayed the flowering of these seeds, but these new historian-archivists would become ascendant after the war, and thus make the field ripe for Lamb’s archival revolution.

The History-Archives Nexus: “Keeping The Past Up To Date”

If Kaye Lamb fostered a revolution in archives, his earlier training in history also occurred at a time of significant change in that discipline. This in turn had a lasting influence on his later conception of the purpose of archives. Until the late 1920s, both at the University of British Columbia where Lamb did his undergraduate studies, and in the British university models on which it was based, history was overwhelmingly legal and constitutional in focus. As he later recollected, the texts then in prominent use were the Public Archives of Canada’s multi-volume set, edited by Arthur Doughty and Adam Shortt, *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada*, and W.P.M.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 66–67.

Kennedy's *Documents of the Canadian Constitution*, as well as similar volumes by Reginald Trotter and Chester Martin. "These and other worthy studies of the long struggle for responsible government were highly important," Lamb observed, "but the precise terms of the successive legislation involved were difficult to make very exciting in the classroom, and they were unrelieved by any very significant references to social and economic conditions and problems." Such a narrow approach he found "boring," and his studies took him in new directions. "I have never since been able to think about politics," Lamb concluded, "without taking economic and social factors into account."¹⁶ This reinforced his early boyhood experiences with ships and the sea, which later was a life-long personal and academic interest, when he watched with fascination the many vessels come and go into Vancouver, carrying people and goods around the world, suggesting human forces at play beyond the political and constitutional.¹⁷

Lamb also believed that this broader conception of history should be made more accessible. These characteristics he adopted early on in British Columbia, when founding the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, which, under his nine-year editorship, one commentator judges, "became a widely respected historical journal which brought readable, scholarly history to a wide readership and publicized the collections and work of the Archives."¹⁸ More directly, he never tired of telling his historian colleagues that, while they should certainly undertake intensive archival research and respect factual accuracy, they must also write with elegance and clarity. Too much history was written as "essentially a research report ... for an extremely narrow audience," amounting to "flawlessly sustained tedium" of ever-more-detailed specialization: "we tend as a consequence to know much more about treaties and constitutions than about the men who shaped and made them." This was

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7. The "Laurentian" school of writing Canadian history, inaugurated by Harold Innis, Donald Creighton, Arthur Lower and others, was still a decade away, which would stress the economic and social factors critical to Canada's distinctive national development. For validation of Lamb's analysis, and more details on the constitutional/responsible government and the Laurentian schools of historiography, see Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing: 1900–1970* (Toronto, 1976), especially pp. 32–53; and A.B. McKillop, *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791–1951* (Toronto, 1994), pp. 471–77.

17 Basil Stuart-Stubbs, "William Kaye Lamb: A Eulogy," text delivered at Kaye Lamb's Memorial Service, Vancouver, 31 August 1999 (Stuart-Stubbs is Librarian Emeritus at the University of British Columbia; former Director of its School of Library, Archival and Information Studies; and long a close friend of Lamb's); Elizabeth Hawkins to Terry Cook, 28 May 2004, and Elizabeth Hawkins, "Notes on W. Kaye Lamb," May 2002, rev. June 2004 (Hawkins is Lamb's daughter, and was herself a librarian and manager at the National Library of Canada and then a senior policy officer at the National Archives of Canada).

18 Elizabeth Denham Eso, "W. Kaye Lamb and the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1934–1939," (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984), ii, and *passim*.

wrong. As poetry was not intended only for poets nor music only for composers, so history was too important to appeal only to historians; it needed to reach and inform a wider public.¹⁹

Accessible and sound scholarship, including history, seemed especially important to Lamb in the postwar era as a possible bulwark against the negative effects of mass communications, then readily available through radio, popular film, television, spectator sports, and picture magazines. All these mass media offered, Lamb asserted in the mid-1950s, “bits and pieces of knowledge ... a passing acquaintance with names and phrases, a glib familiarity with the surface of things that furnishes no sound basis for either knowledge or judgment.” Consequently, “everyone seems to have heard of everything, and to have a vague nodding acquaintance with it that it is fatally easy to mistake for knowledge.” In fact, this “nebulous mass” of non-knowledge was producing what Lamb thought “might well be labelled the new ignorance.” “Let us recognize,” he counselled, “the high value of superlative quality. A mountain range is judged by the height of its highest peaks, not by the height of the plateau from which the peaks rise.” Lamb was no anti-democrat, but he regretted that the wholly admirable need to raise the lowest common denominator – the “plateau” – in social, economic, and cultural/educational terms seemed to be accompanied by disparaging achievements of excellence – the “peaks.” For a rapidly growing post-war Canada, despite the temptations of mass entertainment and the confidence born of economic progress, “the stimulation and the prestige that a country receives from the work of a great scholar or a great creative artist is one of the intangibles that can change the course of history.”²⁰ Lamb was not alone in these views; his old history professor from UBC, Walter Sage, wrote in 1945 that the Second World War for Canada might witness “the letting loose of a genuine and all-embracing patriotism,” not unlike late-Elizabethan England after the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the arrival of Shakespeare, and “should be accompanied by a real advance in Canadian art, literature, and in the writing of Canadian history.”²¹ Four years later, such high hopes for a post-war Golden Age in

19 W. Kaye Lamb, “Presidential Address,” Canadian Historical Association, *Report* (1958), pp. 10–12, from which the quotations are taken; see similar expressions in W. Kaye Lamb, “The Archivist and the Historian,” *American Historical Review* 68.2 (January 1963), pp. 389–91. Such influential Canadian historians (and master stylists) as Donald Creighton and W.L. Morton shared Lamb’s concerns at that time. See A.B. McKillop, “Engaging History: Historians, Storytelling, and Self,” The 2005 Davidson Dunton Research Lecture (Ottawa, 2005), pamphlet publication, 14–15ff.

20 W. Kaye Lamb, “A Higher Priority to Reading,” *Pacific Northwest Library Association Quarterly* 22 (August 1958), pp. 115–16; W. Kaye Lamb, *A Plea for Quality and Inequality*, Bostock Memorial Lecture (Vancouver, 1957), pamphlet publication, pp. 1–2, 9, 15.

21 W.N. Sage, “Where Stands Canadian History,” Canadian Historical Association, *Report* (1945), p. 5, as cited in Laura Millar, “Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998), p. 114.

Canada were manifested in the appointment of the very influential Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (the Massey-Lévesque Commission), which would investigate, among much else, the role of the Public Archives of Canada.²²

In Lamb's mind, then, given these post-war challenges as well as opportunities, the stakes for history and archives were very high. Well-written history, by branching out to more relevant social and economic patterns from its legal and constitutional origins, and incorporating lively characters as well as background circumstances, could help combat the "new ignorance" that Lamb lamented. History offered context in which to situate meaningfully the avalanche of information that was bombarding people daily. Lamb believed that history could offer valuable lessons drawn from experience about the deeper nature of individuals and nations, about human motivations and the complex interconnection of events. And so history could help realize the post-war search for a Canadian identity as an emergent nation, for, as Lamb concluded his archival memoirs, by quoting historian Charles Stacey, "Our history is the prop of our National spirit; it is what makes us what we are; it is all that makes us different from other parts of the human race. In fact, it gives us our 'identity'." Despite this potential power, however, as noted before, Lamb did not believe that history provided "ultimate truths," for it would always remain contingent on an ever-changing present. In this regard, Lamb concurred with the great nineteenth-century Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt, that history is "the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another." Lamb expounded on this idea, which in fact was central to his conception of the archive:

Opinions about what is worthy of note will vary with the years; the selection of facts and the interpretation placed upon them will vary with them; and the number and character of the facts available for selection and interpretation will have a direct relation to the industry and foresight of those who, in past days, including our day, assembled archival collections. If through neglect, accident, or lack of foresight, sources are inadequate, history in its turn must be inadequate, too.

The gravity of the archivist's task in this history-archives relationship was, therefore, highly significant, nothing less than ensuring that the surviving sources were not inadequate, for the present and for the future. Good history depends on a good archive. And so archivists fully shared, in Lamb's view, an honoured role with historians in promoting the important buttresses of national spirit and identity, in advancing human self-knowledge and understanding, and in combatting the pervasive materialism and hedonism of the

²² For an overview, see Paul Litt, *The Muses, The Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto, 1992).

postwar age. Here, with appropriate updating to his era, Lamb echoed the cultural-national purposes for archives that had been so critically important to his esteemed predecessor, Arthur Doughty, the second Dominion Archivist (1904–1935).²³ Because history by definition, following Burckhardt, was temporary, it would be rewritten in each generation, responding to short-term needs to interpret some aspect of the past that speaks to the historian's ever-changing present. By contrast, Lamb asserted that the archivist spoke to the future as well as the present, and so had to take the "long-term view [which] is, perhaps, the basic characteristic of the work and outlook of the archivist, and from it springs a sense of permanence in his accomplishment, which can make that work peculiarly satisfying." Barring a catastrophe destroying the archives, the archivist's work "is something that will endure; it is as likely to interest succeeding generations as anything we now have. Every document added to it and every archival job well done may thus contribute to something that will be important far into the future. This element of permanency is something in which only the very exceptional historian can hope to share."²⁴

For Lamb, this meant that the archivist's principal duty was "keeping the past up to date" so that sources would indeed be adequate for the changing needs of history, a history upon which Lamb placed, as seen, so central a role in national and personal development. In fact, the phrase, "keeping the past up to date," had a special resonance for Lamb: he used it as the title for his presidential address to the prestigious Society of Archivists in Great Britain, where he followed the legendary Sir Hilary Jenkinson into that office, and, much later, at age 80, he chose it again as the most suitable title for his 618-page memoir covering his entire archival career.²⁵ The notion of a relevant archive kept up to date with changing historical patterns was fundamental to Lamb's three-part archival revolution. Its background, though, rests with his conception of the nature and power of history in society, and the integrated history-archives relationship to documentary sources.

Revolution 1: "Total Archives" and Archival Appraisal

Turning, then, from Lamb's intellectual roots to the articulation of his archival ideas, Lamb found that keeping history up to date had been rather poorly done

23 Doughty saw the role of the Public Archives of Canada as the cultural equivalent of the national policy, to build a Canadian identity through history. See Ian Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: The Cultural Role of the Public Archives of Canada, 1904–1935," *The Canadian Archivist* 2.4 (1973), pp. 4–25.

24 For all direct quotations in this and the previous paragraph, see Lamb Memoir, pp. 19, 618; Lamb, "The Archivist and the Historian," p. 386.

25 W. Kaye Lamb, "Keeping the Past Up To Date," Presidential Address, *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 2.7 (April 1963), pp. 285–88; for the full citation of the title of his memoir, see note 13 above.

by archivists before him. He explained this at some length, in the mid-1950s, in light of the fabled acquisition exploits of one of his predecessors:

I should be the last person who would wish to disparage in the slightest the magnificent achievements of my predecessor, Sir Arthur Doughty, but I am reminded at this point of an interview I had some years ago with a distinguished European archivist [Sir Hilary Jenkinson]. The subject of the interview was to be the microfilming of historical documents, and kindly members of the great man's staff warned me that I must proceed cautiously and not expect too much. "Remember," they said, "that he is not really interested in anything that has happened since 1450." If we substitute 1867 for 1450, I think the same remark could be made quite fairly about Doughty. He loved the romance and colour of the days of early exploration and colonial wars and colonial rivalries. But no foreign war later than 1815 has really touched Canadian soil, and the prestige of the aristocracy and of titles waned with the coming of responsible government and the gradual decline in the political importance of the office of governor general. Doughty added to the Archives the finest collection of private papers in existence relating to the Seven Years War, and ... key early political collections.... But after that the programme faltered, perhaps because Confederation still seemed recent to someone born seven years before it took place. Yet Canada as we know it today is largely the creation of the years since 1867, and an adequate collection of political papers to document the last ninety years is clearly essential if we are to understand the history of this eventful period.²⁶

This was not only Lamb's view. The Canadian Historical Association in 1949 also urged the collection of the papers of modern political figures, including cabinet ministers. This in turn elicited a lead editorial from the *Ottawa Citizen*. That there were in the custody of the Public Archives only the papers of Canada's first prime minister "gives cogency to the view that current provisions in regard to the national custody of documents of public figures are not adequate. History is an enduring thing of inestimable value to the people of this country. That it may be intelligently interpreted for present and future generations depends to a large extent on the establishment of reasonable regulations to prevent the dispersal or destruction of relevant documents accumulated by ministers of the Crown...." Not only had Doughty neglected the private papers of national figures who flourished after Confederation, but he had also taken a very desultory interest in acquiring the archival records of the Government of Canada: the government archives, the *Citizen* continued, were "relatively scattered and scanty" and not serving historians effectively

26 Lamb, "Presidential Address," pp. 2-3. On the identity of Jenkinson, as the distinguished European archivist in question, in authorizing Canada to begin microfilming documents in the Public Record Office, see the parallel account in Lamb Memoir, 177, which names him explicitly.

because the Public Archives of Canada “has not become a Public Record Office to which such files would have been transferred as a matter of routine.”²⁷

This public criticism within months of Lamb’s arrival in Ottawa reinforced his personal predilection to keep the past much more up to date than had his predecessors. It also confirmed his first archival impressions in British Columbia back in the 1930s. There he had become firmly convinced that Jenkinson’s archival ideals “had little application to conditions in Canada, where records official and unofficial and historical manuscripts of all sorts were coming together in Canadian collections in a state of confusion – but happy confusion.”²⁸ While Lamb set about in his career to eliminate the confusion, he never abandoned the ideal of acquiring in one archival institution the official records from the sponsoring government and the personal manuscripts from the private or corporate sectors, in order to provide the richest possible range of sources for historians to use.²⁹

This inclusive approach to building an archives was labelled, after Lamb’s time, the “total archives” concept, but it reflects a long-standing Canadian practice that began before him. The first Dominion Archivist, Douglas Brymner, had acquired maps and private papers, and started an excellent library of Canadiana. His successor, Arthur Doughty, was famed for his aggressive acquisition of private manuscripts, as well as maps and documentary art, some film, and diverse collections of museum artifacts and war trophies. And Gustave Lanctôt, Lamb’s immediate predecessor, has begun to address the archival possibilities in the huge backlogs of government records. This comprehensive approach to archives in the public and private sectors contrasted sharply with many countries, such as the United States, England, France, Germany, and Australia, among others, that only acquire the official records of their sponsoring government, but not private papers of national significance. Part of the reasons for the evolution in Canada of this comprehensive acquisition strategy, at least at the national level, was the great size, small population, and limited cultural resources of the country in its first seventy years after Confederation; part of it was the absence for decades of a national library to

27 *Ottawa Citizen* 13 and 10 August 1949; see also *The Globe and Mail* (1 August 1949). These public debates also reflect input to the hearings of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (Massey-Lévesque Commission), 1949–51. See also Lamb’s introduction to Public Archives of Canada, *Report of The Public Archives for the Year 1949* (Ottawa, 1950), vii–viii.

28 Lamb fonds, vol. 41, file 41.21, Background Notes for Memoir, n.d.

29 Lamb Memoir, pp. 43–48, where Lamb lauds (and quotes from) the work of his predecessors as Provincial Archivist of British Columbia, R.E. Gosnell and especially E.O.S. Scholefield, for developing this comprehensive approach. For background on their pioneering roles, see Terry Eastwood, “R.E. Gosnell, E.O.S. Scholefield and the Founding of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1894–1919,” *BC Studies* 54 (Summer 1982).

undertake as elsewhere the major role in the acquisition of private papers; part of it was undoubtedly the personal passion of a great collector like Sir Arthur Doughty. In fact, in this evolution of “total archives,” at least at the national level until the mid-twentieth century, Canada erred considerably on the side of favouring personal papers at the expense of government records. Moreover, as the “total archives” concept evolved, it came to include not only text-based manuscript material from the public/government and private/personal sectors, but audio-visual media as well. In many countries, such media records, especially film and maps, are not kept in the national archives, but primarily in separate institutes or national libraries. A further aspect of total archives, reaching back in its Canadian origins to the mid-nineteenth century, was the systematic copying of records relevant to Canada’s colonial past from established archives of France and Britain, again in order to have archival sources readily available for the present and anticipated needs of researchers. And under Lamb’s direction, “total archives” acquired an important additional dimension: intensive interaction by the archives with the records-creating departments of government and with the new records management profession, so that the archival sphere of activity would encompass the total life cycle of records, from the creation and active use phase by their creating departments, to later dormant storage for very occasional use by those same departments, and then, finally, to the last phase of either destruction or transfer to the archives.³⁰

If the “total archives” approach had, therefore, been evolving long before Lamb, if rather imperfectly and partially in light of the above definitions, it became firmly established at the Public Archives of Canada under his direction, not just as a concept, but fully practised in a robust, balanced way in all the dimensions noted above. For Lamb, the motivation was not just researcher convenience, but rather went back to the fundamental nature of history and historical research. From his earliest days as an archivist, he believed that

30 For Lamb’s explicit acknowledgement that in collecting private manuscripts, as well as maps and prints, the Public Archives of Canada was doing work done in other countries by national libraries, see W. Kaye Lamb, “Canada’s National Library: A Progress Report,” *American Library Association Bulletin* 54.4 (April 1960), p. 288. For detailed analysis of the historical evolution and future prospects of total archives, see Laura Millar’s fine two-part article, “Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998); and “The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999). For a critical overview of the concept as it was explicitly articulated in the 1970s and applied at the Public Archives of Canada, see Terry Cook, “The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on ‘Total Archives,’” *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–80); and “Media Myopia,” *Archivaria* 12 (Summer 1981), that includes references to other essays debating the concept at that time. While “total archives” may have been first articulated at the national and provincial levels in Canada, it has become a pattern of practice also followed by municipal, county, university, and church archives.

... archives may be divided roughly into two classes – official and unofficial – the “official” complementing and supplementing the “unofficial,” both being indispensable to the student. ... no adequate history can be written without the aid of official documents, which are, and always must be, the backbone, as it were, of historical narrative, yet the material of the second class must enter largely into the composition of national chronicles, and for the reason that it embraces the documents called, for lack of a better term, “human.” The private letter, the diary, the memoir, the journal, and the reminiscence, with all their varied and rich side-lights upon men and events, cannot be neglected if close adherence to truth is desired. A thorough understanding of the motives that lay behind and prompted actions and movements, motives which not always have been acknowledged publicly, may only be reached after a conscientious examination of all sources of information.... The student and historian ... are as directly concerned with what has taken place behind the scenes as upon the stage itself, for without such knowledge it is not possible adequately to represent the past, or to characterize truly the men who have played important parts in national life. The official document, then, must be interpreted, not always but often, in the light of the private, unofficial, or secret document.³¹

If the promise of a rich history relevant to the challenge of Canada’s post-war realities were to be encouraged, then Lamb made a virtue of necessity, by eagerly embracing (and further articulating) this comprehensive “total archives” vision of what an archives should be. And then he made the vision come true.

In his twenty years at the helm of the Public Archives of Canada, Lamb as a key priority negotiated for and acquired the personal papers of every Canadian prime minister but one after John A. Macdonald, whose papers alone had previously been fully accessioned.³² Learning from his wide contacts in the historical profession that by convention prime ministers wrote regularly to the governor general “off the record” and as a courtesy did not retain copies in their own outgoing letterbooks of this often revealing confidential correspondence, Lamb successfully pursued the personal papers of post-Confederation governors general, many being located in private estates across Britain. To encourage ministers and senior parliamentarians of all political parties to leave their personal papers with the Archives upon losing office or retiring from public life, Lamb instituted a system of security deposit, where the papers would be stored

31 Lamb Memoir, pp. 47–48. Here Lamb was quoting the “remarkable report” written in 1910 by one of his predecessors as British Columbia Provincial Archivist, E.O.S. Scholefield, of which just-cited passage he remarked: “I have never seen a better statement of the case for combining official and non-official documents, and it is well worth quoting here.” *It de facto* therefore becomes Lamb’s view as well.

32 The exception, when Lamb wrote, not counting still active politicians, was R.B. Bennett, Prime Minister from 1930 to 1935, whose papers were donated earlier to the University of New Brunswick, although microfilm copies were acquired by the Public Archives. Some Laurier Papers had also been acquired in 1938, but the majority remained with his biographer, O.D. Skeleton.

safely at the Archives, still under the control of their creator/owner, but at least not lost in the hurried shuffle of changing offices or ending careers. With the passing of time and lessening of sensitivity, most such papers were eventually turned over to the full control of the Archives. Thus Lamb not only filled many of the large post-Confederation gaps in the holdings, but brought history right up to date by negotiating transfers while records were still current. His initial focus in acquisition (and microfilming priorities too) on political figures clearly reflected the emphasis in Canadian historiography in the 1950s and 1960s on national events and political history, and especially an outpouring at that time of political biographies by many of Canada's leading historians.

But Lamb was also true to his early views that a nation was more than its politics. Social and economic factors were also critically important dimensions of national development, and thus should be documented better in a national archives. Accordingly, numerous collections were acquired from businesses and cultural, social, and professional organizations, as well as from individual scientists and engineers, explorers and military figures, journalists and scholars. The volume of annual manuscript accessions increased tenfold under his years. On his watch too, other dimensions of total archives grew from struggling units to flourishing programs. A small map division mushroomed with the arrival of hundreds of colonial-era atlases and maps, thousands of township and county plans, hydrographic charts and government maps, city plans, and a large assemblage of foreign maps, to the point where by 1967, the much larger unit was designated the National Map Collection, complete with its own cataloguing and publication programs. Similarly, the small picture division Lamb inherited was reorganized to include not only paintings, drawings, and prints documenting a broad spectrum of Canadian life, but a new historical photographs section as well, including nascent sounding recording and film units. Between 1959 and 1969, accessions of such non-map audio-visual records increased annually from 2,180 items to over 114,000, from both government and private sources. As will be seen, Lamb also launched extensive microfilming projects in Britain and France, as well as in Canada, that resulted in the acquisition of thousands of reels, with millions of pages of documents, relating to Canadian history. And most importantly, in light of his correcting areas of past neglect, Lamb completely revitalized the management of current government records and the acquisition of those with historical value, the latter amounting to some 38,000 linear feet (about 12,000 metres) in 850 new accessions coming to the Public Archives in his last decade in office.³³ When Lamb

33 All figures in this and the preceding paragraph come from Public Archives of Canada, *Public Archives of Canada: Report, 1959-1969* (Ottawa, 1971), passim. Wilfred I. Smith, then Acting Dominion Archivist and soon Lamb's successor, organized the compilation of this overview of Lamb's last decade, and wrote the introduction to it, including a graceful tribute to his old mentor.

retired, therefore, his vision of a comprehensive “total” archives that balanced public and private records, in all media, thereby keeping the past up to date both chronologically and in terms of serving researchers, had become the operational reality of the Public Archives of Canada.

Lamb’s vision fundamentally – and deliberately – changed the character of the archivist. Whether choosing the five per cent of government records to be retained permanently as archives from the vast holdings in departmental offices and records centres; whether selecting the small number of series of total overseas government, commercial, religious, and private records to be microfilmed and acquired as archives for Canada; whether deciding on the tiny percentage of private individuals, groups, and organizations from across the nation to have their personal papers or audio-visual media designated as archival, in all these cases, the archivist was required to exercise research skill and personal judgement. He or she was assessing the value of these records for their long-term use to Canada, and equally ignoring or destroying the rest. This process is the function of archival appraisal.

And it was here that Lamb had his most pointed disagreement with the great British archival theorist, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, and his sharpest break with the past Canadian archival practice, at least in terms of government records.³⁴ Lamb made the point clearly in 1962:

Until recent times, the duties of an archivist were essentially those of a guardian and custodian. He took charge of the surviving records of the past and did his best to preserve and safeguard them. The question as to whether they should be preserved, or were worth preserving, rarely arose. By contrast, to destroy records, or to authorize or agree to their destruction, has now become an accepted part of the archivist’s responsibility. This represents a fundamental change in his duties, the implications of which are probably not yet fully apparent.

Appraisal was not the same as acquisition. Acquisition certainly occurred in the past, with the passive curator accepting what was offered, or survived, from government departments, or for private, personal records could be tracked down to fill gaps in the collections. Acquisition was a process for controlling and documenting these transfers of older records. Appraisal – and its ever-present twin, “the fine art of destruction” – dealt with current or very recent records, where the keep–destroy decision had to be made now, and jus-

34 A few other Canadian archivists were following a parallel course, explicitly influenced by Lamb’s work and American precedents, particularly in Ontario and Saskatchewan. See Barbara Craig, “Records Management and the Ontario Archives, 1950–1976,” *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979), pp. 9–11. Alas, we have almost no historical studies comparable to Craig’s for other provinces or cities in this period.

tified. "The difficulty," Lamb wrote of appraisal, "is to decide wisely and well what shall be destroyed and what shall be retained."³⁵

Lamb was blunt about the need to face this new challenge: "The sheer bulk of modern records makes destruction inescapable. The extent and cost of storage space in which to retain them all would be prohibitive." Immediately following the First World War, Jenkinson himself had lamented the difficulty posed by modern records being created, in his words, "on a hopelessly gigantic scale." Yet the records of the Great War, Lamb wryly observed, "shrink into relative insignificance in comparison with the prodigious bulk of those produced since 1939." By the 1950s, such major programs of the social-welfare state as income tax, old-age and other pensions, unemployment insurance, and family allowances, as well as a myriad of subsidies and grants across the entire spectrum of government activity, meant that the Canadian government created and maintained millions of files on individual citizens. Since Jenkinson "was loath," Lamb fairly summarized, "to see the archivist play any role in the destruction of records ... [and] above all anxious to prevent the element of personal judgement from entering the picture," as in appraisal it always must, Jenkinson assigned to the departmental administrators the task of winnowing the good, permanent, and thus archival records from their ephemeral, temporary, and routine counterparts. In this way, Jenkinson hoped to preserve the allegedly impartial and unselfconscious character of the archive, and to allow the archivist to remain "essentially a custodian – the competent, careful guardian of whatever records good luck and good management preserved and placed in his keeping." Lamb found Jenkinson's reasoning in this regard to be misguided:

By and large it is true, no doubt, that a department's own administrators – provided they will take the trouble – can best decide whether old files are likely to have any further practical usefulness from the department's point of view, and whether they form an important part of the department's record of its own operations. But these are by no means the only factors that should be taken into account when the destruction of records is under consideration. Every archivist knows that documents may prove use-

35 Lamb, "The Fine Art of Destruction," p. 50. Despite disagreeing fundamentally with Jenkinson's central theoretical positions on pure unbroken custody, total archives, and especially appraisal, and more deeply on the passivity and impartiality of archivists and archives, Lamb had great respect for his older British colleague, and worked well with him in microfilming Public Record Office holdings for Canada and serving as the three-year vice president of the (British) Society of Archivists when Jenkinson was its president, and then following the great man into that office, as well as contributing to his festschrift. By contrast, the leading American archival theorist of Lamb's generation, T.R. Schellenberg, declared of Jenkinson that "I'm tired of having an old fossil cited to me as an authority in archival matters." (Cited in Donald R. McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents, 1934–1968* [Chapel Hill, 1978], p. 180.)

ful and valuable for a wide variety of purposes that may have little or no relationship to the purpose for which they were brought into existence. And for this very reason the officials of the department that created them may be very poor judges of their long-term value.

Lamb thought that Jenkinson placed “too much trust in the sagacity of departmental administrators,” for why should their exercise of “personal judgement” be less harmful to the alleged impartiality of the record than that of the archivist? Moreover, Jenkinson’s prescription that departments should create permanent files succinctly summarizing all important transactions and maintain them in a rigidly controlled centralized registry as the core archival record was simply an “ideal state of affairs [that] rarely if ever exists.” The reality was that departmental officials and records managers were seldom the highly competent, well-educated, senior officials that Jenkinson envisioned, but more often junior clerical staff who took the short-term view driven by space crises and financial pressures, usually doing “their best, but who cannot rise to anything approaching the level that Sir Hilary contemplated.” The result, Lamb observed, speaking from much personal experience, is that “it is not always possible to trust departments to handle their files as they should, and to have registry staffs who can distinguish unerringly between ephemeral material and significant papers of permanent interest and value. Under pressure to reduce the bulk of records, both they and the records managers alike can develop a zeal for destruction that blinds them to the necessity of giving due consideration to other factors that it is important to keep in mind when the final disposition of files is being decided.”³⁶

Those other factors for Lamb were, not surprisingly, the historical-cultural ones that have little or no relationship to the long-term needs of the department to preserve a tiny fraction of its records for its own long-term operational or legal needs. Lamb was certain that, in terms of identifying “all sorts of unexpected values of this kind ... the archivist is the person most likely to perceive them, or to suspect their existence. It is his business to take the long-term view. And his day-by-day experience in helping those engaged in research should give him a background against which to judge the possible usefulness of material that someone is proposing to discard.”³⁷

36 Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction,” pp. 50–53, for all quotations used. Recent historical analysis suggests that Lamb was right, and Jenkinson was wrong, in terms of how the British Treasury itself, the very core of controlling government administrative practices right in Jenkinson’s period, managed its own registry records in anything but the centralized, tautly controlled, and summarized fashion that Sir Hilary hoped. See Barbara L. Craig, “Rethinking Formal Knowledge and its Practices in the Organization: The British Treasury’s Registry Between 1900 and 1950,” in Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, eds., *Archives, Records, and Power*, published as four issues of *Archival Science* 2 (2002).

37 Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction,” p. 53.

The archivist in appraisal became, in fact, Lamb's very agent for keeping history up to date. At the Public Archives of Canada, in Lamb's period and following on in his legacy, archivists were hired, as Lamb directed, with (increasingly more graduate) degrees in history, and, once hired, were encouraged to attend national and regional historical conferences and participate in historical associations, to read widely in Canadian history and historiography, to interact very closely in specialized reference with academic historians and other serious researchers, and to do their own historical research, scholarly editing, and publication. This background and experience would enable archivists, it was hoped, to assess current patterns in, and thus anticipate future trends for, historical research themes and historical research methodologies. Such knowledge, combined with an analysis of past patterns of research use in archival holdings, would permit the archivist to decide which records were likely to have research value as archives in the future. Such records would then be designated (or appraised) as archives; the rest would be destroyed. Lamb's espousal of this methodology is evident in his reflection on how the "all-important ability to appraise documents" could be developed in the archivist:

To my mind there are two essentials. One is the sound training in history... A knowledge of relevant history gives perspective to one's point of view and one's judgment. Experience in historical research enables one to appreciate how manuscripts and records are used. The archivist must be able to judge the probable value of sources to a scholar or research worker, and this ability can be developed best by personal experience in research. The second essential is practical experience. There are many aspects of the archivist's work that can only be learned effectively on the job. Sorting records and papers, appraising them, servicing them – these cannot be mastered by theoretical study; ... they can only be performed with knowledge and judgment by an archivist who has had considerable practical experience.³⁸

It was not just historical training and an historian's mindset that made the new historian-archivist a good appraiser. Lamb asserted that the good archivist must know his or her collections in great detail to understand their deficiencies and how to address these. Moreover, reflecting his debt to Doughty's tradition of the active private-sector collector, Lamb said that the archivist "must in effect be on duty far beyond the limits of his nominal day, for a chance conversation or a social occasion is just as apt to bring him news of the existence of a cache of paper as a formal interview in office hours. He must watch for the deaths, marriages, estate sales and even the spring cleanings that may bring forth the hidden or forgotten contents of attics and cellars."³⁹

38 W. Kaye Lamb, "The Modern Archivist: Formally Trained or Self-Educated?," *American Archivist* 31.2 (April 1968), pp. 176–77.

39 Lamb, "Keeping the Past Up To Date," pp. 286–87.

But the archivist was not simply an historian, with a bit of on-the-job methodological training and sound practical experience. The mindset was quite different. Lamb told of one historian likening the work of archivists “to a vacuum cleaner – a remark he intended to be complimentary, within limits, because he wanted to commend the industry and thoroughness with which we hunted out material and brought it all together. But there, in his view, our abilities ended. Really important things began to happen only when some historian opened the bag of the vacuum cleaner, sorted out its contents, and made intelligent use of the good things he found there.” To many historians, the archivist was “essentially a hack: a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. He collects things, cleans them, catalogues them, puts them on shelves, and eventually takes some of them off shelves and puts them on a table when a historian wants them. All this is true enough, but it neglects entirely those aspects of the archivist’s job that call for intelligence, knowledge, and judgment to such a degree that the assignment can be a little frightening.” Part of this challenge for the archivist was the obligation

frequently to practice the difficult art of prophecy. He must attempt to anticipate needs. Out of a vast mass of material, a high percentage of which must be destroyed, he must try to identify and retain those items that are most likely to be of interest and significance in the years to come. Unlike the historian, the archivist cannot place any convenient subjective limitation on his field of interest. Somehow or other he must find means to pass judgment on the probable value of source material that may relate to virtually any aspect or period of the history of the state or country with which his institution happens to be concerned. ... Sources can wait for the historian for years, but if they are to be there to await his pleasure, some archivist may have to make up his mind in a hurry and act quickly in order to secure and preserve them.⁴⁰

The challenge of modern appraisal utterly transformed the archivist, and thus formed the fundamental core of Lamb’s archival revolution. “Here, then,” Lamb concluded, “is our modern archivist: not just a custodian, not just a receiver of whatever papers someone may choose to give him, but someone who has a voice in deciding what records are to be retained, and a person who can go far to decide what sources will be available to historians in the future.” While some archivists might long for their curatorial past, “most of us will work and work happily,” Lamb asserted, “to collect, to pick and choose, to expand our holdings and to safeguard them, always with *the basic purpose* of making them represent more fully and fairly the fragment of the past, the record of which it is our task to keep up to date.”⁴¹

40 Lamb, “The Archivist and the Historian,” pp. 392–93.

41 Lamb, “The Third Revolution,” p. 1; Lamb, “Keeping the Past Up To Date,” pp. 278, 287–88. Emphasis added.

Revolution 2: Managing the Records of Government

To add the government records half to the total archives concept, and to ensure that archivists indeed were able to exercise that “voice” in the keep–destroy decision-making process, Lamb effectively introduced records management to the Government of Canada, as well as making it a core function of the Public Archives. If total archives, the appraisal process, and the new appraisal-archivist were the first pillar supporting Lamb’s transformation of the post-war archival profession, the second revolution was records management. “We suddenly began to take an interest,” Lamb observed, “in the records that the government and governments in general should get rid of.”⁴²

When he first arrived in Ottawa in early 1949, Lamb faced a useful precedent and a lurking danger. On the positive side, in September 1945, the Privy Council Office had established the Public Records Committee (PRC). One of its pressing priorities was to ensure that the varied roles of federal government departments in the recent war effort were well documented for posterity. More generally, it was to implement cost-effective approaches for managing current government records and using new office technologies such as better filing cabinets and microfilm cameras.⁴³ With this PRC oversight, the government had two aims. First, there was the need to reduce the vast paper burden within government, where decades of old files were “moldering in damp cellars” and ever subject to the threat (and sadly the past reality several times) of destruction by fire. Secondly, some method was required to identify those government records having historical value for transfer to the Public Archives to rectify past neglect in this area. The Secretary of State (the cabinet minister through whom the Public Archives then reported) chaired the committee, the Dominion Archivist was its vice chair, and the secretary was the Registrar of the Cabinet from the Privy Council Office, plus representatives from the Canadian Historical Association and several key government departments. W.E.D. (Bill) Halliday of the Privy Council Office was appointed secretary and, for almost two decades, was Lamb’s close ally, taking a keen personal interest in archival and records matters, and, from his sensitive position viewing all Cabinet submissions, able to watch government-wide activities on Lamb’s behalf. Although the PRC did not have the power to prevent the destruction of records, under Lamb and Halliday’s leadership, it would become very persuasive in convincing departments to allow those records identified as having archival value to be preserved by the Archives. The PRC at first also hoped to establish in Canada a public record office for government archival records, but, as Halliday confessed, until Lamb’s arrival, no progress had been made. Nevertheless, the existence of the PRC, especially as it gradually finished overseeing its first pri-

42 Lamb, “The Third Revolution,” pp. 2–3.

43 LAC, Records of the Privy Council Office, Order in Council P.C. 6175, 20 September 1945.

ority of the wartime narratives, as well as the growing records management precedents in the United States, offered “a promising start” for Lamb to reverse the neglect of seventy years concerning government archival records.⁴⁴

Yet Lamb almost did not get that chance. The Massey Commission in 1949–51 soon unearthed that past neglect, and the press consequently had a field day. “Something Wrong and Rotten In State of Public Records,” trumpeted the headlines, with editors noting that the Massey Commission, despite “the sweet reasonableness of its general message” of promoting Canadian culture, nevertheless delivered “one of the roughest blasts ever heard around Ottawa. The blast was against the government in general, the civil service as a whole, and the Archives in particular.” Massey found that virtually nothing had changed since the Royal Commission of 1912 had reported that government records were in a state of chaos. Despite the initial work of the Public Records Committee since 1945, Massey concluded that “the truth about Canada’s public records system must still be a cause of embarrassment to all Canadians.” Historical records – “important and valuable documents ... engulfed by rubbish” – are “scattered all over Ottawa, in inactive department files.” Huge costs were involved: a commission study revealed that the “completely inactive and inaccessible public records” in one department alone took up almost more floor space than two nine-story office buildings. The Archives was singled out for its rigid pre-Confederation focus, its disregard for “the interests of efficiency or economy,” and its employment in over one-half of its staff doing “professional archival work” of people with nothing beyond a high-school education. As a result, Massey concluded that the Archives was as much a contributor to this scandalous records situation as were the departments themselves. Lamb was addressed directly: “The Archivist is in effect told he must ... get rid of the dead wood, both that which walks and lies in files ... to get rid of rubbish alive and dead.”⁴⁵

From the very first year of his British Columbia archival experience, Lamb well knew the dire threat to government files that were not well managed during their operational life, and thus the consequent loss of historical records.⁴⁶ Yet because the past failures of the Archives to address earlier official admonitions about government records were now so obvious and out in the open, Lamb feared that the Massey Commission would follow the British and Euro-

44 See W.E.D. Halliday, “The Public Records of Canada: Recent Developments in Control and Management,” *American Archivist* 13 (April 1950), pp. 102–108 (quote at pp. 103, 107); Lamb Memoir, p. 156 (on Halliday); *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 10 August 1949, quoting Lamb before the Massey Commission. For a good analysis of the establishment and goals of the PRC, see Atherton, “The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897–1956,” pp. 49–52.

45 *Ottawa Journal*, 13 June 1951.

46 Provincial Archives of British Columbia, C/D/30.8/L16, “British Columbia. Report on the State of the Library and Archives, Dec. 1934. W. Kaye Lamb, Librarian & Archivist,” p. 27; Lamb Memoir, pp. 69–71.

pean models, and establish a public record office separate from the Public Archives of Canada, thus rending his ideal of total archives in twain. For this reason, he had at first, in the summer of 1949, strategically told the Commission that the new public record office should be “restricted to documents of permanent historic interest. Departments must not be permitted to impose upon the Archives by saddling it with files that must be retained for a term of years, but are not of historic interest.” This opening salvo, Lamb later recalled, “was deliberate. I was anxious at all costs to avoid any possibility that the Commission might recommend the erection of a records building, on the disastrous 1938 model, that had no connection with the Archives. Firm Archives control of what would go into it was the first requisite.” Here, Lamb was referring to the failed Public Works-run project of operating a storage-only facility for old records, but with no reference or disposal service, which therefore, not surprisingly, departments had shunned. By the end of 1949, Lamb judged this danger to have passed; he had very firm support from such influential insiders as Jack Pickersgill, then the key advisor in the Prime Minister’s Office, Bill Halliday in the Privy Council Office (and the PRC secretary), and Robert (Bob) Bryce, Secretary of the Treasury Board. Once he had their assurance that the new records office would be under the control of the Public Archives, Lamb was able to state his broader vision more publicly:

The solution would appear to be the construction of a large half-way house for departmental files, controlled and staffed by the Public Archives, but not necessarily situated in downtown Ottawa. To this depository the departments would be invited to send all records not required for day-to-day use. As long as any reference to files was required, the Archives staff would service them and produce the necessary papers on request. When they ceased to be of interest to a department, records would be reviewed by Archives personnel, and those containing material of permanent historic interest would be transferred to the Archives proper. The rest would be destroyed. This plan would provide an orderly solution to the public records problem at minimum cost; and, by becoming custodian of the older files of the various departments, the Archives would be able to give immeasurably better service to outside inquirers.

In this statement, Lamb was consciously drawing on the American model of the records centre as a half-way house, or cooling-off place, for records between their active use in departments and their final disposition by either destruction or transfer to an archives.⁴⁷ As one observer notes, Lamb chose

⁴⁷ *Report of The Public Archives for the Year 1949*, viii; Lamb fonds, vol. 15, file 15.1, Kaye Lamb to Hilda Neatby, 1 December 1950, also enclosing the memorandum, “Public Archives,” of the same date (Neatby was one of the Massey Commissioners, and long a professional historian); Atherton, “The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897–1956,” pp. 53–55 (where he suggests that Lamb was uncertain of his options and so changed his mind between summer and winter 1949; Lamb rejects this interpretation, arguing that his two positions were taken very deliberately, for strategic reasons); Lamb Memoir, 233–35.

“the American ‘purgatory’ records centre concept, with a central staff [of, and controlled by, the archival institution] ensuring that records are properly administered, to the British ‘limbo’ centre, where the creating departments retained total responsibility for that activity.”⁴⁸

To Lamb’s chagrin, the Canadian Historical Association, addressing the Massey Commission through Charles Stacey, then Director of the Army Historical Section of the Department of Defence, and extrapolating, rather short-sightedly, from his own special experience dealing (admirably) with recent Second World War military records, thought that the records centre should not be built in a relatively remote suburban location, but rather as an extension of the Public Archives’ present downtown building. This would serve researchers’ convenience better, and be more along the British “limbo” approach that focused the Archives’ attention on purely historical records, rather than on dormant operational ones within records management systems. Lamb found this intervention “annoying – even exasperating.” The official historian clearly had no idea of the vast volumes of dormant records involved and the impossible expense of storing them downtown. Cost avoidance and service efficiency were among the key arguments that Lamb used to convince the government to construct and then operate such a record centre within the expanding modern state; concern for rescuing historical archives was, among senior government officials, a distant secondary reason. Stacey also overlooked the “severely utilitarian” architecture that any such large records-storage building would exhibit, which Lamb rightly thought would be “entirely unsuitable” for the downtown of a capital city. Stacey ignored too the crying need for systematic records management across government that would have its focus in PRC-inspired programs made operational in an Archives-administered records centre, where good reference services would of course also be available to historians as well as to the government itself – far more so, in fact, than historians had had in the past going through individual departments. Stacey’s focus on those records of likely historical interest to himself and his colleagues, and not on the larger records management issues, even threatened a reversion to something like the failed 1938 experiment, where simple storage of dormant files was detached from their on-going reference, orderly disposition, and identification (in part) as archives. While the Massey Commission gave Stacey’s views prominence and support, Lamb won the day. His powerful allies in government agreed to the construction of Canada’s first half-way-house records centre on Lamb’s model, before the Massey Commission issued its final report to the contrary.⁴⁹ Yet this incident is revealing. While archivists

48 Atherton, “The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897–1956,” pp. 55–56, referencing T.R. Schellenberg’s purgatory–limbo dichotomy.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 55; Lamb Memoir, pp. 235–37. On Stacey’s important role as both *de facto* archivist and official historian at the Department of Defence, see Tim Cook, “Clio’s Soldiers: Charles

must certainly engage, in Lamb's opinion, in records management work as a means of identifying and preserving government archival records as part of a total archives keeping "the past up to date," the interests of historians and archivists might very well diverge over this new function.

The Public Archives Records Centre (PARC) opened for business in April 1956, located in Tunney's Pasture, then a suburb in western Ottawa, in a building that was, indeed, blandly utilitarian and well away from the capital's downtown core. Each of its five floors had almost an acre of space, with a total shelving capacity for 62 miles (100 kilometres) of boxes, plus offices, special vaults, sorting spaces, and a reference and research room. By 1958, the Archives was answering over 3,000 requests per month from departments, with two deliveries scheduled daily to any government office. With such good service, records soon flooded into the Centre, freeing up in the first three years alone some 87,000 square feet of high-priced government office space in downtown buildings. Nor was this a one-time savings, for the Records Centre would over the years be emptied and refilled continually. Yet Lamb's initiative came none too soon. A.M. Willms, the first chief of the Centre and Lamb's protege and right-hand manager, reported that, in clearing out government departments, "some of the documents were in such bad shape they had to be literally handled with a shovel." Many records were infested with silverfish, feasting on the glues of bindings and envelopes; a large fumigator was therefore added to PARC to treat in-coming accessions, using deadly methyl bromide gas to kill all pests. One spectacular rescue included "some thousands of bound volumes" of early land grants and mining rights from the old Department of the Interior, which had overseen, as part of its mandate, the settlement of the Canadian West from 1873 to 1930; these were "discovered stowed away in an old building on which the government had been paying rent for years upon years. Nobody apparently knew they were there."⁵⁰

Using his Presidential Address to the Canadian Historical Association in June 1958, Lamb took evident delight in recounting these successes. "I would expect," he told his once-sceptical audience, "the transformation of the Archives into a full-fledged public record office to take *first place* in the his-

Stacey and the Army Historical Section in the Second World War," *Canadian Historical Review* 83 (March 2002). Despite these differences with Stacey over the Massey Commission, and later, to less degree, the Glassco Commission and the function of archival appraisal, Lamb and Stacey remained good friends, and made common cause over lowering access restrictions on government records. As noted, Lamb ended his long archival memoir by quoting Stacey, with praise, and Stacey was highly laudatory to his old friend: see Stacey, as quoted twice in Wilfred I. Smith, "W. Kaye Lamb," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83), p. 14.

50 *Report of The Public Archives for the Years 1955–1958* (Ottawa, 1959), pp. 7–10, for narrative and statistics; Interviews with Abraham Martin Willms, in *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 and 27 April 1957; Interview with Pierre Brunet, Assistant Dominion Archivist, in Reginald Hardy, "Tons of Government Files To Be Sorted For Archives," *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 June 1958.

tory of the department in the past decade.” There were two primary beneficiaries of this development. First, Lamb asserted that “the existence of the Centre is of considerable importance from the point of view of the day-to-day functioning of the Government, since it clears the way for marked improvements and economies in records management.” As will be seen, PARC became the locus for the new records management profession within the federal government, not just a place for the storage and disposal of dormant records. This contribution was fully in keeping with, and an important component of, wider initiatives for turning post-war Canada into a modern, efficient, and effective state. And secondly, “for the historian,” Lamb continued, “it is still more important, because it means that older records – the official archives of the future – will for the most part fall automatically into the hands of the Archives as they drop out of departmental use. The selection of material to be retained permanently will then be made by archivists who by training are qualified to take a long-term view, instead of by departmental filing staffs, who cannot be expected to draw a very fine distinction between discarding and housecleaning. ... The danger of wholesale destruction of departmental records of long-term value would seem to be definitely a thing of the past.”⁵¹ Carleton University history professor David M.L. Farr generously agreed that “the Lamb regime has brought about a veritable transformation of the Archives, so that today it serves as a public records office as well as a national repository for [private-sector] historical materials.”⁵²

Lamb’s intention that PARC would become a focus for the expansion and professionalization of records management in the federal government was realized, perhaps even beyond his own high hopes. The government decided in April 1956 that the Central Microfilm Unit (CMU) should be transferred from the Queen’s Printer to the new Public Archives Records Centre. This was “a clear indication” not only of the Public Archives’ rapidly developing microfilm expertise from its filming of historical records, but equally, as Lamb noted, “that the Treasury Board (which had recommended the change) recognized both that microfilming had become an integral part of records management, and that records management was going to be a major activity

51 Lamb, “Presidential Address,” pp. 1–2, emphasis added. Lamb also brought this activist archival-driven PARC model to the attention of British audiences, with their predilection for Jenkinson’s hands-off department-controlled approaches to managing records: see Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction,” pp. 50–56; and “Keeping the Past Up To Date,” pp. 285–88.

52 D.M.L. Farr, “The Development of Archival Institutions in Canada,” paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, Kingston, 8 June 1960, mss in Ian E. Wilson’s personal files. Farr worked closely with Lamb to develop by 1959 the first-ever course in Canada in archival theory and practice, jointly sponsored by Carleton University and the Public Archives of Canada.

of the Public Archives.” Thereafter, the Public Records Committee effectively controlled all government microfilming, for without its formal approval, the Treasury Board would not authorize any filming expenditures in departmental budgets. Of course, centralizing government microfilming through PARC on a cost-recovery basis was not only more efficient, but also allowed the Archives the opportunity, if the records had long-term historical value, to acquire a copy of the master negative microfilm and arrange for the transfer of the original hard-copy records during this microfilm approval process.⁵³

In addition to the usefulness of microfilm for administrative efficiency in the many regional offices expanding across the country, where each office needed copies of many headquarter records, microfilming also served as a security measure through record duplication. Such security was not only needed against possible loss from fires, as in the past, but also in the 1950s from the ever-present spectre of nuclear war. Accordingly, in 1959, the Public Archives was assigned core responsibility to operate a new “essential records” program across the entire government. Once identified and microfilmed, such records would be stored in a secret site well away from the city of Ottawa, which was assumed to be a Soviet missile target for “wholesale destruction.” The staff at PARC undertook surveys to identify such vital records, issued two publications of procedures to guide records managers, and made the necessary essential copies in the Central Microfilm Unit. The aim of the program, as fully implemented, was “to identify, select, reproduce, store and service essential or vital records so that essential services could be maintained if a major disaster, either natural or nuclear, occurred.”⁵⁴ As with dormant records storage and government microfilming operations, the essential records program indicated that the government had accepted Lamb’s arguments about cost savings, operational efficiency, and synergy afforded to records management by centralized services, as well as the benefits for capturing a far better historical archives.

The success of these three programs, in better operations and much reduced costs, very much helped Lamb’s credibility in Ottawa, and opened additional doors for him. The immediate evidence was the rapid growth of the record-centre system itself. Control of the government’s dormant personnel records were transferred from the Civil Service Commission to the Public Archives, first for civilian employees in 1957 and then, from 1961 onwards, for military personnel (going back to the First World War), together with heavy indexing

53 *Report of The Public Archives for the Years 1955–1958*, pp. 10–12; Lamb Memoir, pp. 348–49. The Queen’s Printer “went off the deep end” over this change, and “stonewalled and disrupted meetings,” insisting that microfilming was about publication, not effective management of government information and work flow, but to no avail. The decision stood for three decades.

54 *Public Archives of Canada: Report, 1959–1969*, p. 20; Lamb Memoir, pp. 378–80.

responsibilities and reference workload in order to administer pensions and other benefits for all departed or retired public servants. This resulted in the erection in 1964 of a new Records Centre Annex building, also in Tunney's Pasture, eventually known as the Personnel Records Centre. As Lamb had always predicted – and various PARC records surveys across government confirmed, and the Glassco Royal Commission on Government Organization (1960–63) soon recommended based on its careful studies – the significant operational efficiencies and financial savings achieved through the new records management regime more than offset the entire operational expenses of the Records Centre. This more than justified the expansion of Lamb's system. As a result, regional centres were opened in Toronto in September 1965 and Montreal in November 1966, both on the Ottawa model once they were equipped and operational, to spread such financial and operational efficiencies outside the capital as government records-generating activities expanded across the nation. If bricks and mortar often indicate a government's commitment to a successful program, then Lamb's design, building, and operating, within a single decade, of four large edifices for records management speaks volumes.

A critically important aspect of Lamb's second revolution was the professionalization of records management made possible by the focus that these new structures and programs provided. Initially, with the Centre empty, to justify its existence, all dormant records offered by departments were accessioned, and reference services readily provided. This relieved decades of pent-up space pressures where departments had been forced to keep records because of lack of space in the main Archives building and lack of enthusiasm by Archives' staff for acquiring government archives. But as the Centre began to fill up, there was concern that too many records were being ingested without any date for their disposal. The efficiency of any records centre is based on a continual flow of records in and out, so that storage bottlenecks do not again occur in departments, with concomitant increased costs, wasted space, and misplaced information. Yet by 1964, less than twenty percent of the records at PARC were scheduled with a definite date for their destruction or their transfer as historical records to the main Archives. As a result, a scheduling and disposal section was established in the Centre (staffed by archivists) to address this deficiency, and a circular issued that no unscheduled records would in future be accepted by the Centre, which meant each file must have a precise date (in number of years) for its destruction or archival transfer. As well, Centre staff working with departments produced the *General Records Disposal Schedules of the Government of Canada* in 1963 (revised in 1968), that set file classification standards and firm disposal dates for all categories of administrative records (personnel, accounts, buildings and land, vehicles, and so on) that were common to all departments and agencies.

Beyond that, for records specific to each department, PARC staff set up

numerous training courses for departmental records managers from clerks to supervisors. It established an advisory service to show people on the ground how to undertake records surveys, how to index and classify records in order to set up departmental filing systems, how to organize microfilm proposals for PRC approval, and how to prepare draft records schedules for archival appraisal and PRC destruction authorization. Finally, all this under Lamb's direction, a wide range of publications were produced on mail management, subject classification systems, records scheduling and disposal, essential records, and the establishment of a departmental records management operation.⁵⁵

Lamb's second revolution was recognized and completed by formal structures. In 1961, by Order in Council, the Public Records Committee was reconstituted, with the Dominion Archivist as its chair, replacing the Secretary of State, and the Archives authorized as the permanent secretariat, replacing the Privy Council Office. Compared to the 1945 Order that created the PRC, there were, for the first time, instructions that departments "should, where practicable, schedule their records for retirement and eventual destruction or long-term retention," as well as stronger language supporting good records management practices. PRC recommendations on destruction remained subject to Treasury Board approval.⁵⁶ Building of this initiative, the Glassco Royal Commission on Government Organization studied records management in detail, as an important part of its mandate to create a more efficient state. The results, Lamb noted, were "very satisfactory from my point of view," for its report "endorsed our hopes and plans for the future. Inevitably, as is the way of royal commissions, it picked up ideas from us and presented them as if they had originated them." Not surprisingly, Lamb found the report's summary of records management a "useful analysis," especially its core recommendations on records, distinguishing between the role of the records centres as "primarily custodial" on behalf of departments and of the archivist in appraising records as "fundamentally an archival responsibility.... No records should be destroyed at any point within a plan without due authority. At present, that authority is vested in the Treasury Board acting on the recommendation of the Public Records Committee.... It would appear to be more consistent to allocate to the Dominion Archivist the authorization for records destruction."⁵⁷

These recommendations were manifested in the new Public Records Order of 1966, the official culmination of Lamb's second revolution. Its provisions articulate a fulsome records management program: control over records destruction was assigned formally from the Treasury Board to the Public

55 *Public Archives of Canada: Report, 1959–1969*, pp. 1–2, 9–22, contains more detailed information, publication titles, and statistical charts in support of this narrative.

56 Order in Council P.C. 212, 16 February 1961; Lamb Memoir, pp. 383–85.

57 Lamb Memoir, pp. 479–84.

Archives; “public records” were defined broadly to include all media, including microfilm and computer cards, “regardless of physical form or characteristics”; scheduling of all government records was for the first time made mandatory (with a three-year window until May 1969 to complete the task); departments were compelled to obtain the Dominion Archivist’s authorization to destroy any records or to remove them from the control of the Government of Canada, and to seek his advice on any microfilming projects; the Public Archives was authorized to assess and report periodically on the adequacy of departments’ records management and microfilming operations; and the Public Records Committee was replaced by an Advisory Council on Public Records, which was a source of expertise for, rather than constraint on, the Dominion Archivist. These clauses pleased Lamb, for they “gave the Archives complete authority over the scheduling and disposal of records. In so doing to a great extent it simply put officially into effect routines that had been established in recent years, and no doubt this accounted for the fact that few hackles were raised when it took effect.” And not surprisingly, the wording of the Public Records Order reflected Lamb’s fundamental belief in “the production of ‘more complete and more accessible records for future generations’ as one of the basic aims of better records management,” and thus of course why records management was such a core dimension of his activist agenda for the Archives.⁵⁸

Reflecting this decade of new buildings and growing programs, and anticipating the increase in work to be generated by the Public Records Order’s provision regarding mandatory records scheduling, Lamb reorganized the Public Archives of Canada. The Public Archives Records Centre became the Records Management Branch in 1966, with three divisions that were devoted to accessioning and reference of dormant records; managing the regional records centres; and providing advisory services, especially for scheduling and disposal, but also for essential records, records inventorying, and training and publications. The traditional part of the Archives was reorganized at the same time into the Historical Branch, with major divisions for manuscripts, maps, and pictures, as well as the London and Paris Offices for copying and acquiring overseas records, the Archives Library, and Publications. And in recognition of the large volumes of government archival records now arriving as a result of all these records management initiatives since 1956, and the many more records that the Public Records Order’s provisions would soon generate, a Public Records Section was finally created in 1965 within the Manuscript Division. This was the first unit in the ninety-three-year history of the Public Archives to be devoted exclusively to those government archival records that, in other countries, have always been the central focus of their national archives!

58 Order in Council P.C. 1749, 9 September 1966; Lamb Memoir, pp. 485, 551–52, 611–12; Lamb, “The Changing Role of the Archivist,” pp. 6–7.

And so it all came back to archives, for Lamb remained adamant that, in order to determine the long-term, archival, or historical values of records, appraisal of government records during the scheduling process must rest exclusively with the archivist, and not with either departmental officials or records managers. He knew only too well that records managers were driven by short-term concerns for efficient operations, and space and cost savings. However, these differences in perspective gave no licence for the archivist to remain aloof from the new records management profession. “Calculating the life expectancy of travel vouchers is not an occupation that appeals to everyone. Many archivists not only find it distasteful, but feel that it is no part of their job. To my mind,” Lamb chided, “they are wrong – and very dangerously wrong – in so thinking. Someone must deal with record problems; if the archivist does not take the lead in doing so, someone else must and will. And once authority over records has passed into other hands, the archivist will find it extremely difficult to ensure that material of interest to him is not destroyed.” Lamb summarized his thoughts on the value of records management for government operations and national memory in this way, to a British audience:

Records management, viewed in isolation, may seem to be a barren thing from the point of view of history; but a records programme should have two purposes, not just one. From the point of view of the Treasury and Ministry of Works, its purpose is to get rid of as many records as possible as promptly as possible; but from the point of view of the Government and country as a whole it should have a highly important second purpose – the identification and preservation of documents of long-term usefulness and historical importance. The only way to make certain that this second purpose is not neglected is to have the disposal of records subject to the supervision and approval of the archivist; and if he is to have this authority, the archivist must be prepared to concern himself with both aspects of records disposal, and not just with the one that is of primary interest to him.⁵⁹

No one in Canada ever did more than Kaye Lamb to ensure that the new records manager and the new appraisal archivist worked together to accomplish this twin mandate.

Revolution 3: Serving the Modern Researcher

Lamb’s “third revolution” concerned the researcher. New services developed for them must necessarily expand archival activities, while new kinds of researchers must broaden archivists’ horizons, if history were to be kept up to

⁵⁹ Lamb, “Keeping the Past Up To Date,” pp. 285–86; on many of these same themes, see also Lamb, “Fine Art of Destruction,” pp. 50–56.

date.⁶⁰ Lamb applauded the post-war change in attitude by many archivists towards researchers, in moving “from the obstructive, *via* the permissive, to the co-operative [which] ... reflects the fact that the kind of people who write history has changed, and that the archivist has had to adjust his behaviour accordingly. ... If we have worthwhile wares in our keeping, we shall have scholars – young and old, and good and bad – on our doors, and it is our duty and our privilege to serve them.”⁶¹

“Ordinarily one would not expect the size of a country to have much influence upon the kind of service its archives would offer to scholars,” Lamb told a British audience, “but Canada is so immense that size becomes a factor of importance.” Scholars and students could not easily drop in to the central archives as in Europe: the distance to the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa from Vancouver was half as far again as from London to Moscow; from Halifax to Ottawa farther than London to Rome. With travel and accommodation costs high, and travel grants modest or non-existent, most visits to the Public Archives for any sustained research project “represents a large item in the personal budget of all but the most affluent of scholars.” These factors had motivated the hand-copying programs of overseas and some regional Canadian documents almost since the beginnings of the Public Archives of Canada. And because of these factors, Lamb explained that “the Public Archives is constantly seeking ways and means of helping the historian who cannot come to Ottawa. If he can come, every effort is made to help him to accomplish as much as possible in the limited time he usually has at his disposal.”⁶² Traditional mail reference service addressed this in part, not by undertaking extensive research for researchers, but indicating before they travelled the extent of relevant sources, if any, on a particular topic, and, where possible, providing them with some indicative photostatic copies. And despite certainly security misgivings, Lamb kept the Archives’ reference rooms open twenty-four hours every day of the year, so that researchers could maximize their time when in Ottawa.⁶³

In terms of new services to meet these Canadian realities, however, Lamb developed a broad portfolio of responses, in three areas: microfilming of records, new methods for arranging and describing records, and a revitalized publications program. Lamb was captivated by microfilm, a relatively new technology in the 1940s. Indeed, his demonstration of its capabilities to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King unexpectedly won him the offer to

60 Lamb, “The Third Revolution,” pp. 4–8, and *passim*.

61 Lamb, “Keeping the Past Up To Date,” pp. 287–88.

62 W. Kaye Lamb, “Service to the Scholar,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 1.5 (April 1957), p. 123.

63 Doughty did so as well for certain periods, but Lamb regularized the practice for every day, all year long.

become Dominion Archivist.⁶⁴ Reflecting his life-long passion for accuracy, Lamb extolled microfilm as “an exact and complete facsimile of the original document, doubtful words and all,” as compared to the earlier hand-written transcripts of overseas records relating to Canada. The transcript copyists, ever diligent but under time pressure for piece work, sometimes selected, according to their own values, individual documents to copy rather than whole series, often eliminated what they deemed to be personal or frivolous passages within documents, omitted marginal notes on documents, and made curious errors when puzzling through old handwriting – Lamb’s favourite was a passage from the Haldimand Papers, where the words “supreme unction” were transcribed as “superior suction.” Lamb personally went to London and Paris in 1950 – over the initial “very icy reception” of the Archives’ staff there – to establish the new microfilming operations for Canada, so high a priority did he accord his new program. He intended that microfilming would first supplement, and then replace entirely, the eight decades of previously hand-copied records, and that a great many more series never before copied would be acquired on microfilm from governments, churches and their missionary societies, and fur trading and other businesses, as well as numerous personal manuscripts still in private hands. With its low cost and high copying speed, microfilming in one year, on average, would capture the same number of pages as had thirty years of hand copying.

As with the “essential records” microfilming program in the Public Archives Records Centre, microfilm also offered a safeguard against loss or destruction of the original documents – not unimportant when the archives in London and Paris had twice been threatened during the past half-century in the world wars, and their possible nuclear annihilation loomed in the present. Motivated by such security considerations, the Public Archives also filmed some of its own most valuable collections, as well as some holdings in provincial and regional archives judged to have national importance, and stored these securely in the secret site outside Ottawa. Finally, a major advantage of microfilm was that, unlike original records, positive copies of the master negative film could be sent on inter-institutional loan across Canada, a service that Lamb also initiated. This did not eliminate, in his mind, the need for researchers to go overseas to London or Paris, or indeed to visit Ottawa, for every possible series would never be filmed, but the researcher would arrive at these destinations “infinitely better prepared to take advantage of the incom-

64 J.W. Pickersgill, “Kaye Lamb in Ottawa,” *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83), pp. 5–6; J.W. Pickersgill and D.F. Forster, ed., *The Mackenzie King Record: Volume IV, 1947–1948* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 389–90; Lamb Memoir, pp. 131–34; and LAC, The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King, 10 June, and 8, 13 September 1948, on-line at <<http://king.collectionscanada.ca/>>, accessed 18 February 2005.

parable collections there ... and thus be ready to spend their precious days ... in specialised research.”⁶⁵

Once the program was well established, the results were astonishing. Between 1960 and 1969, for example, the number of microfilm reels consulted by researchers at the Public Archives itself went from 4,052 to 19,184, whereas the number of reels sent out on inter-institutional loan jumped from 252 to 3,112. In that same decade, 15,000 reels had been accessioned, containing 60,000,000 pages of documents; if transcripts instead had been produced, by their best rate of 20,000 sheets per year, only 200,000 pages would have been acquired in those same ten years, or 1/300th of what Kaye Lamb’s new program achieved, and made available to Canadian researchers.⁶⁶ That fur trade and Canadian-imperial historiography flourished in these years from these newly accessible sources was surely not coincidental.

The second major change to serve researchers better was a new method for arranging, describing, and publicizing records. Previously, while the integrity of individual fonds and series had largely been maintained since Doughty’s day, Lamb found in 1949 that new accessions of government records or private manuscripts were added cumulatively, in an “additional manuscript” format, to alphabetical groupings of fonds or collections. Thus the papers of Alexander Mackenzie, the fur-trading explorer of the 1780s, were found side by side with those of Alexander Mackenzie, the prime minister in the 1870s, along with other “M” figures. Colonial government transcripts (or originals) were also alphabetically arranged as, for example, Nova Scotia A, Nova Scotia B, and so on, even though the same series of records, such as the Journals of the Assembly, could be severed into Nova Scotia C and D. The collections themselves were made known to researchers at a distance through detailed calendars, which had been published for many decades as appendixes, several hundred pages each, to the Public Archives’ annual report. When calendaring, archivists prepared a brief, several-line synopsis of the subjects and names in each letter, and then these letter entries were arranged chronologically for a given series in the “calendar” finding aid.

Yet treatment was uneven, and by 1949 these various calendars were scattered across more than 70 annual reports. As an example, three series of the Nova Scotia State Papers appeared as some 2,000 pages of calendars in the annual reports of 1894 and 1946–49, but five other series of calendars for Nova Scotia State Papers were only available in manuscript format in the reading room at the Archives in Ottawa, while a ninth series was half printed

65 For this and the previous paragraph, see Lamb, “Presidential Address,” pp. 3–5; W. Kaye Lamb, “Canadian Archives Service,” *External Affairs* (October 1952), pp. 335–38; Lamb, “Service to the Scholar,” pp. 124–25; Lamb Memoir, pp. 161–63.

66 *Public Archives of Canada: Report, 1959–1969*, pp. 23, 25; for the transcription rate when the London and Paris staff did “extremely well” at 15–20,000 pages per year, see Lamb, “Canadian Archives Service,” p. 338.

and half manuscript. Nevertheless, the published calendars do represent major early attempt at public programming to disseminate detailed information about the contents of archival holdings for potential users.

Despite this admitted benefit, Lamb found this system antiquated, cumbersome, and inappropriate for a modern archive, and ended it almost immediately upon his arrival in Ottawa. His first annual report for 1949 is the last in which calendars would appear, and only did so then in order to complete the calendar for those particular Nova Scotia series that had been running over several previous years. Lamb took this decision with "considerable regret," knowing the tradition dated back "to Brymner's day," and that the results were a "great convenience to historians." To Lamb, however, these calendars shared the weaknesses of the overseas hand-written transcripts. Indeed, far more than decisions of what to include or not in the transcripts, the calendars were "highly subjective ... reflecting the special interests and limitations of the compiler... Calendaring is as much an art of omission as it is of inclusion." Moreover, again given his penchant for accuracy, Lamb "was disturbed to hear reports that some historians were content to use the calendars as their sources, without bothering to go to the documents themselves." Secondly, the anticipated increased flow of new accessions from Lamb's aggressive appraisal and acquisition activities for private and government records, as well as the new overseas and domestic microfilming, would exponentially augment the Archives' holdings, so that calendaring could never be contemplated for the whole. "The old publications," Lamb noted, "never succeeded in describing more than a fraction of the contents of the manuscript rooms, and they were never able to keep pace with accessions, even before the days of micro-filming." And finally, microfilm itself was "a far better means of disseminating information about documents by making the documents themselves available...." Before ending the old process, however, Lamb did make sure that the last report containing calendars in 1949 also carried an index to the overall coverage of all previous calendars and in which volume of the annual report(s) each had appeared.

To replace the old approach of alphabetical/chronological arrangement and calendaring description, Lamb adopted the record and manuscript group system, and a series of published inventories for each. Learning of Ernst Posner's annual four-week archives course in Washington, Lamb decided to send a senior staff member each year to be exposed to new archival thinking, from both Posner and the nearby National Archives. The first to go was W.G. (Bill) Ormsby, who brought back the American record group (RG) system for arranging and describing government records. The records of each major government department or agency were hereby assigned to a distinct record group, such as RG 15 for the Records of the Department of the Interior or RG 17 for the Records of the Department of Agriculture. Using the new system, records at the Public Archives that were scattered across the old arrangement

were reallocated; thus the papers of Governors General in the "G" series were moved to RG 7, Records of the Office of the Governor General. While this mirrored closely what the National Archives had implemented in Washington, and was an improvement, Lamb did not think, for many groups, that it was "as highly innovative as most people seemed to regard it. For the life of me I could not see any very significant difference between C.O. 60 in the Public Record Office in London and RG 53 in the National Archives in Washington. Each simply identified the records of a single office or agency." But in what was "an original and highly important idea," Ormsby extended the logic of the record group to the other half of total archives, thus conceiving the manuscript group (MG). "This was a brilliant idea," Lamb thought, "which promised to bring rhyme and reason to the semi-turmoil in which the Manuscript Division was existing. There was at the moment little system in the arrangement of the collections" in the alphabetical categories. Under the manuscript group approach, fonds were grouped by chronology and function, which Lamb believed to be "the proper bases for the classification of archival materials," rather than by subject or alphabet. Related records would now be arranged and described side by side for the edification of the browsing researcher seeking interconnections: for example, MG 23 Late Eighteenth Century Papers; MG 24 Pre-Confederation Nineteenth Century Papers; MG 26 Prime Ministers' Papers, or MG 17 Religious Archives. In this way, the two Alexander Mackenzies would both find more appropriate archival homes.

Lamb saw three major advantages to the new RG/MG system of arranging archives, in addition to providing "a descriptive technique that could be applied rapidly to large bodies of material, and which would enable us to produce, within a reasonable time, a summary account of our entire holdings." First, by such logical groupings, overview inventories could be produced for each record and manuscript group, each with introductions, biographical or administrative histories giving context about the records' creator(s), and a description of each distinct series (or fonds) within the broader group. This was a significant improvement over the scattered alphabetic approach where themes, subjects, and time periods were mixed together. These inventories also contained cross references to more detailed finding aids, such as lists of files or correspondents, and, towards the end of Lamb's period, computer-sorted indexes. Moreover, the inventories were easily amended and updated in expandable binders as new accessions flowed in, and periodically could be published, as indeed some forty were during Lamb's time. The RG and MG inventories, and the new arrangement of archives on which they were based, had a second benefit, as the circular issued with the first published inventory in 1951 noted: the object was to "make it possible for research workers at a distance to ascertain with some precision what papers are preserved in the Public Archives, and to judge with some accuracy whether the department has in its custody significant material relating to any particular topic."

Finally, there was an important benefit for the archivist who now, Lamb devised, “could be given responsibility for one or more groups, about which they should be able to become an authority – a good thing both from the point of view of staff morale and service to inquirers.” By this logical subdivision into manageable units of the Archives’ rapidly growing holdings, Ormsby added, the archivists were afforded “an opportunity to develop a specialized knowledge on the various subjects to which their groups related,” which he thought essential to appraisal and accessioning, preparing inventories and finding aids, and offering more valuable assistance to researchers. Historian-archivist “specialists,” at least in a large modern archive, were replacing the curatorial generalists of an earlier era of much smaller collections.⁶⁷

This new spirit within the Public Archives led to the formation of the History Club, “which met in members’ homes in the evening to hear original research papers by archivists and visiting scholars working at the Archives.” One such occasion, hosted at Lamb’s home, witnessed Jack Pickersgill presenting a paper, Frank Underhill commenting, and other prominent historians as well as staff in attendance. The specialist archivist and the specialist researcher were evidently encouraged to form professional connections to their mutual benefit.⁶⁸ The formation of the Archives Section within the Canadian Historical Association was indicative of the same trend. The growing specialization and complexity of archival work also led to the first course being offered in archival science in Canada, starting in 1959 at Carleton University, co-sponsored by the Public Archives of Canada.⁶⁹

Lamb’s third initiative to reach out to researchers was a revitalization of the Public Archives’ publication program, which had flourished under Doughty until the Depression. Here the ultimate accomplishment was the compilation and publication of the *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories* (first edition, 1968), which Lamb initiated, and Robert S. Gordon of the Manuscript Division carried to fruition: “I look upon it,” Lamb later reflected,

67 For all the above multi-paragraph discussion (and quotations) concerning arrangement and description, see W. Kaye Lamb, “The Federal Archives Scene,” in Canadian Historical Association, *Report* (1953), pp. 61–63; Lamb, “Presidential Address,” pp. 6–7; Lamb Memoir, pp. 153–55, 210–12; and Ormsby, “The Public Archives of Canada, 1948–1968,” pp. 37–38. For the examples of calendaring used here, see *Report of The Public Archives for the Year 1949*, pp. 454–55, and passim. On the first computerized finding aids for prime minister’s papers, see J. Atherton, “The Application of Mechanization to Manuscript Cataloguing Production in the Public Archives of Canada,” *Canadian Archivist* 1.4 (1966), pp. 3–7.

68 Ormsby, “The Public Archives of Canada, 1948–1968,” pp. 37–38; University of Toronto Archives, Charles P. Stacey fonds, box 41, file: D.Hist Correspondence, 1959–60, G.W.L. Nicholson to Stacey, 14 December 1960 (I am grateful to Tim Cook for passing on this reference).

69 Lamb Memoir, p. 381. Abe Willms and Bill Bilsland worked with Lamb and Wilfred Smith in devising this course. Lamb had taught isolated seminars about archives and libraries at the University of Ottawa almost since his arrival in the capital, but the scope and appeal of the Carleton courses were considerably broader.

“as one of the most important achievements of the PAC during my years in Ottawa.” Originating over yet another of his lunch-time deals, Lamb secured funding from the Humanities Research Council in 1961 for the project; the ULM eventually contained over 11,000 entries describing the holdings of archives right across the country. Lamb knew that archivists tend to be “perfectionists,” and so found that “we had to whittle down our ideal entry to include only the basic details that most institutions could be expected to provide.” Even so, it was an immense project, developing standards, publicizing and training scores and scores of archivists across Canada to prepare and submit entries, and even sending PAC archivists out to do the actual work when institutions proved recalcitrant or incapable.⁷⁰ The ULM was a great success, for archivists and researchers, and several later editions came out, including for other media, before being superseded by a national on-line network in the 1990s. The ULM remains the first major nation-wide cooperative project among Canadian archives, and thus a harbinger of the Canadian Archival Network of the 1980s.

Lamb involved the Archives in many other publications to provide support for Canadian research, and (in part) to celebrate the centennial of Confederation: a biographical directory to all members of parliament, 1867–1967; a guide to every federal cabinet (and every change to each) since 1867; an annual register (since 1966, when the project was taken over from the Canadian Historical Association) of all post-graduate theses in progress in history and related subjects across Canadian universities; and, as the start of an intended series, a volume of John A. Macdonald’s letters. The publication of some forty manuscript and record group inventories has been mentioned, as well as the many published guides issued by the Records Management Branch. Under Lamb’s encouragement, there were also, among others, published catalogues on early maps and on documents related to Champlain, and, especially for genealogists, guides to parish registers and census districts, and the first edition of the ever-popular *Tracing Your Ancestors in Canada*.

Reaching out to genealogists from the traditional clientele of academic historians was symbolic of Lamb’s third revolution. Public programming in microfilming; in new ways of arranging, describing, and publicizing archival holdings; and in a dynamic program of publications and (for those in or visiting Ottawa) in-house exhibitions – all these paved the way for the new specialist archivist to welcome a wider range of users. “For long enough,” Lamb noted, “the historian was, of course, our chief customer. Now we have a flood of new customers; we have economists, sociologists, geographers and all sorts of people flooding in and they are just as important as the historians and I think we are under just as great an obligation to do what we can for them.” Lamb cited,

70 Lamb Memoir, pp. 460–61. See also R.S. Gordon, “Footloose in Archivia (Fond Reminiscences of Former U.L.M. Editor),” *Canadian Archivist* 2.5 (1974), pp. 86–99.

among others, zoologists understanding animal life cycles through old records to enhance wildlife conservation now, or climatologists unearthing past patterns of water and ice formation to improve present-day flood control. To his mind, however, the chief challenge were the new social scientists (and historians sharing their perspectives) who are “interested in the ordinary rather than the extraordinary.” Such researchers required quantitative data from voluminous series of case files, aided by computer manipulation, in order to understand “the nature of society [and] the process of social change....” Often this research targeted more recent records in series of individual instance case files, thus raising issues of space and privacy, as well as appraisal, for archivists.⁷¹

Indeed, issues of access to more modern records often set the modern archivist and the researcher at loggerheads – “a perennial cause of friction” – in a way rarely faced by earlier archivists working with colonial-era government records or pre-Confederation personal papers. To the discomfort of some of his historian colleagues, Lamb strongly defended the first priority of the archivist to preserve the record, before considering access, even if that meant, as with his own well-known management of the William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, that researchers must be barred from the records for a term of years because of donor sensibilities or arrangements with official biographers. These restrictions he tried to negotiate as liberally as possible, but ultimately acquiring the collection, rather than seeing its destruction, and maintaining the credibility of the Archives with its donors, always came first for Lamb. As he concluded regarding appraisal, so with access: the archivist served the future as much as the present, whereas researchers were concerned mainly with their own present and the past. Of course, respecting access periods for government records was equally important to the success of the Archives’ records management program, and for maintaining good relations with donor departments, but here Lamb also worked first to clarify the nebulous fifty-year rule for

71 Lamb, “The Third Revolution,” pp. 4–5, 7–8.

72 W. Kaye Lamb, “Liberalization of Restrictions on Access to Archives,” *Archivum* XVI (1966), pp. 35–40 (speech delivered to ICA Extraordinary Congress, Washington, 9–13 May 1966); W. Kaye Lamb, “Réponses des rapporteurs,” *Archivum* XVI (1966), pp. 59–61; Lamb, “The Archivist and the Historian,” pp. 386–89; Lamb, “Presidential Address,” pp. 8–9; Lamb Memoir, p. 471 for background negotiations on clarifying access to government records. Prime Minister Trudeau announced the new thirty-year access rule for government records to the House of Commons on 1 May 1969, a few months after Lamb’s retirement, but reflecting his efforts, with those of others, behind the scenes for some years. On the archivist’s balancing act of advocating for better researcher access while protecting donor rights, and indeed earning a donor’s trust to give sensitive records to an archives, there is Lamb’s own extended involvement with William Lyon Mackenzie King as an example: see Jean E. Dryden, “The Mackenzie King Papers: An Archival Odyssey,” *Archivaria* 6 (Summer 1978), pp. 40–69; Tom Nesmith, “‘Prepared To Lose Your Job?’: ACA Institute 2003 and the Archivist in Society,” *ACA Bulletin* (November 2003), pp. 5–12; and Pickersgill, “Kaye Lamb in Ottawa,” p. 6. For the interaction of Lamb slowly winning King’s trust, see LAC, The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King, 24 January, 1 February, 13 and 30 May, 24 October, 2 December 1949, and (on reviewing the draft will and being a literary executor for King) 2, 4 March 1950.

access, and then to have it reduced to thirty years.⁷²

These dramatic changes in the kinds of scholars coming to use archives, the questions they asked, and the methods they used, all underlined for Lamb, as did the challenges of appraisal and records management, the growing necessity to abandon the old curatorial, inward-looking mindset. The new historian-archivist will “seek advice from specialists in many new fields in regards to methods as well as to subject matter.” Cooperative partnerships would be the approach of the future, not withdrawal into the comfortable calendaring cloisters of the past. In his last public speech as Dominion Archivist, a few weeks before retiring, Lamb ended with the admonition that “we have got to broaden our horizons ... widen our definitions ... widen our functions.... We have got to be ready to work and persuade experts in other fields to work with us in order [to] ... get the best possible ... result, both from the point of view of the companies or institutions or governments from which records come and from the point of view of scholars and researchers and others who will make use of them ... in a greatly increased number and variety.”⁷³ This expansive vision of a new archive and a new profession, with its own specialist scholarship, found in Kaye Lamb a perfect unison of articulated ideals and implemented practice.

If expanded and sustained interactions with “front-end” donors and departments and “back-end” historians and other researchers were two important dimensions of Lamb’s prescription for archivists in inventing a new profession, what of the relationship of archivists with librarians? Uniquely positioned to address this issue as both Dominion Archivist and National Librarian, then two separate positions in two separate institutions, Lamb’s views on the library–archives relationship evolved over the twenty years he was in Ottawa. Certainly he always saw a close relationship as natural and desirable between the Public Archives and National Library; indeed, exactly seven decades before the merger of these two institutions in 2004, Lamb had himself been appointed as the Provincial Librarian and Archivist of British Columbia. When in 1949–50 the Massey Commission was considering the grounds on which to recommend the establishment of a National Library for Canada, Lamb was asked directly for his opinion on a possible merger, and was clear in reply:

Personally I would like to see the National Library and Archives develop as a single institution, with the two divisions in a common building. The two have great areas of interest in common. For example, the Archives would frequently be very much handicapped if it did not possess, and could not make use of, its extensive historical library relating to Canada, its extensive collection of newspapers, and its long files of public (i.e., published sessional papers, departments’ annual reports) documents. Its great need is for more material of this sort, not less; yet it is obvious that a comprehensive historical library, a newspaper collection, and files of public documents are all part and parcel of

73 Lamb, “Third Revolution,” pp. 16–17.

a National Library. Great economies could, I think, be secured by bringing together the book buying, book cataloguing, exchanges, etc., of the two branches. The same is true of their Information Services. A person seeking information cares not at all whether the facts he is seeking are secured from a book, a map, a newspaper, a manuscript, or a photograph. The more material can be centralized, the greater the ease with which it can be consulted by the public, or by reference librarians working for the public.

Moreover, such media as maps contained both original manuscript and published items, and allocating the collection solely to one of the two institutions, let alone dividing it between them, would be a fundamental error. The same could have been said for film. Lamb discounted to the Massey Commission various international precedents for separate national libraries and national archives as products of their time, place, and conditions that differed from those in Canada.⁷⁴

Yet despite the advantages of coordinated acquisition without duplication, of operational and staff efficiencies, and of better researcher services, this did not mean that Lamb saw archival and library work as equivalent, or that, in his ideal merged institution, librarians and archivists would be morphed into some kind of common information professional. In defining the distinctions between archivists and librarians, as he did between archivists and historians, Lamb did much to call the modern archival profession into being. Lamb grew increasingly nervous about archivists being educated in library schools at universities, for example, because librarianship appealed to students who were encouraged to take a wide variety of courses in their undergraduate years, whereas “the archivist, by contrast, almost invariably requires a sober, solid training in history and is under a great handicap if he has not had it.” As Lamb saw especially in the United States, librarians and archivist-librarians venturing into archival work “are seldom able to resist the temptation to apply library methods and techniques to manuscripts and archival materials. Books on the one hand and manuscripts and records on the other are in fact so different in character that the same techniques simply cannot be applied successfully to both of them.” The arrangement and description of archival records, in context, respecting provenance, “have virtually nothing in common” with the classification and cataloguing of books. And of course, appraisal – based for Lamb, as seen, on deep historical knowledge, experience, and empathy – was the major demarcation between the two professions:

One of the vital and inescapable elements in the work of the archivist is the function of appraisal. It is true that the librarian exercises judgment, and exercises it in a most

74 Lamb fonds, vol. 15, file 15.1, Lamb to Archibald A. Day, Secretary to the Massey Commission, 23 November 1950 (confidential); and Confidential Memorandum for the Massey Commission by W. Kaye Lamb, “The Establishment of a National Library,” 15 June 1949.

important way, when he selects the books that are to be added to his library. But this is rarely a final or irrevocable judgment. ... The archivist, by contrast, is called upon continually to decide what papers or records are to be kept and which should be destroyed. ... If he makes a wrong judgment the verdict cannot be recalled; the papers in question will have vanished forever – and there can never be a facsimile, or a reprint, or a second edition such as can make good a lapse of judgment (or a shortage of cash) on the part of the librarian.

For these reasons, archivists differed fundamentally from librarians, no matter their common clients. Lamb accordingly believed “that these considerations indicate the place where professional training for the archivist should be given. It should be offered at the graduate level by a department of history, and it should be given at a university that is near to and can work in close association with an archival institution of some size and stature.” Theory and practice could thus be tested against each other, as the two essential ingredients of a good archival education.⁷⁵

Despite these differences between archivists and librarians, Lamb was adamant that the Public Archives and National Library make common cause and not be considered as museums. When the *National Museums Act* was being considered in the mid-1960s, Lamb resisted inclusion of the two institutions. Earlier in the decade, he had told the Glassco Commission that the Public Archives should get out of the museum business entirely, and that he was accordingly curtailing PAC’s large-scale museum activities in preparation for the anticipated revitalization of the various national museums planned for the Canadian centennial. While the PAC Museum was then still a major Ottawa tourist destination, and had entertained, indeed charmed, in Lamb’s period the royal family and prime ministers,⁷⁶ he did not think that such work was appropriate for an archives. He proposed closing the museum completely once the new Public Archives and National Library building was occupied on Wellington Street in 1967, and transferring its extensive collections of artifacts to the National Museum of Man (now Canadian Museum of Civilization) and the National (now Canadian) War Museum. Even before the move in 1967, Lamb

75 Lamb, “The Modern Archivist: Formally Trained or Self-Educated?,” pp. 175–77.

76 In 1964, for example, even before moving to the spacious ground floor of the Daly Building at Ottawa’s premier intersection, directly across from the Chateau Laurier, the PAC Museum had attracted 65,000 visitors to view everything from a large model of Quebec City, to the bullet-pierced tunic of Sir Isaac Brock, to wood fragments allegedly from one of Jacques Cartier’s ship. The Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh visited on 10 October 1951, even overstaying their allocated time. Walking home from work in 1961, Prime Minister Diefenbaker and his wife stopped by to inspect the letters and portraits of his hero, John A. Macdonald, and to sit for a time at Macdonald’s desk which was then in the Archives’ possession. See *What’s On in Ottawa* (April 1965); *Report of The Public Archives for the Year 1951*, pp. 5–6 and title-page-facing portrait; *Ottawa Journal*, 6 September 1961.

had transferred in 1965 the Archives' extensive collection of paper banknotes and metal coinage (some 160,000 items) to the Bank of Canada's new Currency Museum, and moved the museum out of the Archives' main building into transitional quarters in the Daly building.

But Judy LaMarsh, the dynamic new Secretary of State and Lamb's own cabinet minister, had other ideas. She decided that she wanted the Archives and Library to be included with all the National Museums, and the National Gallery of Canada too, as part of a new National Museums Corporation, all governed by a board of directors reporting to her on centralized cultural policy. Lamb strongly objected. Archives and libraries "were essentially service institutions, with little or nothing in common with museums." They are in the business of underpinning scholarship and research, not providing entertainment or supporting tourism. Moreover, he was not willing to give up his status as a deputy minister to report now to some advisory board rather than directly to the minister, especially in terms of government records management operations and control of records destruction. When LaMarsh's omnibus bill seemed ready to go forward, Lamb threatened for the first time in his career to tender his resignation on principle. The *National Museums Act* became law in early 1968, but such was Lamb's influence in Ottawa that the Public Archives and National Library had quietly been removed from the new museum corporation.⁷⁷

In summary, then, Lamb envisioned a new profession for the archivist in the revolutionized archival world: not an historian, not a records manager, not a librarian, not a museum curator, but a specialist scholar of records, steeped in their history, media, character, and context, interacting with other scholars and professionals in many fields to forward the new activist agenda, especially in appraisal and government records and in serving many new kinds of research and researchers. To nourish a new profession, Lamb promoted archival education, where history-trained professionals would learn archives in the classroom and on the job. He supported professional associations for archivists and forums for the discussion and publication of their ideas. As with the *Union List of Manuscripts*, Lamb encouraged nation-wide cooperation among archivists and, to this end, he established the Dominion-Provincial-Territorial Archivists meetings to reduce acquisition competition and foster interchange among the heads of the principal archival institutions in the country.⁷⁸ And at the Public Archives of Canada itself, Lamb typically put action to words, replacing the poorly educated staff he inherited, and which the Massey Commission had condemned, with his new breed of historian-archivist, eschewing completely the antiquarian and jour-

77 Lamb Memoir, pp. 483–84, 528–29, 538–39, 606.

78 On such meetings with his provincial counterparts, see Provincial Archives of British Columbia, GR 1738, Records of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Box 90, File 2, Lamb to Willard Ireland, 2 April 1949, 5 April 1950; Ireland to Lamb, 15 February 1949.

nalist tendencies that had too often set the tone for the institution in the past. A new agenda for archives clearly called for a new kind of archivist.

An Archival Revolution? Assessing Lamb's Influence

Despite his vision, his articulation of a new profession, and his vigour in implementing most of his ideas, Lamb had his blind spots and his ideas would in time be challenged as circumstances changed. One criticism of Lamb by several readers of an earlier draft of this article questioned the degree of change for which Lamb should be credited and, thus implicitly, just how revolutionary were his conceptions of a new Canadian archivy. Perhaps his rhetoric makes him appear more radical than precedents and trends before his time or his own actions actually warranted? These are plausible assertions, and deserve analysis.

Certainly in criticizing his predecessors as passive and curatorial, Lamb painted with too broad a brush at a personal level, even if his critique was accurate about the profession generally and his own institution in particular, as he inherited it. Lamb's legitimate criticism of a Jenkinson or a Doughty, for example, sometimes blurred into tarring all archivists before 1950 with the same charge of curatorial passivity; he equated Doughty and Jenkinson, for example, over their mutual fascination with records of the heroic formative periods in their nation's history, and rightly criticized both for the unequal emphases in their programs that favoured earlier records over more recent ones. Yet in terms of passivity, Doughty obviously engaged throughout his career (as Lamb generously acknowledged) in very active acquisition of private-sector records, and sought to reshape the core interpretation of Canadian history by the documents he collected and the publications he authored or sponsored. By contrast, Jenkinson thought that any form of appraisal by the archivist, let alone historical reinterpretation as Doughty advocated, to be unarchival, as these would necessarily bias the alleged objectivity and naturalness of the record; Jenkinson thus urged a passive stance for the archivist regarding appraisal, which Lamb attacked. To his credit, however, Jenkinson paid careful attention to official government records in his theoretical writing, as did Lamb, which Doughty almost completely ignored in ideas and practice, save in the special crisis of wartime. Further, Jenkinson was carefully methodological in his approach to arrangement and description, and very scholarly in his writing, whereas Doughty by temperament was idiosyncratic, romantic, and far less disciplined, and in terms of calendaring, classically curatorial. In several important areas too, like total archives and public programming, Lamb certainly had precedents to follow, in Ottawa and some provinces, as he readily admitted. Those seeing Lamb on a smaller scale also note that his spectacular results also rested, in part, on his enjoying ever-increasing budgets and facilities, better educated professional staff, and the surrounding dynamic

optimism of the golden age of the Canadian public service. It was thus easier for him to be comprehensive and expansive when times were good and morale was high.

These points noted, it must be said in Lamb's defence that there was no reason why, in far-off British Columbia, starting out his career in archives the year before Doughty retired, that he should have been aware of the minutiae of his various predecessors' accomplishments. Besides, whatever scattered precedents may have existed for acquiring certain media or undertaking certain activities, these do not equate to a dynamic, operational, sustainable program operating over time, and *that* is what Lamb was able to create across the whole range of archival functions. Moreover, *his* reality when he arrived in Ottawa in 1949 was that the Public Archives was in desperate straits, whatever its past precedents and outstanding achievements: staff morale was very low; archivists were unqualified in many cases; programs had been gutted or marginalized; the Archives' failings publicly attacked in the press; and the very existence of the institution as a total archives threatened by the Massey Commission. That the niceties of historical continuities got lost in responding to these very real internal and external crises that Lamb faced in 1949–50 is not only understandable, but fully justified. From *his* perspective, despite the magnificent collections that he inherited (and acknowledged), the sad truth was that by 1949 his predecessors had cumulatively left him some deeply troubling problems, an institution much diminished, and a poor base from which to build a modern archives. That he said so starkly was not un-charitably downplaying past accomplishments to make himself look good, but rather reflecting the hard realities that he faced. Nor can he be faulted for enjoying good times during much (but certainly not all) of his regime; rather, he can be admired for seizing the initiative and imaginatively crafting innovative archival and records management programs that meshed with the government's wider agenda for a modern Canada and thus earned him support and funding by that government. That he enjoyed better professional staff, with relevant and advanced education, is certainly true, but also a credit entirely to his redefining the nature and role of the archivist, and then hiring accordingly.

Lamb's archival revolution itself, as noted earlier, was not a unique contribution to modern archivy. Others, such as Schellenberg, Posner, and Norton in the United States, had voiced many of these same ideas, especially regarding records management and the life cycle, and Lamb knew these thinkers and drew from them, or had his staff do so. In Canada, provincial archivists such as George Spragge in Ontario or Lewis H. Thomas in Saskatchewan moved in a similar progressive directions during the 1950s; Lamb himself had learnt "total archives" from his predecessors back in British Columbia. In fairness, Lamb spoke of "revolutions in the world of archives" occurring in his archival lifetime, not of *his* revolution. Nevertheless, the radical range of his ideas – drawing from others, yes, but accepting none of their approaches without

modification, while integrating Canadian precedents and a great deal of his own innovative thinking – and the astonishing array of major program changes resulting from those ideas across the entire spectrum of the Public Archives, plus the establishment of records management and the crystallizing of a new professional archivist: these results were truly revolutionary. This was not so much an accelerated evolution of past trends as a radical departure from so many of them, and thereby fundamentally reshaping the nature of archives and the role of archivists.

Lamb's ideas themselves did not, of course, remain unchallenged in the decades ahead. Basing archival appraisal as he did on historical knowledge, working experience, subtle intuition, and the gift of prophecy was rejected by the later 1980s as insufficient, theoretically and methodologically, for justifying the wide-scale destruction of records in an era of much greater public accountability, or for supporting the functional macroappraisal strategies then designed to cope with computer-generated records or the voluminous series of government case files.⁷⁹ In arrangement and description, Lamb's adoption of the record group concept, like its manuscript group counterpart, blurs provenance compared to the later concept of the archival fonds; while the record and manuscript groups offer a more efficient entrée to archives compared to calendaring, both distort the nature of archives, and have not been easily applied to such media as photographs or maps.⁸⁰ In terms of such media, Lamb's establishment of separate media divisions has been criticized as a practical weakness in the application of total archives, leading to internal, isolated stove-pipes that distort provenance, duplicate finding aids information and acquisition efforts, and mislead researchers.⁸¹ And for all his great work with records management and government records, Lamb seriously understaffed those areas working on government archival records, considering the volumes of records involved and their complexity, as compared to private manuscripts; perhaps part of the old PAC manuscript tradition lingered, and appealed to his personal historical interests in the fur trade, colonial exploration, and biography. Finally, his wisdom may be questioned over the removal,

79 See Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 84–85; Terry Cook, "Macroappraisal in Theory and Practice: Origins, Characteristics, and Implementation in Canada, 1950–2000," *Archival Science* (forthcoming, 2006); Terry Cook, "'Many are called but few are chosen': Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 25–50; and Eldon Frost, "A Weak Link in the Chain: Records Scheduling as a Source of Archival Appraisal," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), pp. 78–86.

80 See, for example, Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description, and Provenance in the Post-Custodial Era," in Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 31–86 (a shorter summary version appears in *Archivaria* 35 (Winter 1992–93), pp. 24–37).

81 See note 30 above for some relevant sources.

through the Public Records Order in 1966, of the Minister, the Treasury Board, and the Privy Council from the formal records disposition approval process and internalizing this entirely within the Public Archives; under less well-connected successors than himself, the cross-government visibility and central-agency importance of these representatives would be sorely missed.

While some of Lamb's key ideas were later challenged, it merely demonstrates the power that his professional formulations have had for Canadian archives in the past half century. He did nothing less than set the agenda for his profession for decades to come. And not just at the Public Archives of Canada. Through the PAC-run annual Archives Course, the Dominion-Provincial-Territorial Archivist meetings, the *Union List of Manuscripts* national coordination, and his own dynamic personal presence on so many fronts, Lamb's agenda became the Canadian one – and at the very sensitive time that archivists were developing into a separate modern profession. The strategic and practical implementation of his ideas at the Public Archives became a national model and international showcase. When Canadian archivists have since formulated ideas and programs on macroappraisal and appraisal theory, on the archival fonds, on descriptive standards and national networks, on public programming, on new media and total archives, on archival education and professional identity, they have, knowingly or otherwise, been engaging with Kaye Lamb's legacy of what a modern archives should be (as opposed to its more antiquarian and amateur forerunners).

Yet Lamb was no ideologue, nor a theoretician for theory's sake. He saw the need for continual change and for continually reinventing archives, to which his own career obviously offers potent testimony. I suspect that he would have been very pleased that his archival ideas generated so much future debate, and that things did indeed change after him, just as he changed so much of what went before him. And while these various criticisms may help put Lamb's ideas in broader perspective, they are of course essentially unfair, decontextualizing Lamb from his own times and the issues he faced. Moreover, most are possible only with the benefit of hindsight of events before and after Lamb to which he could have had no access.

More fairly, within the context of his times and the archival world he inherited, Lamb envisioned well and accomplished much. Despite a rapidly changing political, economic, social, cultural, and bureaucratic context, Lamb saw clearly the challenges that large-scale modern governments posed for archives and archivists; the implications for theory and practice of the exponential growth in the volume of modern records; the possibilities of adopting new information technologies to enhance archival programs; and the opportunities presented by an expanding and changing historical profession as well as other types of researchers. To his credit, he did not respond to these stimuli by defending the status quo in either acquisition or description, nor by evincing technophobia, nor by adopting theories with little connection to modern reali-

ties, nor by retreating into the comfort of dealing primarily with older records, nor by ignoring major portions of his mandate, nor by making archivists into mini-historians. Rather, he carefully discerned the new environment of the post-war years, and the need, accordingly, to imagine what a new archival profession should be like. He then developed the conceptual and practical tools to make that dream a reality. In making his case eloquently and steadfastly over many years for a new profession and a new kind of modern archives, perhaps rhetorically Lamb made comparisons that did not do full justice to some of his predecessors and even contemporaries. But that Lamb rose to the occasion in the face of many difficult challenges, and articulated brilliantly both the needs and solutions for archives in his generation, and then implemented them with great success, of that there can be no doubt at all. His accomplishments and influence truly make him Canada's equivalent of Jenkinson in Britain, Schellenberg in the United States, or Maclean in Australia: the father of his country's *modern* archives.⁸²

The Archival Revolution: On Inventing A New Profession

"If records have changed with the years," Lamb observed, "so have archivists. We are all familiar with the archivist of old – who, incidentally, continues to live on, sometimes to an alarming degree, in the popular imagination: a gentle old soul, with a long white beard, who lived happily and harmlessly in the past...." Lamb loved to tell the story of a visiting Australian official who, coming to see Lamb as Provincial Archivist of British Columbia, offered "gifts made from a wide variety of beautiful Australian woods. These had been chosen with considerable care, in the hope that each would be appropriate for the occupation of the recipient. My gift – handed to me with obvious embarrassment – was a stout walking stick intended to support my declining years. I was thirty-one at the time, and the thought that an archivist might be young had clearly never crossed the statesman's mind."

In this incident, Lamb saw both the stereotype of the past and the portent of the future. Until his generation, an archival career, far from attracting dynamic young people, was seen as "a passive occupation. Archivists were primarily custodians; they looked after whatever manuscripts were placed in their care; they felt little obligation to add anything to the collections except items that

82 Here I am following (see note 7 above) Jim O'Toole and Luke Gilliland-Swetland, among others, in positing a certain historical periodicalization of the archival profession since its revitalization in the nineteenth century: moving from antiquarian, amateur, historical, collector, and curatorial foci, that might be called *premodern*, dealing with older especially prestigious records as precious documents, to *modern* archives, dealing with large volumes and series of records, in the aggregate, strategically adopting the tools and mindsets of the mid-twentieth-century state. I believe we have now entered a third stage, the *postmodern* or virtual archive of our own times, but that is another story.

chance and gift brought to their doorsteps. All this has changed,” Lamb asserted, writing in the early 1960s. “The archivist now seeks to build up his collections, and to make them represent more fully the history of the parish, county, society or authority they represent; and beyond this if he is active and conscientious, he will endeavour to see that any documents of historical value, regardless of the subject or area to which they relate, are preserved and, if possible, deposited in a safe and suitable archival repository.”

Yet the revolution in archives did not stop there, for “the greatest change is that most modern archivists must be prepared to pass judgement on records, including the sentence of life or death; they must be ready to pick and choose the items that should be kept, and to decide which items may be destroyed without serious historical loss. This is a grave responsibility – indeed, rather a frightening one – but we must face it and discharge it to the best of our ability. The old archivist, as we have seen, could dodge it in great part by the simple expedient of retaining everything. We, on the contrary, must pick and choose knowing that the decisions we make will in a measure – and frequently to a very great measure – shape history, since they will determine what documents will survive to provide source materials for historians in the years to come.”

And so it comes full circle back to history, and to the critical role of the archivist in keeping the past up to date, so that the future can have a past. That challenge meant “leaving far behind the peaceful but passive days of the antiquarian archivist” and fostering a “dynamic and developing profession,” that encompassed, through a “total archives” approach, new media, new alliances with records managers, new types of researchers, new types of history and research, and new functions for archivists. The “new profession” would of course have its own standards, terminology, and methodologies, but these Lamb saw as means to the new core of specialist archival scholarship. No longer hewers of wood and drawers of water, the modern archivist, especially through appraisal, would now consciously shape history by co-creating the archive.⁸³ This was the heart of Kaye Lamb’s revolutionary transformation of the archival profession, and still remains our professional touchstone a half century later.

83 Lamb, “Keeping the Past Up To Date,” p. 28; Lamb, “The Changing Role of the Archivist,” pp. 7–10; Lamb, “The Modern Archivist: Formally Trained or Self-Educated?,” pp. 175–77. For additional insight on Lamb’s personal odyssey from historian to archivist, see Nesmith, “What’s History Got To Do With It?,” pp. 7–8.