

The Evolution of Recordkeeping at the Hudson's Bay Company



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RÉSUMÉ Le développement d'une politique relative aux documents à la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson a été un processus long et graduel qui a donné comme résultat un héritage archivistique unique et un engagement au versement continu de documents d'intérêt archivistique pour le bénéfice de la recherche future. La création d'un programme de gestion de documents d'entreprise a toutefois été un développement plus récent. On peut trouver quelques courants communs entre l'évolution de la gestion de documents au XX^e siècle et le développement du programme de gestion des documents de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson : l'émergence et la professionnalisation de la discipline de gestion des documents en Amérique du Nord; la participation des archivistes dans la mise en pratique de programmes de gestion de documents afin de faciliter un processus précoce de sélection de documents pour la préservation; la tendance actuelle de créer des partenariats entre les archivistes et les gestionnaires de documents dans le but de sauvegarder les documents numériques.

ABSTRACT The development of a records policy at the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) has been a long and gradual process, resulting in a unique archival legacy and a commitment to the continual supply of records of archival interest for the benefit of future scholarship. The evolution of a corporate records management program, however, has been a more recent development. Common trends from the evolution of twentieth-century record keeping practices can be found in the development of the records management program of the Hudson's Bay Company: the emergence and professionalization of the records management discipline in North America; the involvement of archivists in implementing records management programs to facilitate the process of records selection for preservation as early as possible; and the present drive for partnerships between archivists and records managers to safeguard electronic records.

In 1670, King Charles II of England granted a group of investors a Royal Charter forming the "Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay." Today, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) is one of the oldest, continuously operating companies in the world, and has over five hundred stores in Canada under the Zellers, Bay, Fields, Home Outfitters, and Designer Depot banners. HBC is unique in the world of busi-

ness, particularly in terms of its longevity, its national impact, and its devotion to its records. The company has maintained a coherent records system for over three hundred years, systematically creating, managing, and preserving its records. Many of these records have been preserved thanks to the policies of early management, who created and kept records because they were considered essential for doing business, and successive generations of management who continued to centralize and safeguard the Company's records. The resulting archival legacy consists of more than three thousand linear metres of textual records, one hundred and thirty thousand photographs, twelve thousand maps, charts and architectural plans, approximately 1,350 prints, drawings, paintings and calendars, as well as sound recordings and moving images. Recording the involvement of HBC in the fur trade, in North American exploration, in the development of Canada, and in the growth of its Canadian retail empire, these records document the company's decision-making, communications, accounts and transactions, and employees. They also provide valuable information about the various territories in which it operated and the people with whom it came into contact. The world significance and uniqueness of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) is evidenced by their recognition and inclusion in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organizations Memory of the World Registry.¹

The story of HBC's lengthy effort to develop record-keeping and archival policy, illustrates the evolution and growing challenge and complexity of recordkeeping, particularly over the course of the twentieth century, as well as the evolving relationship of records management and archives. It also reflects an emerging awareness of the separate but interconnected records management and archival functions. It is a fascinating story, and one that has been approached from a variety of perspectives and degrees of detail, beginning with a series of articles in the 1930s written by HBC's first archivist and published in the Company's newsletter, describing the creation and organization of the archives, and culminating in Deidre Simmons's exhaustive and detailed treatise on the history of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.² The various articles produced by archives staff about the Company's archives,

1 In 2006, 2,670 researchers used the archives on-site in addition to the twelve hundred mail and Internet reference questions received by the archives. The HBCA library contains over ten thousand titles on HBC.

2 R.H.G. Leveson Gower, "The Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company," *The Beaver* (December 1933), pp. 40–42, 64; Arthur S. Morton, "The Business Methods of the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company," *Annual Report* (Ottawa, 1938); Joan Craig, "Three Hundred Years of Records," *The Beaver* (Autumn 1970), pp. 65–70; Alex Ross and Anne Morton, "The Hudson's Bay Company and Its Archives," *Business Archives* 51 (1985), pp. 17–39;

initially served to provide internal awareness of the archives but later informed researchers and the archival community about the scope and research potential of the holdings. In 1970, on the occasion of the Company's tercentenary, HBC archivist Joan Craig produced the first, brief historical overview of the creation and management of HBC's archives to illuminate the Company's announcement that it was making all of its records up to 1900 available for research to accredited students (previously, only records up to 1870 had been accessible). More recent studies have added to archival scholarship through documentary analyses, administrative histories, public program assessments, and the role of archives in public relations.³ Deidre Simmons's most recent work about the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, *Keepers of The Record*, situates the development and function of the Archives within the broad context of the history of HBC, Canada, and Great Britain. She paints a vivid picture of record-keeping practices in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, explains why the Company created and maintained records for more than three centuries, and gives insight into the growing recognition of the historical significance of the Company's records and the resulting shift in attitudes toward access and use.

Even though much has been written about the history of HBC and of the development and use of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, there has been little discussion about twentieth-century records management practices at HBC, or for that matter, similar practices within the Canadian private sector. Therefore, this paper focuses on the evolution of the modern records management program at HBC, illustrating the growing challenge and complexity of recordkeeping in the twentieth century and the barriers to implementing solutions.

Geraldine Alton Harris, "An Archival Administrative History of the Northern Stores Department, Hudson's Bay Company, 1959–1987" (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 1994); Jean Martin, "Canadian Chronicles," *Imperial Oil Review* (Spring 1998), pp. 22–27; Deidre Simmons, *Keepers of the Record: The History of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives* (Montreal, 2007); Deidre Simmons, "The Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company," *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996), pp. 70–78; Deidre Simmons, "'Custodians of a Great Inheritance': An Account of the Making of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives" (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 1994).

3 Andrea Paci, "Picture This: Hudson's Bay Company Calendar Images and their Documentary Legacy, 1913–1970" (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 2000); Allison Gregor, "Going Public: A History of Public Programming at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives" (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 2001); Peter Geller, "Constructing Corporate Images of the Fur Trade: The Hudson's Bay Company, Public Relations, and *The Beaver* Magazine 1920–1945," (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 1990).

Background: From Records Creation to the Creation of the Archives

Records creation and preservation have been ongoing issues at HBC from the time of the company's inception. Company employees – made up of servants and officers – were geographically dispersed across what is now modern Canada and were separated from the London headquarters by a long sea voyage. Ships made annual trips to the Hudson Bay to deliver goods and collect furs, and it was not uncommon for an officer, tasked with keeping the account ledgers and writing the journals, to run out of paper and ink while waiting for the next ship, or to have the ink freeze in the quills as he wrote. These precious records were sent back to the London headquarters via the returning ships, while duplicate copies were to be kept at the posts. It is a testament to the value and subsequent efforts to maintain and safeguard records for future use that so many records survived, despite circumstances not conducive to safe recordkeeping.

From the outset, management has conscientiously maintained detailed and complete records as evidence of business transactions to establish trust and control over its trading posts⁴ and to support its special rights and privileges. As early as 1683, the London Committee instructed factors⁵ (business agents) on Hudson Bay to keep “exact Journalls of what hath been Done both at the place where you shall reside your selfe and at all our other Factories ... that we may know how they and those under them have employed their time ...”⁶ For more than two and a half centuries, company records were sent from North America to London where they eventually accumulated in company warehouse trunks, chests, and packing cases. While it may seem inattentive to pack away older records in various containers, this practice assured that vital records remained safe, intact, and in permanent custody, despite the initial lack of a permanent home or any formal system of records control. The contents of some storage chests were even recorded in the minute books.

During the first twelve years of the Company's incorporation, official papers were left in the care of various company officials and committee members until a permanent home was found. By 1682 the Company had leased Scriveners' Hall in London where the records were transferred. The

4 Michael O'Leary, Wanda Orlikowsky, and JoAnne Yates, “Distributed Work over the Centuries: Trust and Control in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670–1826,” in *Distributed Work*, eds. S. Kiesler and P. Hinds (Cambridge, MA, May 2002), pp. 27–54.

5 Factors were responsible for managing the trade and the men, made up of “servants” and “officers” at their respective trading posts.

6 E.E. Rich, ed., *Copy-Book of Letters Outward &c, Begins 29th May, 1680 and Ends 5 July 1687, Hudson's Bay Record Society* 11 (Toronto, 1948), p. 73 – Instructions to Factors, 27 April, 1683.

following year the Secretary was ordered to purchase an "Iron Chest with great keys and padlock" for its papers.⁷ The records were to remain in the same place until 1794 when the Company moved to Hudson's Bay House. This move left things in a "confused state," revealing the inadequacies of the existing record-keeping practices and the need for a records inventory. Two years later, in 1796, HBC paid Mr. John Brome to compile the first catalogue of its archives, which resulted in the *Inventory of Books, &c*, listing records dating from 1667 to 1796 alphabetically, and allowing the searcher to find both the page listing and the bookcase in which the record was stored.⁸ The inventory was maintained and updated by staff until 1819.⁹ While emphasis was given to the order and accessibility of archives, there was no program in place to manage the records. Over time, as business methods became more formalized, closer attention was paid to the production and preservation of records, which were intended for the exclusive use of company officials to support the activities of the Company.

Even though HBC officials laid the foundation of an archival legacy early on by prescribing the creation, care, and centralization of company records, their intent was only to account for HBC's fiscal status and protect its legal rights and obligations. Adequate finding aids and convenient access to the archives were required to help the Company defend its historic rights. Management's recognition of the value of its current and archival records is more recent; the Company's 250th anniversary in 1920 served as a catalyst for the creation of a formal archival program. To commemorate this anniversary, Sir William Schooling, a journalist, was commissioned to write a brochure on the history of the Company. His research into the records exposed the many treasures stored in various vaults and raised an awareness of the untapped value of the archives. Upon completion of the 129-page illustrated brochure, Schooling sought and won the Board of Directors' approval to write an official history of the Company. However, before the wealth of information could be mined, the documents had to be made physically accessible and finding aids had to be both created and updated. The relocation of the archives was a necessary first step in making them accessible. Prior to 1924, most of the archival records had been stored in packing boxes in the company's London

7 E.E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684, second part, 1682-1684* (Toronto, 1942), p. 120. Records placed in the iron chest included bills of sale for several ketches, covenants, and servants bonds; accounts of ship stores; bills of lading; the lease for Scriveners' Hall; indentures, deeds of mortgage, patents and declarations of trust; captains orders and bonds; and charter partys.

8 Joan Craig, "Three Hundred Years of Records," *The Beaver* (Autumn 1970), p. 67. The "Inventory of Books, &c" is still in the possession of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA), A.64/45.

9 Simmons, *Keepers of the Record*, p. 82.

warehouse. From 1924 to 1927, the company provided separate accommodation for the archives at its Garlick Hill location; records were moved again to the top floor of the newly built Hudson's Bay House in 1927. This final move facilitated work on opening and arranging the archives.

Initially, the Company maintained manuscript lists, but with the Board's objective to publish documents and journals of interest, it became necessary to prepare a preliminary catalogue of its archival holdings.¹⁰ First promised in 1924, this publication objective stemmed both from recognition of the strong desire of scholars to have access to the records of HBC for research purposes and HBC's awareness of its obligation to make its archives available, as well as its self-interest in protecting its image by controlling what was published. Managed properly, the Company's history could serve as a positive public relations tool. In 1926, HBC contracted Sir Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist of Canada, to direct the classification and arrangement of its records to support the beginnings of the publishing program. Doughty's work was discontinued in 1930 as a result of financial cutbacks.¹¹ Neither Schooling nor Doughty's efforts resulted in the publication of an official history, but both made an invaluable contribution to the indexing and cataloguing of the records. For example, Schooling's assistants compiled a four-hundred-page catalogue describing the records stored in the basement and Doughty convinced the company to start a program of copying records for the Public Archives of Canada.¹² By 1928, the Company's Governor announced the establishment of the Archives department and for the next three years, staff at the London head office concentrated on the collection and preparation of materials to support research and publication. In this period, they examined and arranged archival records from 1821 to 1860. Only a few favoured outsiders were permitted to see the records but it was not long before staff began to arrange and describe records for public access. In 1931, Richard H.G. Leveson Gower became the first company archivist, and the Archives were opened to the public, albeit with some restrictions on access and publication, which were controlled by the Secretary under the advice of the Governor. Nevertheless, the London based Archives staff were positioned to provide invaluable assistance to researchers, as well as supporting internal research projects and answering reference questions. The Archives was a distinct department with the dual directive of facilitating access to historical records and managing publication activities.

To improve access to the records, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, from the Public

10 Leveson Gower, p. 41.

11 Simmons, *Keepers of the Record*, p. 208.

12 Simmons, "The Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company," p. 70; *Keepers of the Record*, p. 200.

Records Office, and Professor Reginald Coupland, a professor of history from Oxford University, were hired in 1932 to review the collection pre-dating 1870 and make recommendations regarding its organization and classification, storage, security, and reading-room procedures. Jenkinson worked with Leveson Gower to develop a classification system to aid both the physical and intellectual organization of the archives. Records were grouped from the general to the specific: fonds, sections, classes, and pieces. Based on provenance, the records were first divided into sections: section A consisted of the records of the London office; section B included the records of the various administrations in North America; section C consisted of documents pertaining to ships; section D, called the "special section," was divided into sixteen classes including records of the Red River colony, journals of explorations conducted by HBC staff, and miscellaneous papers; section E consisted of subsidiary company records and private records; and section Z was established for miscellaneous records. Each section was divided by class, then further sub-divided and described by piece – such as a volume, file, box, or bundle – and arranged chronologically.¹³ In addition to proposing a method of classification, Jenkinson and Coupland suggested the installation of special steel shelving to house the records and developed detailed inventories listing the contents of each shelf, followed by an index to the contents of the inventories. Their contribution was invaluable and lasting; indeed, the Hudson's Bay Company Archives still uses the classification arrangements set out by Jenkinson and Coupland in their finding aids, as well as Jenkinson's principles for insuring the records' impartiality, authenticity, and unbroken chain of custody.

Efforts to identify and organize records were not limited to historical records but were designed to maintain their continuity. The Board of Directors valued the Archives for both scholarly research and public relations purposes. At the 16 May 1933 Board meeting, a resolution was passed "that the respective managements in London and in Canada be instructed to examine all the Company's records with a view to providing for continuity of collection of all important documents for preservation in the company's Archives at the London Head Office,"¹⁴ clearly indicating that HBC was already thinking about scheduling its current records with an eye to the future. Even during a

13 Leveson Gower, pp. 63–64. For a detailed description of the classification system and some of the treasures to be found, read the series of articles written by R.H.G. Leveson Gower about the Archives for *The Beaver* (December 1933, June 1934, December 1934, and September 1935).

14 Hudson's Bay Company Corporate Records (hereafter HBC), Box D-1-3-3/ File 615.7.1., "Speech by Governor Richardson," 31 July 1973; HBCA, A.1/171/196, Board Minutes, 16 May 1933.

period when the Company had lost money for three consecutive years, management still took time to discuss the archives, demonstrating a continued commitment to managing and preserving its records. This 1933 resolution also marked the beginning of a records management program for the Company, initiating the routine gathering and transfer of records to the archives.

The Emerging Records Management Function

The emergence of a records management function at HBC can be seen in the development and evolution of the tools used to control business records from point of creation, such as filing systems and retention schedules. Following the creation of the Archives department, the Company used two concurrent classification systems for two distinct purposes: staff employed one classification system to enable physical and intellectual access to its archives, and another filing system was used to organize its current records for efficient retrieval. For decades, the Company had operated a sophisticated registry and classification system for all corporate files at both the London office and the Canadian Committee Office (CCO), instituted in Winnipeg in 1919. The use of subject-based classification systems in English registry filing systems had become well established by the late nineteenth century. The London office was using a central records registry system in which all correspondence was recorded (or registered) in a book, assigned to a subject category, and stamped with the assigned subject number. Alphabetical card indexes were maintained as a cross-reference to the subject numbers.¹⁵ The CCO initially employed a dossier system to manage incoming and outgoing mail. Correspondence was divided into the various departments, and files were assigned an alphanumeric label. For instance *FTI* represented the first file assigned to the Fur Trade Department.¹⁶ In the spring of 1926, two clerks sent from the London office introduced a new dossier system to the Accounts department at the Winnipeg office. Named for the company that manufactured it (Roneo Limited at Romford, Essex, England), the Roneo Filing System was structured as an alphanumeric system with an overall alphabetic arrangement within which material was filed only by subject. In cases where the company received a letter that contained multiple subjects, extracts or cross-reference had to be made in order to provide access points for all of the subjects. This meant that copies of all incoming correspondence had to be made in order to complete the files, since correspondence was kept in duplicate under both a subject

¹⁵ Simmons, *Keepers of the Record*, p. 212.

¹⁶ HBCA, RG2/ Series 75 (Documentation re Records & Filing Systems, 1947–1975)/ item 1 (File Clerk's Filing Index Book, 1960–1967).

heading and a personal heading (the author). Finally, an alphabetical subject index and a filing index were maintained in order to facilitate access to the files. By 1929 this Roneo system had fully replaced the earlier dossier system in all departments.

Following the creation of systems for organizing current and archival records, schedules were soon developed for the consistent retention and disposition of twentieth-century records. In order to ensure continuity in the Company's archives, a regular disposal system was set up in January 1934, with schedules to show the length of time records were to be retained in Canada.¹⁷ The schedules also indicated which records were to be transferred from the CCO to the Archives in London. Thus, the pattern of centralizing files established and used at head of office in the seventeenth century continued, and was still apparent in the early retention schedules of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.¹⁸ Similar to seventeenth-century practice, records were not allowed to accumulate at posts; rather posts regularly sent records to the Canadian Committee Office in Winnipeg. Retention schedules were developed for the Fur Sales, Wholesale, Land, Retail Stores Office, and Fur Trade departments, and the Canadian Committee Office. Final disposition instructions were either "destroy" or "refer to Canadian Committee Office." This awareness of the need to save records because of potential archival value is demonstrated by the following annotation to a 1950 Fur Sales retention schedule:

Personal files – keep file intact for 10 years after date of cessation of employment or until employee is over employable age, then destroy the file except in the case of Senior Executives, these keep for 25 years and then refer to the C.C.O. As you will appreciate in the latter case, there may be matters of historical interest.¹⁹

In the Canadian Committee Office, a complete list of retention dates and dispositions was noted beside each file as listed in the filing index books, and a diary note was brought up annually to review all current files and their

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Surviving retention schedules cover the period from 1942 to 1967. There is no evidence of any new schedules until 1996. See HBC, Records Management department files 1942 – Fur Trade Department: Disposal of Documents; 1944 – Retention Schedule – including Fur Sales Department, Wholesale Department, Land Department, Retail Stores Office, Fur Trade Department, and Canadian Committee Office; 1950 – Fur Sales Department Disposal of Records; 1952 – Land Department – Accounts Unit: Disposal of Documents; 1953 – Canadian Committee Office: Disposal of Records; Lampson, Fraser and Huth: Retention of Records (1953); 1953 – Fur Sales Department: Disposal of Records (1953); 1958 – Bay Stores: Disposal of Records, 1958; Insurance Department: Disposal Schedule, 1958; 1958 – Canadian Committee Office: Disposal of Records.

¹⁹ HBC, AD07 (Executive Subject Files)/ Box 001 159873/ Memo: Office of Fur Sales Department to the Controller, Canadian Committee Office, Nov. 13, 1950.

transfers. After an agreed interval, a selection of the files centralized in the CCO was forwarded to London for the Archives Department. It was intended that there would be annual shipments but despite this system of routine transfers, old neglected records continued to be discovered, many years later.²⁰

Notwithstanding the existence and use of retention schedules and filing systems during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, there is no evidence that a centralized and comprehensive records management function with jurisdiction over the life cycle of the records actually existed at HBC. Instead, various records management related functions were divided among several departments: the archivists and librarians managed the classification of historical records, while the Controller of the Canadian Committee Office appears to have had jurisdiction over record retention matters. Meanwhile, filing activities were initially centralized in the Winnipeg and London offices but were soon decentralized to the departments. This trend toward organizational decentralization extended to the management of records. In fact, staff thought that centralized filing would not apply to Hudson's Bay House, where the Canadian Committee Office was located, because the departments referred to their files very frequently and found it convenient to keep their files in their departments. However, they did believe that the Canadian Committee Office should work more closely with the other departments in the fields of storage and disposal.²¹ Indeed, departments communicated regularly with the Controller regarding records destruction policy and proposed changes.

How did record-keeping practices at the Hudson's Bay Company compare with other organizations at this time? In terms of the creation and use of retention schedules, HBC was in step with current practices. The British government had introduced the modern concept of records retention scheduling in the late nineteenth century, with the 1877 amendment to the *Public Record Office Act* authorizing the destruction of records of insufficient value, and the Canadian Cabinet approved the first federal government retention schedule (for the Post Office) in 1889.²² In the years following World War I, ad-hoc systems for recordkeeping and control slowly replaced registry and vault storage methods that had been abandoned because they were no longer

20 Simmons, *Keepers of the Record*, p. 238.

21 HBC, AD07/ Corporate Controller's Files/ Internal Report, Oct. 10, 1957. Mr. Paynel attended a Records Management Study Group in Toronto and subsequently reported on what he learned from the sessions and what methodologies could be adopted by HBC: "*It is my personal opinion that the rest of the building is only vaguely aware of our Archives. Perhaps I am mistaken. The thought persists, however, that as we become more and more decentralized we are losing contact with the inside stories of our operation.*"

22 Jay Atherton, "The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897–1956," *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979), p. 38.

adequate.²³ In Canada, formal records scheduling in the “public departments” was introduced in 1924 when the federal government approved a general records disposal schedule for its administrative records. These schedules were eventually extended to its operational records in a series of Treasury Board Minutes issued between 1936 and 1945.²⁴

The 1940s and 1950s witnessed an explosion in paperwork, largely due to the expansion of government services and departments during World War II, and a related increase in the number of clerical workers.²⁵ The growing volume of records initiated through wartime activities placed increasing stress on existing filing procedures and required the services of an office worker or workers devoted to the management of paper, as well as systems designed to administer the paper burden efficiently and economically. By the 1940s, government departments and large organizations alike faced a mounting backlog of files to be disposed of and struggled to retrieve current files in a timely manner.

Although the British introduced the first records retention schedule, the Americans are generally credited with the development of modern records management techniques in response to the record-keeping problems that emerged before, during, and after World War II.²⁶ A crucial event in the advancement of the records management discipline was the development of the first records disposal schedule by the US National Archives under the 1943 *Records Disposal Act*.²⁷ Records management thus emerged with the objective of helping organizations establish the business routines needed to efficiently handle an ever-growing mass of information, and its principles were widely adopted. In the 1950s for example, faced with similar records disposition issues as those observed by the American and Canadian federal governments, the Government of Ontario experienced a renewed interest in records and the motivation to establish dormant records centres, vital records plans, and retention/disposition schedules. Because records management was seen as the best means to handle current business records, government administrators essentially created an artificial division between records administration and archives.

23 Barbara Craig, “Records Management and the Ontario Archives, 1950–1976,” *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979), p. 4. See also Marion Beyea, “Records Management: The New Brunswick Case,” *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979) pp. 61–77.

24 Ian E. Wilson, “Access Act Reform: The Destruction of Records and Proposed Access Act Amendments,” Ottawa, Ontario (1 May 2000), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/government/001/007001-3004-e.html> (accessed 7 July 2008).

25 Within the Canadian government, the total number of employees tripled between 1932 and 1940. See Atherton, p. 48.

26 Wilson, “Access Act Reform.”

27 David O. Stephens, “Records Management in the United Kingdom, part 2,” *Records Management Quarterly* (January 1996), p. 76. See also Atherton, p. 45.

Early twentieth-century economic, organizational, and occupation changes essentially resulted in an administrative revolution in the private sector as well.²⁸ Growth and diversification of business interests led to an explosion in the volume and complexity of records, and an increase in the clerical staff required to capture, analyze, and report on activities. Changes in office management and record-keeping practices ensued; the Hudson's Bay Company was not immune to this administrative revolution. HBC's business operations expanded and diversified through the first half of the twentieth century, as the company delved into a wide variety of commercial pursuits. In 1910, HBC reorganized its operations into three departments, or lines, of business: retail, land sales, and fur trade. However, it soon became involved in numerous other business ventures including the Bay Steamship Company, formed during World War I to serve as the overseas purchasing agent for the French government. While HBC continued its retail expansion efforts after the war and through the 1920s, it also ventured into new lines of business. Hudson's Bay Wholesale ran a thriving business in liquor, canned salmon, coffee, tea, and tobacco. The Development Department, which operated from 1925 to 1931, and the Fish and Fish Products Department (1934 to 1940), are also representative of this period of innovation when the Company researched and developed methods of extending and expanding upon its fur trade and other natural resource activities. Shipping and natural resources, particularly oil and gas, were important sidelines to the main business of real estate, fur sales, and retail.

As the company evolved and diversified, it became apparent that the existing, central filing system used in the Winnipeg office could no longer accommodate the company's activities. Centralized, dossier-based filing systems such as the one used, tend to be most effective in managing relatively small quantities of records in small organizations.²⁹ HBC was a large and complex organization; therefore, it was considered more expedient for each department to manage their files to suit their needs, rather than centralize information. Each department was still required to consult with the Controller, Canadian Committee Office, to ensure the retention schedules were adequate, and the CCO continued to maintain a central filing room and employ at least two file clerks. One filing research clerk was responsible for London mail, filing research and upkeep of the files, while the second looked after incoming and outgoing mail, and the preparation of file and daybook copies. However, after

28 Graham S. Lowe, "The Enormous File": The Evolution of the Modern Office in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), p. 138.

29 Terry Cook, "Legacy in Limbo: An Introduction to the Records of the Department of the Interior," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88), p. 76.

several decades of use, it had become clear that like the London central registry, the old Roneo filing system could no longer adequately accommodate the increasing complexity and volume of records that HBC created to support its activities.

In the 1960s Nora Quinn, a forward-thinking filing clerk, identified this problem and proposed that the company adopt a direct, decimal subject filing system, based on the outline of the company's organization, as a solution to managing its voluminous and complex records. Capable of indefinite expansion by grouping related subjects, such a system could assist in detecting relationships between files. In addition to this new method of coding, she also recommended developing an index to the records and adopting a change-out system for the central files.³⁰ Management readily agreed to adopt these suggestions, and the new filing system was adopted for use within the Canadian head office in Winnipeg, and later Toronto, where it was used until the late 1980s.

At the same time that HBC was adopting its new record-keeping system, records management as a profession was beginning to take a firm hold in Canada within the federal and provincial governments, as well as to a lesser extent in the private sector. The American Records Management Association (ARMA) and the Association of Records Executives and Administrators (AREA) were both founded in 1955,³¹ just a few years after the adoption of the US *Federal Records Act*, which formalized records management in the federal government; ARMA Canada was established in 1968. ARMA began to provide professional development opportunities through conferences and encouraged discourse through its quarterly publication. However, both the function and the profession were still in their infancy and it took several decades for "total records management" – a program that included filing systems, forms, vital records, records centres, and records retention schedules – to develop. Unfortunately, there is very little detailed information about the status of records management within the Canadian private sector during the 1960s and 1970s. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the private sector was lagging behind the government sector in records management and that there was a lack in management understanding, interest, and support of the records

30 HBC, Box D-1-3-3-3/ File 615.7/ Memo re CCO Filing System from Nora Quinn, Filing Research Clerk to W.A. McColl, Office Manager, CCO. Dec. 19, 1962. The company adopted a subject classification system where numbers in blocks of one hundred were assigned to each main classification.

31 ARMA and AREA merged in 1975 to form the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA), which is now known as ARMA International. See ARMA International Educational Foundation, "History and Archives," <http://www.armaedfoundation.org/history.html> (accessed 16 June 2008).

management discipline.³² Some reasons for not establishing a methodical procedure for the retention, preservation, and storage of business records, which were expressed as early as 1943, included:

... a decided inertia on the part of management, or a disinterest in regard to the costs of handling and storing, misinformation as to or miscalculation of the volume of the records, decentralization of authority in separate departments, and the fact that unless force of circumstances compels immediate attention to certain records top executives seldom are concerned with the problem.³³

The drive to establish a formal records management program at HBC first began in the late 1960s, at the same time as the provincial and federal governments were solidifying their own programs. Despite the absence of a centrally controlled records management function at HBC, by the 1960s there was undoubtedly a degree of records control in place that included retention schedules, file plans, micrographics, and vital records protection. The file plans and retention schedules developed in the first half of the twentieth century as a means of managing the growing volume of paper records, continued to be used until the early 1970s. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, policies governing records were not always comprehensive and were followed inconsistently across an increasingly decentralized organization. Fortunately, a number of key individuals recognized the problem and sought to formalize a records management program; however, it would take more than two decades before their recommendations would be instituted.

The Path to Establishing a Records Management Program at HBC

It was the HBC archivists who championed the creation of a records management program, with the goal of ensuring the routine transfer of records to the Archives, as well as facilitating the efficient control of active records at head office. Shirlee Anne Smith, Keeper of the Record from 1973 to 1990, was an early advocate of records management. Trained as a historian, Smith began her career with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1957 as a librarian at Hudson's Bay House and worked on many history-related projects in the public relations department. As early as 1968, she expressed her concern regarding the disposal of business records of various departments and Hudson's Bay House, fearing that key records from the Northern Stores Division, Rupert's Land Trading Company, and Retail Stores were not being sent to the Canadian

32 Ira Penn, "Records Management: Still Hazy After All These Years," *Records Management Quarterly* 27 (January 1993), p. 4.

33 Carl H. McKenzie, "An Experiment in the Retention and Preservation of Corporate Records," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, vol. 17, no. 1 (February 1943), p. 3.

Committee Office and were thus being “lost to history .” Writing to Rolph Huband, who as Corporate Secretary had responsibility for the Archives Department, the library, and the Public Relations Department, Smith advocated the creation of a master file list that included the ultimate disposal of files, so that one could easily identify what was being considered for the Archives. Smith referenced the company’s obligation to preserve records for all legitimate users “and to see beyond the immediate interests of the official in charge at any given time.” Calling for all files to have definite disposal information, she made three recommendations. First, “all departments in Hudson’s Bay House should have definite dates on files; second, the ultimate disposal should be listed and adhered to; and third, there should be a master plan in CCO of all files so that they can be marked off, listed, and sent to the archives.”³⁴ After completing the work of evaluating files for permanent retention or archives, HBC would have better control over records through annual reviews, and could save money in space and filing cabinets. In urging HBC to take the lead in preserving its business records, the secondary benefits of financial savings and increased efficiency were identified as an incentive to adopting records-keeping principles. Smith’s memo appears to be the first call for the creation of a records management program at HBC; over the course of the following three decades, Smith and her colleagues would repeat this call, as well as the argument to develop inventories and retention schedules for the purpose of identifying files for permanent retention.

During the 1970s, the Company was occupied with relocating its head office, selecting where to deposit its archives, and embarking on a multi-year program of retail expansion and investment.³⁵ Many parties were concerned about the fate of HBC’s historical records and, in anticipation of the relocation of the head office, inquired whether the records would also be moved. A number of Canadians had expressed interest in bringing HBC archives to Canada starting in the 1960s. In 1964, Dr. William B. Ewart, a Winnipeg physician impressed by the extent of the archives and their historical significance to Canada, was the first to suggest that the archives be moved to Canada. A year later, a request followed from Dean B. Lionel Funt (Faculty of Graduate Studies) and Professor W.L. Morton both of the University of Manitoba, and Manitoba Premier, Duff Roblin, that the archives be relocated to the University of Manitoba. In 1969, Dr. Hugh Saunderson, President of the University of Manitoba, renewed the request. The Company replied that until the question of relocating the head office was decided, the future of the

34 HBC, AD07/ Box D-1-3-3/ Letter from Shirlee Smith to A.R. Huband, Sept. 16, 1968.

35 In 1972, HBC became a shareholder of Hamilton retailer G.W. Robinson, and acquired the Shop-Rite catalogue stores and Ottawa retailer A.J. Freiman. By 1978, it added Zellers and Simpsons to its retail portfolio.

archives should be held in abeyance.³⁶

On 2 May 1970, HBC announced its intentions to move its head office to Canada, contingent on shareholder approval; this move was reflected in the Company's new charter, granted by Queen Elizabeth II on 28 May 1970. After it was announced that the head office would be relocated to Winnipeg, the company received offers to house its archives from the University of Toronto, the University of Manitoba, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), and the Public Archives of Canada. After much consultation and careful deliberation, by 31 July 1973, the Company agreed to place its archives on deposit with the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Because of the Company's long and involved association with the Northwest, it was considered a natural decision to deposit its archives in Winnipeg, where HBC also had its head office. To satisfy the British Government's requirement to provide the Public Records Office a microfilm copy of HBC's records dating from 1670 to 1904 (a condition of gaining the necessary export permit to transfer records to Canada), HBC continued the micrographics program it had begun as a conservation measure in 1952 under the direction of W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist of Canada. With the export permit granted, in the fall of 1974, one hundred and twenty tons of archival records were shipped from London to Winnipeg in eight separate containers. The Hudson's Bay Company Archives, newly located in the recently renovated Civic Auditorium, opened its doors to researchers on 17 April 1975. While responsibility for the custody of the records and administrative costs rested with the Government of Manitoba, the Company retained ownership of the archives. It is important to note that HBC also undertook to continue supplying the Hudson's Bay Company Archives with current records of archival interest.

Relocation of the company head office to Winnipeg, followed shortly after by another move to Toronto, as well as the physical move of the archives from London to Winnipeg, provided opportunities for discussing regular records transfer and disposal. Always looking to the future and the research needs of sociologists, historians, and others, Shirlee Smith routinely requested that staff be directed to consult with her prior to destroying records so as to ensure that vital records were not eliminated and that specific files were retained for the Archives.³⁷ Until 1973, Smith worked within the Public Relations Department at the Winnipeg head office, reporting to Corporate Secretary, A.R. Huband, who also had responsibility for the archives and the library. As a consequence of Huband's multiple responsibilities, Public Relations staff were responsible for reminding other departments to submit lists of current

36 HBC, 1-4-8/ Box D-1-3-3/ file 615.7.1., July 25, 1972.

37 HBC, AD07/ Box D-1-3-3/ Memo to managers from Shirlee Ann Smith, Public Relations Officer, Head Office, 1972.

files to be reviewed for disposal or retention in the years leading up to the transfer of records to P AM, and for many years after . Once records were transferred to Winnipeg, public relations staff continued to serve as liaison between the departments and the Hudson's Bay Company Archives to facilitate routine transfers of records (largely because Huband continued to be responsible for the relationship with the Archives and had a vested interest in its successful operation). Furthermore, the department filled a void created by the absence of a formal records management program. Departments cooperated with records-related directives as long as the commitments set out in the 1973 archives deposit agreement were still fresh in people's minds.

Prior to 1972, when the corporate office and most operating departments were located in Winnipeg, collection of relevant documents had been relatively easy. Other business priorities, however, soon overshadowed the mundane record-keeping goals. The growth of the Company, restructuring and relocation of the head office, staff turnover, as well as the decentralization of certain operations, placed a strain on record-keeping practices. Lacking centralized and enforced records-keeping policies and procedures, corporate standards and methods for the maintenance of conventional paper-based records eventually all but disappeared.

The Company was well aware of its poor records control and the resulting operational difficulties, including losses incurred due to the absence of records required to support tax audits and litigation. Several attempts were made to study the issues and make recommendations; in fact, individual departments and the HBC Archives initiated separate efforts. HBCA staff consulted and gave advice to the company on records management and archival matters since, in the absence of a corporate-wide records management program, staff felt the need to communicate its interest in the company's records and to make whatever recommendations that it believed would assist the Company in handling this material.³⁸

This archival involvement was in keeping with what was happening in other public records management programs at the time. From the earliest days of the twentieth century, archivists have acted as some of the strongest proponents for the establishment of records management programs within government organizations throughout North America. In 1940, Phillip C. Brooks argued that archivists should participate in classification systems design and records selection from the point of creation.³⁹ In addition to facilitating the

38 HBC, Box C0012332038/ File "History, Archives Material sent for Safekeeping": Memo from Alex Ross to Shirlee A. Smith, 1985.

39 Phillip C. Brooks, "What Records Shall We Preserve?" paper presented to the Society of American Archivists, 13 April 1940, as cited in Charles Dollar, "Archivists and Records Managers in the Information Age," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), p. 39.

records disposition process, guidance from archivists early on in a record's life cycle would ensure selection of records for both the archives and scholarly use. In 1941, the US National Archives founded a records administration to facilitate the process of selection for preservation of records as early as possible.⁴⁰ In Canada, Dominion Archivist, W.K. Lamb, is credited with introducing records management to the Government of Canada. He also advocated that archivists and records managers work together in the appraisal and scheduling of records.⁴¹ Similarly, throughout the 1950s, George Spragge, Archivist of Ontario, pursued the implementation of a government-wide records management program, and sought acceptance of uniform retention and disposal procedures. He fought to have a permanent records branch under the control of the Archives to ensure the systematic management of all records disposals and retention of historically valuable records. It was not until 1965 that a Records Services Branch was established within the Department of Public Records and Archives, a branch monitored by the Treasury Board-run Records Management Committee.⁴² While the necessity of records management was widely acknowledged, political, organizational, and financial hurdles delayed the establishment of a broader records management function. Even though archivists were strong advocates for records management in the public sector and can be credited with the establishment of many government records management programs, their efforts were principally directed at archival objectives: to save archival records from indiscriminate destruction, and facilitate the routine scheduling and transfer of documents to the archives.

Like their government colleagues, the archivists working in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives had similar goals. By 1980, HBCA had created a position that included a responsibility to advise the Company on corporate records management, particularly regarding records retention issues. At the same time, public relations staff indicated that they would be re-instating a records retention program, in cooperation with HBCA.⁴³ After conducting a review of records located in the Toronto head office, the findings reported by Jocelyn McKillop of the Public Relations Department, were discouraging. No records were ready or targeted for transfer to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, no master list of head office files existed, and no common classification system was in use. Individual sections had reclassified their files and were not sure what files existed in other departments. Finally, many individu-

40 Dan Zelenyj, "Archivy *Ad Portas*: The Archives-Records Management Paradigm Re-visited in the Electronic Information Age," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), p. 68.

41 Terry Cook, "W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005), p. 210.

42 Craig, p. 17.

43 HBC, Box T-170-2/ File 014.1.2/ Memo from Jocelyn McKillop to AR Huband re Retention of Head Office Records, Jan. 17, 1980.

als in charge of files were unaware that company records were ultimately transferred to the Archives. These findings are not surprising, given that no records inventory or general policy on retention and final disposition of files existed, and there were likely internal communication deficiencies.⁴⁴ The problems stemmed from the overall lack of an efficient records management system to ensure the preservation of the company's records for future study, and the low priority given to record-keeping issues.

Alex Ross, a newly appointed HBCA archivist, was given the mandate in 1981 to take charge of the acquisition of twentieth-century records for the Archives. Ross quickly instituted a program of visits to HBC offices in order to familiarize himself with the current records of the company and its operations. Both he and Shirlee Smith felt that he should be involved in the development of a records management program, particularly since he had a strong background in records management procedures. Ross believed that the archivist must be concerned with the entire life cycle of each type of record generated by HBC in order to ensure preservation of all those company records, which were valuable for the writing of social history and other scholarly pursuits.⁴⁵ This viewpoint, which was gaining momentum in the profession, encouraged archivists to take a more active role in records management activities such as the development of record retention schedules and the identification of records of archival interest from the point of creation. Beginning in 1981, Ross regularly visited HBC office locations in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal to review record holdings, identify record series of archival interest, and meet with department heads to learn about their records and record-keeping practices. Following the first visit, Ross drafted a proposal for establishing a liaison with HBC to facilitate records management activities. To expedite the identification and systematic transfer of inactive records of permanent significance, he proposed that HBCA assign one staff member to serve as a liaison with the Company on matters pertaining to records management. The staff member would consult on records inventories, records retention schedules, records appraisal, records disposal, micro recording, vital records protection, equipment control, and training. The Provincial Archivist of Manitoba and the HBC Corporate Secretary supported these initial fact-finding visits, the liaison proposal, and a subsequent inventory project. The stated benefit of conducting an inventory included a comprehensive list of all records generated by each department, the identification and subsequent elimination of inactive records of little value, the identification of records of long-term value, savings in terms of space and staff time, and the revision and

44 HBC, Box T-170-2/ File 014.1.2/ Report from Jocelyn McKillop, Jan. 8, 1980.

45 HBC, Box C0012332038/ File: "History, Archives"/ Memo from Alex Ross to Rolph Huband, July 12, 1982.

updating of the records retention schedule.

Ross corresponded regularly with Rolph Huband regarding his findings, and made recommendations regarding records management and archival matters. While Ross advocated developing a strategy for the creation of a records management program, HBC wanted a “go slow” approach. It did not want to engage a full-time records manager, but rather preferred to assign the responsibility on a part-time basis. Ross urged Huband to reconsider a full-time position, drawing attention to the large volume of inactive records that were nearing “critical stage.” He recommended beginning the records work in the corporate office since the records were predominantly archival yet lacked an adequate filing system. The first step would be completing a records inventory, then developing a records retention schedule. Eventually, the developed records management procedures could be applied company-wide.⁴⁶ Huband’s response, however, reflected the cost-cutting focus of the company:

I accept your argument in principle with respect to the hiring of a records professional. However, in view of our expense situation mentioned earlier, it will not happen in the near future.⁴⁷

Thus, the records management initiative championed by the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives was destined to progress slowly. In this, HBC was not alone. In general, progress in the field of records management was uneven at the time. New privacy and access to information legislation served to increase public awareness about records in the public sector, and the dawning recognition that good records management promoted both efficiency and financial savings brought growing managerial support, but much still remained to be done to raise the profile of the profession. It was common for an organization to be caught between the desire to preserve corporate memory and the costs associated with that preservation; with costs being an extremely powerful factor, exercising precedence over historical justifications, many companies put off establishing records management and archival programs.⁴⁸

Despite the Company’s reluctance to hire a full-time professional records manager, Alex Ross was determined to help HBC attain its record-keeping objectives, and continued to work with head office staff to inventory head office records. He even provided Huband with a suggested job description for a company records manager as well as a detailed strategy for the implementa-

46 HBC, Box C00123321 19/ File “Records Management”/ Letter from Alex Ross to Huband, Sept. 17, 1981.

47 HBCA, RG20/3/63. Rolph Huband to Alex Ross, October 14, 1981.

48 Michael D. Swift, “The Canadian Archival Scene in the 1970s: Current Developments and Trends,” *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83), p. 52; Christopher Hives, “History, Business Records, and Corporate Archives in North America,” *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986), pp. 46–47.

tion of a comprehensive records management program. In support of Ross' s efforts, Shirlee Smith broached the topic of a records management program with Huband once again in 1985. In her view , the effectiveness of the Archives was dependent on the existence of clear disposition guidelines. She warned that without such guidelines in force, the Archives would continue to receive incomplete runs of records on an ad hoc basis. In addition to enabling the Hudson's Bay Company Archives to be run in a systematic manner , a records management program would also save company time and money.⁴⁹ Around this time, HBC approached the National Archives of Canada to assist with establishing a records management program; the Archives declined the request for assistance and there is no evidence that this initiative progressed any further.⁵⁰ The intended introduction of a professionally directed records disposal program was postponed for financial reasons. No further action was taken and the recommendations put forward by HBCA were set aside.

The proposed program soon faced another financially related delay . In 1987, the Government of Manitoba sought to reduce its deficit by cutting costs; as a result, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba lost two senior positions, one of them from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Consequently, the HBCA-driven records management initiative lost momentum. In the absence of an action plan designed to prepare the necessary disposition schedules, Huband directed senior management to "ensure no material of archival interest is destroyed. When in doubt, do not destroy ." ⁵¹ Departments were instructed to send all records of possible archival interest to HBCA.

Meanwhile, HBCA staff did their best to support HBC' s public relations officers in their efforts to coordinate and communicate records reviews and transfers of identified archival records. While many departments transferred inactive records to Winnipeg from 1973 to 1993, they only did so on an ad-hoc, "hit or miss" basis. Various departments shipped inactive records that were no longer required for operations and often of questionable archival interest. It appeared that HBCA was becoming a records centre for HBC' s inactive records. Momentum for the creation of a records management program was lost with the elimination of the HBCA archivist position, and little progress was made until the position was eventually filled several years later with the appointment of Gerry Berkowski.

While HBCA-led efforts faltered due to lack of personnel and resources, two separate initiatives to develop records management policies and retention

49 HBC, Box C0012332038/ File "History, Archives"/ Letter from S.A. Smith to Huband, Sept. 5, 1985.

50 HBC, AD07 (Executive Subject Files)/ Report written by Roy Schaefer, "Hudson's Bay Company Records Management Study," 1993, p. 8.

51 HBC, Box C0012332038/ File "History, Archives"/ Memo from A.R. Huband, May 5, 1987.

schedules were launched independently within HBC by the Internal Audit Services and Technical Planning departments. In 1986, staff from the Internal Audit Department conducted a thorough study of federal and provincial legislation governing records retention, and audited the extent of security compliance to assist HBC management in the determination of “acceptable and prudent practices.” Next, they planned discussions with senior financial management executives to set short- and long-term action plans. The end result was a broadly defined, draft record retention guideline. Internal Audit also intended to introduce a professionally-directed records disposal program in order to classify confidential records and to identify archival material, to honour the undertakings of the 1973 deposit agreement for HBC to continue supplying HBC Archives with current records of archival interest. However, work did not proceed beyond the preliminary research phase, and the development and implementation of a records retention program was once again postponed for financial reasons.

In 1990, HBC’s Computing Centre Technical Planning Division hired consultants to review the organization of their files, and submit a proposal for the effective management of technical planning and accounting records. The division was concerned with the over-crowded state of its files and the staff time wasted trying to retrieve information required to support decisions. Staff members were also concerned with the lack of records oversight and security. Accordingly, records management consultants were engaged to examine the records situation and make recommendations for improvements. A report was prepared, outlining the program and suggesting changes but no action was taken because the costs could not be justified at the department level. Like the Internal Audit effort, this initiative did not translate into any policy or record-keeping implementation.

While organizational structure and corporate culture may have had a role to play, expense monitoring was clearly the prime factor in explaining why all of the recommendations of HBCA and public relations staff were not implemented, and why the initiatives of Internal Audit and Technical Planning did not translate into any formal record-keeping program. For HBC, the 1980s were characterized as a period of expense curtailment and downsizing. The company suffered large losses, attributing poor performance to the deep recession of 1981 and 1982, and it took many years thereafter to recover.⁵² As part of its recovery efforts, management focused on financial objectives by restraining capital spending, lowering operating expenses, and disposing of

52 HBC experienced the effects of deep recession in 1981, reporting a \$122 million loss in 1982, a \$107.4 million loss in 1984, a \$9.1 million loss in 1985, and a \$78.5 million loss in 1987.

many marginal investments.⁵³ The year 1985 was marked by a program of retail rationalization and divestiture of six non-strategic investments: Marshall Wells Ltd, Eaton Bay Financial Services, HBC Travel Ltd., HB Distillers Ltd., Toronto Credits, and Computer Innovations Distribution Corporation. This trend continued through to the late 1980s; to improve profit, management continued to restrain capital expenditures, and to make business dispositions with the objective of concentrating resources on core department store and real estate segments, and reducing debt. HBC sold its London Fur Sales Division assets, Northern Stores, followed by its Wholesale Division and folded the remaining Simpsons stores into the Bay brand.

Given the economic conditions at this time, it would have been difficult to make the business case or raise the funds necessary to staff and operate a new program that was not viewed as being part of the company's core business, or even an essential function. Although there was consensus among directors that records management was necessary to support the regular business activities of the company, it was hard to justify the costs based on the "soft" benefits of time and space savings. A strong legal compliance argument would have helped, however, one could not be made for a retail company such as HBC since it was not heavily regulated like the financial, oil and gas, health, manufacturing, and government sectors.

Nevertheless, HBC did undertake to continue supplying HBCA with current records of archival value and it was recognized that some level of records control was required to satisfy this commitment. The need to make a decision about the future of HBCA, and the lure of potential tax savings and operational cost reductions, ultimately served to push HBC along the road to establishing a records management program and realizing the dreams of HBCA archivists of receiving routine accessions of records through the collaborative efforts of archivists and records managers.

In the early 1990s, Peter Bower, Provincial Archivist of Manitoba, renewed discussions about the future of HBCA. Even though HBC's archives had been officially deposited with the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, it was not necessarily a permanent arrangement. Furthermore, HBC still owned the records. At a 1992 meeting, the HBC Executive Committee considered a recommendation to transfer ownership of HBC archives to the Manitoba Government.⁵⁴ Shortly afterwards, Huband wrote to Bower to propose that HBC transfer title of the Hudson's Bay archives to the Provincial Archives.

53 In 1981, HBC sold its shares in the G.W. Robinson Company and HB Oil and Gas; in 1982 HBC closed its unprofitable Shop-Rite Catalogue store chain.

54 HBC, AD07 (Corporate Secretary's Files) "Executive Committee Minutes" – Report to Executive Committee, October 1992.

The *Cultural Property Export and Import Act*, designed to ensure preservation of cultural property in Canada, also firmly established the practice of issuing tax credits for gifts of cultural property; by donating the Hudson's Bay archives to Manitoba, HBC would very likely get certification from the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board and receive a large tax credit.⁵⁵ HBC intended to use most of the resulting tax savings to establish a foundation, which would in part fund the operating costs of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Also as part of the proposal, HBC intended to set up an internal records management program.⁵⁶ Part of the expected tax saving was to be used as the funding base for the company's records management function because "this is a function which is desirable for operating efficiency and necessary if we are to comply with an obligation to provide ongoing materials of archival importance."⁵⁷ HBC had finally found a way to overcome the persistent economic barrier to creating and operating a comprehensive records management program. Thus, the scene was set, but it would still take a few years to be realized.

Taking advantage of the momentum of the 10 May 1993 donation agreement, Rolph Huband hired records management consultant Roy Schaeffer to conduct a feasibility study for a records retention and management program. Schaeffer, whose previous experience included working as an archivist for the Law Society of Upper Canada, was also managing a project to inventory and appraise all of the records of Woodwards, a recently acquired department store. Activities of the feasibility study were to include research into the legal requirements for retention, interviews with staff, physical examination of all records and record-keeping practices, analysis of records creation, use and transfer, discussions with the Archives staff to determine their requirements and priorities regarding transfer of permanent records, and the development of an implementation plan.⁵⁸ Records retention was the priority. Schaeffer conducted a thorough and detailed study of the company's records and retention practices and found that records retention policies were:

... ad-hoc and inconsistent in design and application. No procedures have been established for the identification and regular transfer of archival material. Only a small quantity of Corporate/Bay records are preserved, and these move to the archives only

55 HBC first investigated the tax write-off possibilities (if the HBCA were donated permanently) in 1987.

56 HBC, Box T-176-2/ File "Archives-Appraisals"/ Letter from R. Huband to Peter Bower, November 1992.

57 HBC, AD07 (Corporate Secretary's Files)/ "Executive Committee Minutes" – Report to Executive Committee, Oct. 23, 1992.

58 HBC, AD07 (Corporate Secretary's Files)/Memo from Huband to senior staff informing on the engagement of Roy Schaeffer, June 10, 1993.

on an ad hoc basis at the initiative or discretion of the Corporate Secretary, or other members of senior management.⁵⁹

Schaeffer's findings were consistent with those of earlier formal and informal reports. Despite repeated suggestions to develop comprehensive retention schedules, nothing had been done and, consequently, the records situation had hardly changed from the early twentieth century. Schaeffer repeated the Archives litany that the absence of mechanisms for regular routine transfers of records of archival value had a negative impact on the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and "hampered its mission to reflect the modern development of the company."⁶⁰ Therefore, he recommended annual transfers of records as part of a routine process of retention scheduling. Significantly, Schaeffer's study revealed that professional help was needed for the implementation of a records management program. He recommended that records management should be established as a corporate function, with professional staff given a primary responsibility to develop a records retention program, retention schedules, records database, records centre management and a records retention manual, and a secondary focus on active records management services. He also recommended the creation of a Records Management Committee composed of representatives from Tax, Legal, Audit, Information Services, and HBCA.

These recommendations were not immediately acted upon, partly because of the lengthy senior management review process, and partly because of the activities surrounding the formal transfer of ownership of HBC's archives to the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, which were completed in 1994. An important event, this "gift to the nation" ensured the future protection of HBC's archival legacy and public access to the records. HBC also expressed its intent to make future donations of records, and in order to facilitate selection and preservation of archival records, the company formally agreed to hire a full-time records manager to establish and operate a records management program.

This formal commitment inspired HBCA to guide HBC along the path to hiring a records manager. Gerry Berkowski, who previously worked in the Public Access and Freedom of Information Unit of the Government Records division of PAM and was now the new Head, Acquisitions and Access for HBCA, conducted a site visit in early 1995. In his subsequent report, Berkowski concurred with the findings of Schaeffer's study, provided a convincing argument regarding the full benefits of records management to

59 HBC, AD07, "Schaeffer Report," p. 14.

60 Ibid., p. 38.

HBC, and proposed the creation of a records management committee as a “logical and feasible approach to get the process going.”⁶¹ His proposal received strong support from both his superiors and from HBC. On the recommendation of Berkowski, Huband’s successor, Brian Grose, revived the dormant records management initiative and, with Berkowski’s assistance, established a Records Management Committee along the lines first proposed by Schaeffer – with the goal of implementing a records management program.

The newly-formed Records Management Committee first met in June 1995 and served as a crucial first step in building the program. Its role and mission was to establish policy, develop an action plan for records management implementation, and begin the process of documenting what records existed. The intended record-keeping objectives were to reduce costs, rationalize office procedures, and ensure that information was protected and retrievable.⁶² The Committee duly discussed Schaeffer’s 1993 report, and agreed that professional help was required and that records management should be a corporate function. Before implementing any program, the Committee decided to conduct a pilot project to get a better idea of the scope and costs; consequently, a consultant was hired to provide the context for launching a records management program. The resulting pilot project focused on three departments and was completed in 1996. Results of this pilot indicated that the company had incurred certain financial losses between 1990 and 1993 that were directly related to the lack of sound information management practices, and that there had been other intangible costs of lost staff time, delays in meeting tax audit requirements, and unfavourable pension settlements. Throughout the organization, there was a universal lack of consistency in dealing with records. Although these reported problems were not uncommon for a large organization, they did serve the intended purpose of getting the attention of HBC’s senior management, a necessary skill for records management to ensure program support and success (there is a large body of literature on the subject of advocacy and advising best practices for gaining senior management support for records and information management initiatives). In discussing the report and its recommendations, the Records Management Committee recognized that without strong policies in place for the protection

61 HBC, AD07 (Corporate Secretary’s Files)/ Site Visit Report by G. Berkowski, “HBC Records Management and HBCA, 1995.” “The HBC can’t provide records of historic significance without a clear idea of HBC’s current organization structure, how divisions and departments function, and the records systems that support those functions. Records management would generate this contextual information. It would provide the HBC and HBCA with the ability to determine archival values, and realize, in advance, the full benefits of deposits of records for tax purposes.”

62 HBC, AD07 (Executive Subject Files)/ File “Records Management Committee”/ HBC Records Management Committee Meeting Minutes, June 26, 1995.

of archival information, HBC could be faced with a stagnant archival collection. However, this records management initiative was once again suspended when Zellers's head offices were moved from Montreal to Toronto, and was only resumed in October 1997. HBC, nevertheless, continued to be committed to the preservation of its history, taking pride in its longevity and legacy, and continuing to use it as a positive public relations tool.

During the 1996 hiatus, members of the Records Management Committee launched two independent initiatives regarding the handling of confidential information. Involvement in the Committee had created awareness among members of the poor information management practices across the company and the record control elements that were lacking from existing policies. Schaeffer's study had also underscored the financial losses that could be directly connected to inadequate information management practices. Most likely as a result of these findings and as a means of doing damage control until a professional records manager was hired, the Vice President of Corporate Control undertook the first initiative: to define and implement procedures for stores to handle and dispose of confidential records. Confidential information was defined as any type of sensitive material that could affect the well-being of the company if disclosed to unauthorized parties. The updated accounting manual included a new policy covering record retention and disposal of confidential information, and established minimum records retention requirements. The purpose of the policy was to maintain store, distribution centre, and head office records in accordance with a systematic record retention schedule that reflected the needs of the business and various regulatory agencies. It was also designed to identify confidential information that must be protected from unauthorized access, and to implement an effective, regular, and uniform method of disposal of confidential and non-confidential information. Confidential records were to be shredded, while non-confidential information could be disposed of in regular recycling bins. This policy applied to paper documentation only; records retention was assigned at the document level. There was no attempt to organize and classify records into series, or identify and preserve records of archival interest. Rather, the goal was to protect the Company from the risks associated with mishandled confidential records including penalties, lawsuits and consumer complaints, and to seek financial savings through efficient practices. Furthermore, this policy was limited to the finance group and focused on store records, as well as transactional records such as merchandise, banking, inventory, sales audit, and payroll.

The second initiative was organized by the Vice President of Information Services to investigate the development of records retention and disposal processes for confidential information within their department. Employees were instructed to review and put into practice processes for records control, with an eye to implementing an appropriate retention and disposal scheme for

Information Services. The review revealed that no department-wide guidelines or standards existed to define what was confidential and what retention schedules to follow. The project's objectives were to address the vulnerabilities of mishandled confidential information, reclaim space and improve productivity, and formalize practical processes for records retention and disposal of confidential records. Yet again, this initiative did not result in a records management program and was soon abandoned.

There were limits to the 1996 Information Services and Corporate Control initiatives. Both concentrated their focus on paper-based records and classification of confidential information. They advocated implementation of a regular selection process, and appropriate and timely disposal of paper records, but neglected other aspects of a records management program such as classification systems, alternative media, equipment and filing systems, and additional active records controls. They also overlooked long-term preservation concerns. These initiatives addressed the needs of current business use and timely disposal, but not those of long-term accessibility and use.

Yet while these initiatives themselves did not result in a records management program, the members of the Records Management Committee did provide the support required to bring the long-awaited records management initiative to fruition in the late 1990s. HBCA staff continued to strive to keep the records management project viable because its success was "vital to making the Archives a growing and developing institution, not dead storage for historical records."⁶³ Berkowski was asked to make a presentation on records management to senior managers and helped to draft a records and information proposal, which recommended approving costs for a records management initiative. While management had been committed to the terms of the 1993 donation agreement requiring HBC to hire a records manager and to continue to preserve records for the archives, it was not in a position to implement the recommendations of Schaefer and Berkowski until a clear funding plan was in place. Finally, in 1997, HBC approved the expenditure for the establishment of the records management program and the hiring of a records manager. The first records manager, Brenda Hobbs, was hired in February 1998, and was responsible for coordinating the development of all aspects of HBC's records and information program.

Did the newly created records management program meet the expectations of its creators? It took a few years to develop and implement the policies and procedures necessary for both physical and intellectual control of the company's records; in the meantime, the archives function continued to be the

63 HBC, AD07 (VP Tax Financial Planning's Files)/ HBCA: Annual Report to the Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, February 1996.

responsibility of the HBCA. Cooperation between HBC records managers and HBCA archivists was necessary to ensure that the intended goals were realized. They began meeting to set joint planning priorities, with HBCA focusing on the archival dimension of the program, recognizing the need to augment the records management function with a strong archival presence. This approach was based on the assumption that archives and records management functions were interdependent and should therefore be tightly integrated.⁶⁴ The Records Manager's first task was to inventory and determine the disposition of nearly forty thousand linear feet of poorly-described records housed in multiple storage locations; a second challenge was to assess the impact of a new CEO initiative, the so-called Electronic Office Task Force. Work on the classification system and retention schedules began two years later, by which time the records management department consisted of four staff members. Today, the records management program has been implemented at head office and extended to all store locations. Policies cover the full life cycle of records to ensure that archival records are identified from the point of creation, and maintained until their eventual transfer and donation to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Both parties recognize that effective retention scheduling and records preservation require ongoing cooperation and integration of records management and archival roles. In fact, the collaborative effort resulted in the 2007 donation to the HBCA of 425 linear metres of records covering twentieth-century operations.

Archivists, Records Managers, and Electronic Records

Hudson's Bay Company has been called unique because of the archival legacy that it has not only preserved but has also given to Canada, and because of its ongoing commitment to continually supply records of archival interest for the benefit of future scholarship. Common elements from twentieth-century evolution of record keeping practices, which can be seen in the records management experience of the Hudson's Bay Company, also illuminate broader trends in records management and archives, particularly as they relate to the management of electronic records; one of these is the emergence and professionalization of the records management discipline in North America, and the perceived schism between the archival and records management functions. Dan Zeleny succinctly sums up the traditionally held view of the two functions: "the records manager is basically a business administrator and the

64 HBC, AD07 (VP Tax Financial Planning's Files)/ HBCA Report to Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, March 1999.

archivist is basically an historian.”⁶⁵ This divide was clearly seen at HBC, where the Archives Department was created long before the Records Management Department, and with a different purpose. The focus of the former was to preserve and promote company history, and to facilitate access to historical records in the interests of publication and scholarship, while the focus of the latter was the life cycle management of the company’s current records, and resulting financial savings and efficiencies.

Those advocating for the reduction of the perceived schism through a strong partnership between archivists and records managers are now branching out in a new direction, with the aim of ensuring the preservation of electronic records for current business requirements and future users.⁶⁶ The task of selecting electronic records for preservation, and developing programs that will not only ensure their accessibility over time but will also preserve their authenticity, integrity, and reliability, necessitates a collaborative effort between records managers and archivists, similar to that displayed by HBC and HBCA. In 1993, Charles Dollar wrote that “the changing information technology environment makes it imperative that archivists and records managers develop a vision of the future of their professions, stake out conceptually and practically what they bring to the organization and use of electronically recorded information, and initiate dialog with the larger information-handling community.”⁶⁷ Many archivists and records managers believe that a team approach to digital preservation with clearly defined roles is imperative, and that there is a need for digital preservation projects with the object of ensuring that records of long-term, historical value to the organization are reliable, authentic, and useable. Efforts to ensure that such records are preserved should start at the point of their creation and continue through to disposition; consequently, both archivists and records managers should participate in the design of record-keeping and information resource systems to ensure that retention and appraisal functionalities, as well as the capture of contextual information essential for maintaining records integrity and preserving provenance, are included in system specifications.

65 Zelenyj, p. 67.

66 Ibid., p. 68. See also Mike Marsh, Ineke Deserno, and Donna Kynaston, “Records Managers in the Global Business Environment: The Role of the Records Manager has Evolved Over Time Along with the Technologies Used to Collect, Manage, and Preserve Records,” *The Information Management Journal* vol. 39, no. 2 (March/April 2005), pp. 30–36; Sue Myburgh, “Records Management and Archives: Finding Common Ground,” *The Information Management Journal* (March/April 2005), pp. 24–29; Michael Nelson, “Records in the Modern Workplace: Management Concerns,” *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 80–87; Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Limited Identities for a Common Identity: Archivists in the Twenty-First Century,” *Archivaria* 41 (Spring 1996), pp. 6–30.

67 Dollar, p. 38.

These collaborative efforts are now clearly visible at HBC. Because of HBC's obligation to preserve and donate its historical records to the Archives, and because of HBCA's mandate to make such records available to the public for research, each has a stake in records preservation regardless of the medium of the record. Until recently, the HBCA has only had to contend with preservation issues related primarily to paper, cartographic, and photographic records; however, a growing percentage of the records that HBC now produces are created and stored only in digital formats, and attention must now be given to managing electronic records that have long-term retention requirements. Accordingly, HBC's Records Management Department will need to work closely with HBCA to define roles and responsibilities, select records requiring preservation, ensure that the proper records management and archival functionality is built into systems, and plan the best approach to ensure both the current and future accessibility of HBC's electronic records.

Conclusion

The evolution of recordkeeping at the Hudson's Bay Company, particularly in the twentieth century, illustrates the impact of changing business practices and a growing workforce that resulted in the increased production of records and required new, sophisticated systems to manage them. Records management programs offer the promise of efficient records control with a related benefit of expenditure reduction. As with many other organizations, particularly within the government sector, the HBC initiatives to implement such a program tended to come from those departments or individuals who had a vested interest in the records. Senior management constantly needed to be convinced of the value and benefits of records management, as well as the important connection between records management and archival programs. The implementation of any record-keeping initiative has not traditionally been seen as a priority and delays were generally due to a lack of funding; consequently, many corporate archives, particularly within the financial sector, still have a problem convincing their management of the value of records and archives.

Records management as a function and a profession has developed unevenly within and across the public and private sectors in Canada. The profession has grown significantly over the past fifty years, and while this growth may mark the general acceptance of the function, it does not reflect the success of individual programs. Even though ARMA International currently has over eleven thousand members, the size, scope, and penetration of information management programs within organizations varies significantly. A 2005 survey of records professionals revealed that such programs continue to be under-funded. In this light, it is not surprising that thirty-two percent of

respondents rated their programs as “fair” or “marginal.”⁶⁸ Unfortunately, very little has been written about the status of records management in the Canadian private sector, leaving a notable gap in the literature.⁶⁹ Many Canadian firms still do not have extensive records management programs, and progress in those that do has been uneven. Corporate records management programs tend to be transitory and are easily affected by reorganization, loss of staff, or changes in the financial status of the company. Although the development of a formal records management program was slow at HBC, the Company was not completely out of step with what was occurring in other organizations: proponents for records management at HBC had to gain the support of senior management, find a solution to the funding obstacle, and make a legal commitment before the records management program was officially sanctioned and could be implemented.

Where HBC *does* stand out in the private sector is in the management of its archives, and the unique relationship between the Company and the HBCA. Proud of its heritage, HBC has been dedicated to the preservation and use of its records since the seventeenth century. While the company had successfully operated its own archival program for many years, by transferring its archival legacy to the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and by establishing a foundation to help fund the operation of the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, HBC ensured the long-term care and accessibility of the records. Committed to the long-term viability of the HBCA, the Company eventually instituted a full-fledged records management program, which would not only support HBC’s current record-keeping operations but had the potential to ensure future transfers of archival records to the Archives. The future of records management and archival preservation at HBC now depends on the uninterrupted support of this program, regular transfers of archival records, as well as a collaborative relationship between HBC records managers and HBCA archivists. While HBC’s record-keeping policies developed slowly and unevenly, the effort has ultimately resulted in a strong and comprehensive records management program that will continue to contribute significantly to the Canadian archival record.

68 Robert F. Williams and Lori J. Ashley, *2005 Electronic Records Management Survey. A Renewed Call to Action* (Chicago, 2005), p. 18.

69 There is a similar gap in archival literature regarding Canadian business archives. Chris Hives, “History, Business Records, and Corporate Archives in North America,” *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986), p. 56.