

# Study in Documents

## Indian Department Headquarters

### Records, 1844–1861: A Case Study in

### Recordkeeping and Archival Custody



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**RÉSUMÉ** Cette étude décrit les systèmes de gestion de documents et les pratiques du bureau du ministère indien, 1844-1861, période durant laquelle le secrétaire du gouverneur général servait comme surintendant en chef des affaires indiennes. Dans l'histoire de la gestion des documents du ministère indien, cette période a précédé une transition. Le bureau du surintendant en chef du ministère indien était petit et ses pratiques reflétaient une approche laissez-faire; les documents se trouvaient dans des dossiers (« *dockets* »), des livres de copies de lettres, des registres et des sommaires, des formes de documents qui sont inconnus de la plupart des chercheurs d'aujourd'hui. D'énormes changements devaient encore se produire dans le dernier quart du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle quand la prolifération du papier, résultant de l'expansion géographique et des besoins des politiques d'assimilation, a obligé l'agence de se pencher sur les lacunes d'un système de gestion de documents conçu pour une bureaucratie beaucoup moins complexe. Cet article dresse le chemin par lequel les documents du bureau du ministère indien ont voyagé à partir de l'entreposage semi-actif du ministère jusqu'à leur versement aux archives et leur état actuel de classement et de description à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada.

**ABSTRACT** This study describes the records management system and practices of the Indian Department headquarters, 1844–1861, the period during which the civil secretary to the governor general served as superintendent general of Indian Affairs (SGIA). In the history of Indian Department recordkeeping, the period was a preface to transition. The SGIA office was small; its practices reflected a laissez-faire approach to business; its records world was one of dockets and letter books, registers and abstracts, document forms that are unfamiliar to much of the researching public today. Momentous changes were to come in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when a paper explosion occasioned by geographical expansion and the demands of assimilation policies forced the agency to address the inadequacies of a records management system designed for a less complex bureaucracy. The article then sketches the route by which the records of the SGIA office travelled from contemporary use through semi-active departmental storage to archival custody and to their present state of arrangement and description at Library and Archives Canada.

In his article “Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898–1958,” Terry Cook underlines the importance to an understanding of records of studying not only their administrative context but also the manner in which they have been managed. An investigation of the types of recordkeeping systems used to control documents, of the method by which records were indexed to facilitate retrieval and use by their creators, and of the manner in which successor agencies incorporated inherited documents into their own holdings, Cook argues, does more than simply serve the interests of the modern user by pinpointing current locations and explaining gaps and anomalies. An examination of the history of the records, Cook asserts, should reveal much about the history, nature, and functions of the organization that created and maintained them.

As a tentative step in the direction of research that Cook recommends, the following study attempts, first, to provide a glimpse of the manner in which a small mid-nineteenth-century government office – that of the Civil Secretary acting in the capacity of Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (SGIA) – managed its incoming and outgoing correspondence and, second, to describe aspects of the subsequent custodial history of these documents. The focus is very much on the records themselves, on how they were organized and managed by their creating agency and its successors in the course of departmental business, and how archival treatment at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) has brought them to the state in which they are found today. It is much less ambitious in its goals than was Cook in his examination of the records of the Northern Administration. It does not speak to the manner in which the records document the lives of the people who were their subjects – the First Nations population of the Province of Canada and the members of the settler society who interacted with Aboriginal peoples through the intermediary of the Indian Department. Neither does it attempt to address the impact that Indian Department recordkeeping practices of the mid-nineteenth century had on First Nations peoples and their settler society neighbours.<sup>2</sup> Worthwhile as

- 1 Published in Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, eds., *For Purposes of Dominion: Essays in Honour of Morris Zaslow* (North York, ON, 1989). While Cook focuses on the archives of a government agency, JoAnne Yates makes a similar case in the study of American business records in her article “From Press Book and Pigeonhole to Vertical Filing: Revolution in Storage and Access Systems for Correspondence,” *The Journal of Business Communication* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 5–26.
- 2 An obvious example is the chaos that resulted from the inadequacies of Indian Department financial and land-related recordkeeping, the effects of which remain with us today and the evidence of which is laid bare all too frequently in modern claims negotiations and court actions. For those interested in this aspect of the subject, good points of departure are the reports of the various commissions of inquiry that investigated the Indian Department between 1828 and 1858. They variously decry the department’s failure to institute a proper system of bookkeeping for the accounting of Indian monies held in trust; the inability to maintain accurate and readily accessible records of the sale of surrendered Indian lands and

they would be, such examinations merit treatment in separate and considerably more extensive studies.

A version of this paper was prepared originally as an appendix to a finding aid. Its intent was to put some contextual flesh on the bones of an otherwise prosaic “how-to” guide to a records series. As such, the principal target audience was originally, and remains largely in the adaptation presented here, the researching public, who in order to gain access to the documents today must make sense of the documentary forms, the recordkeeping systems, and the tools generated by both the record creators and subsequent custodians. Yet it is hoped that the piece may also be of interest to archivists, particularly those unfamiliar with the mid-nineteenth-century Indian Department and its records management regime or with the archival treatment practices of LAC in the century that followed.

### Administrative History Context

The Commission of Inquiry established in 1842 under Governor General Sir Charles Bagot to investigate the administration of Indian affairs in the Province of Canada was a watershed in the history of the management of the Indian Department. Included among the commission’s findings, delivered in its first report in January 1844, were recommendations for the reunification of the Indian Department (split into separate branches for Upper and Lower Canada since 1830); the placement of overall management of the Indians under the civil secretary, “with the view of its being brought more immediately under the notice of the Governor-General;”<sup>3</sup> the future conduct of the central business and correspondence of the department at the seat of government, under the superintendence of a chief clerk, to be assisted by an accountant; and the centralization of headquarters records.<sup>4</sup> Little time was lost in transforming the commission’s

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monies owing from those sales; and the paucity of statistical information on the economic and social activities of the Department’s wards, data which could be used to assess the success or failure of policy. These reports are analyzed in John Leslie, *Commissions of Inquiry into Indian Affairs in the Canadas, 1828–1858* (Ottawa, 1985).

- 3 Fundamental to an understanding of the management of Indian affairs prior to 1860 is the fact that it remained a responsibility of the imperial government. The Indian Department was not an agency of the government of the Province of Canada. Ultimate authority for Indian affairs rested with the governor general as representative of the Crown. It is also important to bear in mind that not all matters relating to First Nations were managed by the Indian Department. Responsibility for various aspects of Indian affairs was distributed. The survey and sale of Indian lands, for example, were carried out by the Surveyor General and the Commissioner of Crown Lands, respectively; the Receiver General had accounting responsibility for monies received from sales; as a vestige of the strong historical links that First Nations had with the British military, the Commissariat played a major role in the provision of the annual presents distributed to bands.
- 4 Rawson William Rawson, John Davidson, and William Hepburn, “Report on the Affairs of the Indians in Canada: Laid before the Legislative Assembly, 20th March 1845,” *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada*, 1847, Appendix T, Appendix 1.

recommendations into actions. With the almost immediate departure of the incumbent civil secretary, Rawson W. Rawson, the Governor General appointed his private secretary, Captain James Macaulay Higginson, to the post effective 30 January 1844. On 23 April, Higginson informed Chief Superintendent Samuel Peters Jarvis (who, as the senior officer of the Indian Department in Upper Canada since 1837, had come under particular scrutiny in the recent investigations for “various and grave irregularities” in the conduct of his duties) of the new headquarters management structure to be put in place in the reunited Indian Department. As presaged in the commission report, Jarvis was advised that central business and correspondence would now be conducted at the seat of government under the orders of the civil secretary. Resident superintendents in Canada West, who had heretofore reported to Jarvis, would be instructed to correspond henceforth directly with the civil secretary on all matters connected with their charge. These changes were to take effect on 15 May.

Higginson, who assumed the title Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (SGIA) *ex officio* in mid-May,<sup>5</sup> was faced with a daunting task. Still carrying the considerable responsibilities of civil secretary,<sup>6</sup> along now with those of SGIA, he was expected to guide the implementation of the plans then being formulated to address failings in the management of the Indian Department that the Bagot Commission report had identified. Securing the services of a good assistant to handle the day-to-day operation of the new department headquarters office was critical to the success of this mission since the SGIA could devote only a part of his energies to Indian affairs. With Chief Superintendent Jarvis demoted to a position of superintendence over only those First Nations resident in the central region of Canada West, as if to add insult to injury, the clerk in his office, George

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Although Rawson, Davidson, and Hepburn were the officers commissioned in October 1842 to form the investigative body, it has generally come to be referred to as the Bagot Commission, named for the governor general responsible for the appointments.

- 5 Higginson served as SGIA until May 1846. His successors included George Vardon (acting), June 1846 to March 1847; Major T.E. Campbell, March 1847 to November 1849; Colonel R. Bruce, December 1849 to May 1854; Laurence Oliphant, June to December 1854; Viscount Bury, December 1854 to January 1856; S.Y. Chesley (acting), January to February 1856; R.T. Pennefather, February 1856 to June 1860.
- 6 Archivist Patricia Kennedy has described the work of the civil secretary as follows: “The primary function of the Civil Secretary to the Governor was to support the civil administration of the province through the management of correspondence. This included receipt and acknowledgement of petitions, memorials and applications for office; preparation and recording of replies; transmission of messages and documents to and from the Legislature; referral of petitions to the appropriate public departments; and preparation of those licences to which the governor’s Privy Seal was affixed.” See Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), inventory description for the Office of the Governor General of Canada fonds (Record Group [hereafter RG] 7), Civil Secretary’s Office correspondence received (series G 20).

Vardon,<sup>7</sup> was now reassigned to assist Higginson and attached for that purpose to the latter's office in the capacity of chief clerk. Principal among Vardon's new duties was the management of the office correspondence, including the drafting of routine letters and the filing of all documents received, as well as financial operations such as the preparation of accounts and estimates, requisitions, and money warrants. In order to ensure a smooth transition to the new management regime, Jarvis was instructed to deliver over to Vardon the records of the department that he had accumulated in his capacity as chief superintendent.

Indeed, there was some urgency on this last point as the seat of government was in the process of relocating from Kingston to Montreal and public offices in Kingston were slated to close as of 15 May. Ongoing Indian Department business demanded that records be made available as soon as possible in the Montreal office. But over the following month, Jarvis disputed the surrender of the records accumulated during his service in the Upper Canada headquarters of the Indian Department prior to Union. In the end, he won a limited reprieve. On 27 May, Higginson informed him that the Governor General had relented "in order to obviate the difficulty you seem to anticipate from the want of certain references," and that a partial alteration in the former arrangements would be made. Jarvis was authorized to retain records that related to those tribes under his immediate superintendence; all others, Jarvis was reminded, were to be delivered to Vardon. Regardless of the best intentions in the planning of the move of the Indian Department headquarters to Montreal, the office in Kingston closed only on 5 June. And even as of that date, Jarvis had yet to deliver up the records, forcing Vardon to delay further his move to the new seat of government.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite

7 Educated at Sandhurst, Vardon arrived in Canada in 1832 and commenced his public service in October 1839. As chief clerk in a very small office, Vardon held a position of considerable administrative responsibility, particularly as regards recordkeeping. Moreover, in July 1845, his title was elevated to that of "Assistant Superintendent General and Accountant" (see "List of Indian Department officers and salaries, September 1846" in LAC, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Indian and Inuit Affairs Program sous-fonds (RG 10), Office of the Civil Secretary in the Province of Canada series, General Operational Records sub-series, vol. 267). See also LAC, the George Vardon fonds, Manuscript Group (hereafter MG) 19, F 24. Solomon Yeomans Chesley joined the headquarters office in 1845 as "second clerk" under Vardon. Vardon was succeeded as chief clerk in 1851 by Michael Turnor, who held the post for the remainder of the period during which the civil secretary served as SGIA. In 1851, Chesley took over the position of departmental accountant. However, as Chesley's long service gave him experience far greater than that of Turnor, it was he rather than the chief clerk who acted as SGIA during periods of his superior's absence, assuming the role de facto of assistant superintendent general. Moreover, after 1851 Chesley, not Turnor, had primary responsibility for the office recordkeeping system, a job normally assigned to a chief clerk (see "Report of the Special Commissioners appointed on the 8th of September, 1856, to Investigate Indian Affairs in Canada," *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada*, Sessional Papers, Appendix No. 21, 1858).

8 See LAC, RG 7, Office of the Governor-in-Chief of the Province of Canada series, Letter Books sub-series, Civil Secretary's Letter Books sub-sub-series (G17 C), vol. 10, J.M.

these inconveniences of physical relocation and Jarvis's tenacious attempts to retain control over the records of his now reduced administration, the business of the Indian Department headquarters carried on. And to mark the beginning of the department's centralized regime, new tools for correspondence management – registers and letter books – were opened.

Before turning to a description of these tools and their place in office workflow, it is worth emphasizing that what is described here is not a "subject file" system. It is a "register–docket–letter book" system, i.e., one that records the receipt of each incoming letter in a register, retains and stores the item in a docket once action on it has been completed, and keeps physically separate a copy of the outgoing reply in a letter book. It would be decades before a post-Confederation Indian Affairs Branch headquarters office introduced the subject file into its records management world and, in so doing, brought together incoming and outgoing correspondence relating to a transaction on a file. It should also be noted that the following discussion focuses primarily on the three elements that make up the main correspondence management system of the department headquarters – registers, dockets and letter books. Certainly the office inherited, created, and maintained many other records. Two of the more obvious types are those related to the management of accounts and of lands sold or leased for the benefit of the Indians, although, as noted earlier, in both these cases other departments of government – the Commissioner of Crown Lands and the Receiver General – played significant roles and maintained many relevant records. However, the scant evidence available about office procedure permits little comment on the extent and nature of such ancillary records and how they were maintained. To date no contemporary inventory of the headquarters' holdings has been located. Moreover, a certain quantity of ancillary records created and maintained in the SGIA's office was inherited by successor Indian Department and post-Confederation Department of Indian Affairs administrations and incorporated into their recordkeeping systems. Much of what can be discerned about the extent and state of those records that fall outside the

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Higginson to S.P. Jarvis, 23 and 25 April 1844, 146 and 148. See also LAC, RG 10, vol. 510, Higginson to Jarvis, 27 May 1844, 8; and LAC, RG 7, G 17, vol. 10, Higginson's memorandum to Vardon, 4 June 1844, 206. The register of Jarvis's incoming correspondence shows that as late as 21 June he was still being exhorted to forward "certain Books, etc." to Montreal (see RG 10, vol. 748). No evidence has yet been found of a demand having been placed on Lt.-Colonel Duncan Campbell Napier, Secretary of Indian Affairs in Lower Canada (and, as such, roughly Jarvis's equivalent in that province prior to Union) to deliver up records to Vardon's care. Significant differences in the manner in which the Indian Department's business was managed historically in the Lower and Upper Provinces may explain this. Moreover, Napier was a long-serving and trusted officer, based at Montreal since 1840. At the time of Napier's retirement in 1857, it is assumed that the SGIA's office inherited responsibility for the records he had created and maintained (and which are largely found today at LAC in the Secretary of Indian Affairs, Lower Canada and Canada East, and Resident Agent at Montreal series of RG 10).

structured confines of bound registers/letter books and bundled docketts has to be based upon evidence that survives in the records themselves, in particular the notations made in the registers by contemporary clerks.

## The Records

### *a) Incoming correspondence registers*

The incoming letter registers were the key element in the management of the office's workflow. Not only were the registers used to record the receipt of a letter and provide an encapsulation of the action taken on the matter raised in the correspondence, but they also provided the contemporary officers with storage location information for the document to facilitate its later retrieval, links to related records, and reference to any formal reply sent. The idea of controlling the incoming headquarters correspondence by means of registration was not a new one for the Indian Department. In fact, the practice began in the office of Chief Superintendent Jarvis in Upper Canada prior to Union. A committee investigating the workings of the Indian Department in that province in 1840 had recommended that Jarvis "should be obliged to keep a Book in which shall be entered all the correspondence of the Department with an Alphabetical Index." His clerk opened just such a register in September 1842.<sup>9</sup> However, the new SGIA's office turned a fresh page, so to speak, by beginning a new volume of this record. The first letter received and registered on 21 May 1844 was assigned the number 1. Subsequent pieces of incoming correspondence were similarly registered, in the date order of their receipt, and each was allocated the next available number.

Five registers were opened during the period in which the civil secretary served as SGIA.<sup>10</sup> Apart from minor variations in, for example, column layout,

9 Although published in its own right, the 1840 "Report of Committee No. 4 on Indian Affairs" appears also as an appendix to the Bagot Commission report. This quotation is taken from that reprint version. The register is found today in LAC, Office of the Chief Superintendent in Upper Canada series, RG 10, vol. 748.

10 Today the five registers constitute RG 10, vols. 752–56. In stating that five registers were opened, it is more correct to say that five survive. The final entry in the fifth register is 1589½ for a letter registered 31 December 1861. However, the docket covers of the correspondence registered in the successor office's system, that of Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Spragge, show that the register number sequence continued for some 100 numbers further (to at least 1688) for letters registered January to May 1862. This suggests that a sixth register was opened. With Spragge's appointment in March 1862 and the abandonment soon after of the register numbering practice of his predecessor in favour of a new system, Spragge's clerk superimposed new alpha-numeric identifiers onto the covers of docketts numbered beyond 1589½. The transition between the two numbering systems was complete by mid-May 1862, after which point no numbers from the SGIA system appear on docket covers. No sixth register has been located to date. Assuming that it must have existed

all exhibit a standard format. Each register comprises two sections. The first is a simple control and identification tool. At the front of each bound volume is a listing in columns of letters registered in that book, in ascending register number order. Beyond the register number, the listing provides nothing more than the name of the correspondent. The year of receipt frequently, although not always, heads each page, but the precise date of individual letter entries is not recorded. (See Figure 1, illustrating a typical register page that documents the registration of letters 9813 through 9924.)

“Name of correspondent” is, in most cases, a surname. However, it was common practice to record titles/positions rather than personal names. Correspondence from another government office, for example, is typically registered under the name of the relevant department (e.g., Commissioner of Crown Lands, or Provincial Secretary) rather than that of the specific office-holder. Correspondence from various bishops is registered as, for example, “Bishop of Bytown.” Where the correspondence emanates from a group or corporate entity rather than an individual, collective terms are often used in place of surnames; for example, “Six Nations Chiefs,” “Becancour Indians,” “Commercial Bank,” “Essex and Lambton Municipal Council,” and so forth. It is important for the user today to recognize such idiosyncrasies since these name/title/position conventions are also reflected in the entries found in the second section of each register volume where, for example, a letter from the Bishop of Toronto is abstracted under “B” for “Bishop” and one from the Provincial Secretary under “P” for “Provincial.”

The front section of the first register volume records the receipt of letters numbered 1–2930 (i.e., correspondence received between 21 May 1844 and the end of December 1847);<sup>11</sup> that of the next volume covers letters received January 1848 to September 1852 and numbered 2923–5899½ (overlapping a few entries from the previous register); the third book registers letters received between 1852 and 1856 and numbered 5900–9705. The fourth references letters received between 1856 and 1860 and numbered 9706–12483½. For some unknown reason the numbering system changes within the final volume. That register begins with 12484, but after entry 12765 a note appears: “Commence Again 31

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at one time, it may be that its use was suspended when Spragge’s clerk introduced the new numbering system and retroactively renumbered the docketts generated between January and May. Being of no further use, the “sixth register” in this scenario would likely have been destroyed.

11 Such was the close relationship in Higginson’s dual roles of civil secretary and SGIA that a transition period is evident in the two sets of registers maintained to support the correspondence of his different activities. For a period, entries for Indian affairs–related correspondence continued to be made in the registers maintained for the correspondence of Higginson acting in his capacity as civil secretary (see LAC, RG 7, series G 20, vol. 380), in effect duplicating those found in the registers maintained in the Indian Department for his correspondence related to his position as SGIA (LAC, RG 10, vol. 752).



9813	Public Works	9814	Anderson Capt	9815	Anderson Capt
9814	Anderson Capt	9815	Anderson Capt	9816	Anderson Capt
9815	Anderson Capt	9816	Anderson Capt	9817	Anderson Capt
9816	Anderson Capt	9817	Anderson Capt	9818	Anderson Capt
9817	Anderson Capt	9818	Anderson Capt	9819	Anderson Capt
9818	Anderson Capt	9819	Anderson Capt	9820	Anderson Capt
9819	Anderson Capt	9820	Anderson Capt	9821	Anderson Capt
9820	Anderson Capt	9821	Anderson Capt	9822	Anderson Capt
9821	Anderson Capt	9822	Anderson Capt	9823	Anderson Capt
9822	Anderson Capt	9823	Anderson Capt	9824	Anderson Capt
9823	Anderson Capt	9824	Anderson Capt	9825	Anderson Capt
9824	Anderson Capt	9825	Anderson Capt	9826	Anderson Capt
9825	Anderson Capt	9826	Anderson Capt	9827	Anderson Capt
9826	Anderson Capt	9827	Anderson Capt	9828	Anderson Capt
9827	Anderson Capt	9828	Anderson Capt	9829	Anderson Capt
9828	Anderson Capt	9829	Anderson Capt	9830	Anderson Capt
9829	Anderson Capt	9830	Anderson Capt	9831	Anderson Capt
9830	Anderson Capt	9831	Anderson Capt	9832	Anderson Capt
9831	Anderson Capt	9832	Anderson Capt	9833	Anderson Capt
9832	Anderson Capt	9833	Anderson Capt	9834	Anderson Capt
9833	Anderson Capt	9834	Anderson Capt	9835	Anderson Capt
9834	Anderson Capt	9835	Anderson Capt	9836	Anderson Capt
9835	Anderson Capt	9836	Anderson Capt	9837	Anderson Capt
9836	Anderson Capt	9837	Anderson Capt	9838	Anderson Capt
9837	Anderson Capt	9838	Anderson Capt	9839	Anderson Capt
9838	Anderson Capt	9839	Anderson Capt	9840	Anderson Capt
9839	Anderson Capt	9840	Anderson Capt	9841	Anderson Capt
9840	Anderson Capt	9841	Anderson Capt	9842	Anderson Capt
9841	Anderson Capt	9842	Anderson Capt	9843	Anderson Capt
9842	Anderson Capt	9843	Anderson Capt	9844	Anderson Capt
9843	Anderson Capt	9844	Anderson Capt	9845	Anderson Capt
9844	Anderson Capt	9845	Anderson Capt	9846	Anderson Capt
9845	Anderson Capt	9846	Anderson Capt	9847	Anderson Capt
9846	Anderson Capt	9847	Anderson Capt		
9847	Anderson Capt				

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**Figure 1.** Correspondence register, 1856–1860: 1 page. Reference: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds/RG 10, vol. 755/e010963417. Credit: © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada (2013).

1853

No.	Name.	Date. 1853	Received.	How Disposed of
6541	Clench J. B.	2 Feb	9 Feb	attached to 95482 of 1857
6554	Commons Lands	9 "	11 "	Refer'd to Napier 17 Feb 53 reg with copy of 1853 - Commons Lands
6554	Cheris Edward	5 "	11 "	Refer'd to Napier 11 Feb with copy of 662 1/2 Feb
6580	Clench J. B.	8 "	14 "	Ans'd 17th/1853
6589	Commons Ground		17	Paid by Wm B 876 mail 29 March 53
6590	Commons Lands	18 Feb	28 Feb	copy to Durham 27 March 53 with Cr 581/70
6602	Clench J. B.	28 "	7 March	
6603	do do	28 "	11 "	
6601	Copple M. O.	28 "	17 "	
6609	Commons of Lands	5 March	7 March	file in Clench 6631
6610	do do	7 "	8 "	Letter to Commons 24 Feb 1853
6612	Clench	3 "	9 "	
6613	Coffin J. William	3 "	9 "	Letter 3362 of 51
6619	Clench J. B.	3 "	10 "	Answered 21 March 1853
6629	Clench J. B.	9 "	17 "	Ans'd 19 March 53
6630	do do	9 "	17 "	Ans'd 17 March 1853
6631	do do	9 "	17 "	Ans'd plan's sent later 18 Feb 1853
6634	Whitice David M.D.	17 "	19 "	Refer'd to Napier 28 March 53 Letter filed with 516
6639	Clench Colonel	14 March	21 March	Ans'd 29 March 53
6641	Commons of Lands	19 "	22 "	Copy to Commons 16 May 1853
6645	Clench J. B.	10 "	23 "	Paid by Wm B 877 Mail 22 March
6646	do do	" "	" "	Ans'd 29 March 53
6647	do do	" "	" "	Ans'd 30 March 53 1/2 1/2 1/2 make copy of 6646 evaluation 20 March
6648	Commons of Lands	21 "	23 "	
6649	Commons of Lands	26 "	25 "	referred to an answer with letter 28 March

e010963418

Figure 2. Correspondence register, 1852–1856: 2 pages. Reference: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Subject of Letter

Acknowledgy Receipt of Cheques No 52 & 53 to L. Laube and David Buchanan  
 Enclose Schedule of the distribution of 230,000 Acres of land amongst the Indians of  
 Nova Canada. Recommends it being surveyed & boundaries marked.  
 For Remission of fine imposed for residing at the Indian Village of Upperhouse  
 Reports proceedings of a general Council respecting the distribution of presents  
 Encloses a Requisition for the annual interest money  
 Submits Schedule with Vouchers of pay for salary of Senior during Quarter ended  
 31<sup>st</sup> December 1852 for George Harant  
 Acknowledges receipt of £2,063 16. 9 on acct of Job W. 22. 2<sup>nd</sup> Consp. Provenant  
 Encloses a numerical list of the C. N. Indians entitled to share in the interest money  
 including Alexander Stewart  
 Encloses vouchers & schedule for 21 payments  
 On behalf of Job W. states that the last instalment on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Oct 19  
 4<sup>th</sup> Consp. of Interest has been paid to W. P. Peterson & Requests the Patent  
 Return Reference No 6367 accompanied by a Report on the Credit Int. paid in Southwick  
 Encloses copies of Orders & correspondence relating to the Credit Return on Security of Job  
 Encloses a schedule of receipts from the aged and infirm at Port Lorne for £26. 5 0  
 Reports the final payment for land at Coughnawaga Requests the Patent  
 Encloses copy of a proposed surrender by the Wyandotte of land in Sandwich &  
 2 letters from Mr Henry respecting Mr Polley's intertainer  
 B. Wright's Acct for Medicine to 1<sup>st</sup> March 239 16 9 Plus Report of cases of febrile & venereal  
 during the year ending 1<sup>st</sup> March 1853  
 February list of New cases amounting to £122. 8. 10 to Peter Jones in Southwick  
 Has failed to find the title to the Southwick land & advises the T. Jones to procure a new one  
 Encloses copies of Affidavits & letters from J. Malcolm in reference to Abraham Westcott  
 claim to the W. lot No. 1. 2<sup>nd</sup> Range & W. Pleasant Head Grantford  
 Requisition from Wyandotte for \$10 to pay a years wages to Chief & Interpreter Clark  
 Has entered in the schedule the Dept. Genl. proposes modification for distribution the  
 grant of land among the Lower Canada Indians  
 Account of Office Rent & Fuel Wood for year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1853 £13. 7. 11  
 Lay list for Quarters ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1853  
 Encloses a letter from Treasurer of County Essex respecting leases on Indian lands  
 in Essexville — Requests copy of 180<sup>th</sup> Ordals valuation of lots in Port Lorne — also  
 of David Rogers Bond to Mr Henry  
 The Indians claim to the Islands in Rice Lake is untenable  
 Knows no description or diagram of lots of land allocated to the New England Com-  
 pany in the Township of Smith, C. N.

e010963419

fonds/RG 10, vol. 754/e010963418, e010963419. Credit: © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada (2013).

March 1860.” At that point, the numbering begins again at 1 and continues until register number 1589½. This last number was assigned to a letter received 31 December 1861.<sup>12</sup>

The second section of each register comprises an abstract description of every item of correspondence registered in that particular volume. It is this abstract entry that provides the key information about an incoming letter’s fate. The abstract descriptions are arranged in alphabetically ordered blocks, letters from correspondents with surnames/titles/positions beginning with “A” being grouped together, and similarly “B,” “C,” etc. Within each of these alphabetical blocks, abstract entries are presented in ascending register number order (i.e., chronological – by date of receipt). Given that an abstract entry would have been begun soon after a letter’s initial listing in the first section of the register, there is no strict alphabetical order for the names/titles/positions of individual correspondents within each block. And, of course, abstracts of the many letters of a prolific correspondent, such as a department field officer, appear throughout the block, according to their date of receipt and registration. The abstract entries describe each piece of correspondence under the following headings: No. [register number]; Name [of correspondent]; Date [of letter]; [date] Received; How Disposed Of; and Subject of Letter. (See Figure 2, illustrating a typical abstract double page showing entries from 1853 for correspondents whose names begin with the letter “C.”)

The “No.,” “Date,” and “Received” columns in the abstract entries are straightforward and need no further comment. Anomalies surrounding “Name” have been mentioned already. The “Subject of Letter” column for each abstract entry provides a brief précis of the purpose of the letter. The entry in the “How Disposed Of” column maps the fate of the letter, indicating the nature (and often timing) of the department’s response and the link to any written reply issued and found in the outgoing letter books.

The registers have neither nominal nor subject indexes. Indexing of that sort simply was not a feature of the Indian Department headquarters registry during the years in which the civil secretary served as SGIA.<sup>13</sup> Once a letter had been

- 12 There is no obvious significance, in terms of the Indian Department’s administrative history, to the date 31 March 1860. The act that removed the Indian Department from imperial control and placed it under the Crown Lands Department of the Province of Canada took effect later in 1860. The order-in-council establishing the Office of the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs and appointing William Spragge to the position is dated 17 March 1862. Further research is required in order to find some rationale for the 31 March 1860 numbering change in the system.
- 13 The possibility that separate bound indexes did at one time exist and that they do not survive has to be considered. Some agencies that registered correspondence did create indexes in books separate from those used for the registers themselves. No such separate indexes have been located, and no evidence has been found to indicate that such tools ever existed. It seems unlikely that an agency that retained its registers for as long as the Indian Department

put away, the contemporary clerks relied upon their knowledge of the name/title/position of the correspondent in order to locate the item if it was required at a later date for related business. An anomaly occurs with the manner in which correspondence was recorded that transmitted orders issued by the Governor in Council to the department. One might logically expect to find incoming orders-in-council to have been registered in the list at the front of the book using the position/title of the correspondent (e.g., possibly one or other of the terms “Executive Council” or “Governor in Council”) and in the abstract section of the register in the block for the appropriate letter of the alphabet. In fact, the term “Order in Council” is used in the initial listing in place of the position/title of the correspondent, and the item is abstracted under the letter “O” with the words “Order in Council” appearing in the “Name” column of the abstract entry. There is no explanation in the records for this anomaly, although one can speculate that the importance attached to orders issued by the Governor in Council dictated that such documents be easily located in the system.

### ***b) Dockets***

“Docketing” refers to the process by which information about an incoming piece of correspondence and about the history of the transaction to which it related was recorded on the document itself. The term “docket” is also used for the physical document package – the incoming letter and its enclosures.<sup>14</sup> It is in this latter sense that LAC descriptions speak of the correspondence dockets of the SGIA. Following the registration of an incoming letter, and in order to facilitate both its flow through the office and its ultimate storage in a manner that would permit retrieval, it was necessary to inscribe identifying information onto the document. In many instances, the docket was constructed simply from the incoming letter itself. In such cases, typically the incoming letter was folded by the Indian Department clerk, thus usually providing a blank space on the back of the last page of the letter. Where no such space was available, a docket cover sheet (or “minute sheet,” the term found often in British literature)

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and its successors would have misplaced separate indexes, given how important such tools would have been in tracing records for retrieval.

14 The term “briefing” also appears in American literature on the history of nineteenth-century records management systems and practices. See, for example, Bess Glenn, “The Taft Commission and the Government’s Record Practices,” *American Archivist* 21, no. 3 (July 1958): 277–303. For descriptions of docketing practices in the British context, see Jill Pellow, *The Home Office, 1848–1914: From Clerks to Bureaucrats* (East Brunswick, NJ, 1982); or R.B. Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominion Offices*, Public Records Office Handbook no. 3 (London, 1964). Pugh defines the “docket” as “either the endorsement upon a despatch or letter briefly indicating its origin, contents, and method of disposal, or what is otherwise called a ‘paper’ i.e. a despatch or letter covered by a minute sheet.” The SGIA dockets are found today in LAC, RG 10, vols. 142–262B.

was provided. Some departments, such as that of the Provincial Secretary, used printed forms for these cover sheets. That was not the case in the Indian Department headquarters during the period of the SGIA's superintendence. Printed forms were used for other departmental purposes, but the docket cover sheets were handwritten throughout the period.

Information about the letter was written onto the blank space or the cover sheet by the clerk. This endorsement included: the number assigned to the letter during its registration; the name of the correspondent; the letter's date and date of receipt; and a précis of the letter's purpose. As action was taken to address the matter raised in the correspondence, the docket was further annotated. The information added corresponded to that entered into the register abstract entry for the letter; references to related documents, to other offices consulted, and to the date and location in an outgoing letter book of any formal reply were commonly recorded in both the register and on the docket. Frequently, directions for the preparation of a response and a draft, or at least the main points of the text to be used in that reply document, were also written onto available space on the incoming letter. With these instructions, the clerk would draft the outgoing reply. Separate internal memoranda created in the course of dealing with the transaction are very rare. Relatively few dockets, as found today, include separate drafts of the replies that were sent out. However, a number of items identified during archival treatment of the records as drafts were drawn together at LAC and form a separate sub-series of the records today. More will be said later about these documents.

The folded document package was stored initially in a pigeonhole arrangement. The docketing process, which saw the transcription onto the outside cover of the package of the important identification elements of the piece of correspondence and which summarized the history of action taken, made the pigeonhole storage method practicable; a docket required for subsequent business could be readily identified by the information inscribed on its cover. Eventually, however, as the pigeonholes filled with these correspondence packages, dockets were moved to other less immediately accessible storage. Many Indian Department headquarters dockets comprised only a single piece of incoming correspondence. In other cases, enclosures (sometimes extensive) accompanied the principal document and these were normally kept together with it as part of the docket. However, as the system evolved, many dockets were brought together physically and tied with tape into multi-docket transaction-specific bundles. As new incoming correspondence related to a transaction for which a docket already existed was registered, a new docket was created for it and placed with the existing related one. Indeed, if the transaction played out over a number of years and required many dockets of correspondence to bring it to completion, docket bundles became large. In so doing, they took on something of the physical appearance of the files that were the feature of later recordkeeping systems. However, the docket system, as practised in the Indian Depart-

ment headquarters, was a more primitive form of records management than was the subject files system introduced later in the century.

### *c) Letter books*

The practice of maintaining reference copies of outgoing letters in entry books was not new to the Indian Department in 1844. The Western Superintendency field office in Upper Canada had been doing so since at least 1830. Both the Office of the Chief Superintendent in Upper Canada and that of the Secretary in Lower Canada – the respective Indian Department offices in the two provinces prior to Union – had also followed the practice. It was natural, then, that the centralized headquarters for the department in the united Province of Canada would follow suit. However, a new volume in this series of records was opened to mark the administrative transition in 1844. The first document transcribed into the new SGIA's letter book was, fittingly, a copy of a 16 May circular sent by Higginson to various Indian superintendents in Canada West, advising them of the amended reporting requirements of the new regime.<sup>15</sup>

The format of the letter books was straightforward. The letter copies, written in the clerk's "fair hand," were dated and entered in chronological order. The pages of each letter book were numbered. Most of the letter books were also individually indexed by surname (or position/title) of the letter recipient. By the late 1850s, the index entry format had been expanded such that an index entry included not only the recipient's name and the page number reference but also the date of the outgoing letter along with a brief précis of its purpose. In the earliest letter books, in those instances in which an outgoing letter was sent in direct response to a piece of incoming correspondence, the letter book copy did not cite the register number of that incoming letter. However, over time the practice emerged of including the register number of the related incoming letter in the margin beside the text of the reply. This practice made easy the linking of incoming and outgoing letters.<sup>16</sup>

15 Not all incoming correspondence required a reply. Hence, there is not an outgoing letter corresponding to every letter received and registered. On the other hand, some outgoing letters copied into the letter books (e.g., circulars of instruction to field officers) emanated from the headquarters office without the prompt of an incoming missive.

16 The eleven headquarters letter books of the Indian Department during the period of civil secretary superintendence are today found in RG 10, vols. 510–20. Users of RG 10, vol. 520 will notice that it contains entries up to and including 31 December 1861, more than a year after the transfer of responsibility for Indian affairs from imperial to colonial authority. Moreover, many letter book entries throughout 1860, and even into early 1861, continue to appear over the name of Civil Secretary R.T. Pennefather, even though his role as superintendent general had, in theory, ended. There was something of a transitional period during which the experienced Pennefather continued to take a hand in Indian affairs, and the letter book records reflect that fact. That period ended in 1861, and thereafter most outgoing letters were sent over the signature of Charles T. Walcot, the Indian Department accountant,

## Office Practice

### *a) Comparative contemporary recordkeeping practices*

In documenting aspects of the evolution in the British office in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Barbara Craig has observed that “the procedures of departments in the civil service for receiving, registering, and dispatching documents present a mosaic rather than a monolith of practices.”<sup>17</sup> A comparison of recordkeeping methods employed within a selection of agencies in both England and the Province of Canada bears out the validity of this characterization for the period 1840–60 as well. How did the recordkeeping practices of the mid-century Indian Department headquarters in the Province of Canada – in particular those related to correspondence management – fit within this varied pattern? The register–docket–letter book method of correspondence management was commonly used in mid-nineteenth-century government offices in both the mother country and the colony. That said, there were many variations of practice as regards the manner in which registration was carried out, how docketts were controlled, and how letter books were used. The Indian Department had numerous models from which to adapt its tools. A few examples of usage within government offices in England and in agencies of government within the Province of Canada help to illustrate the diversity and also place practices of the Indian Department headquarters within context. The picture that emerges is one of an Indian Department that, while not innovative in its correspondence management methods, was certainly not backward.

The manner in which offices documented outgoing correspondence is a good point of departure. The use of entry books to capture the full text of an outgoing letter was a common practice. Pugh, when speaking of the Board of Trade, describes their use from the eighteenth century in that agency. Such letter books were also used in British North America, and survive in the records of various government offices. They were maintained by the civil secretary in the Office

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or Chief Clerk Michael Turnor, with only the occasional one bearing the signature of the Commissioner of Crown Lands officials. Again, this reflects a transitional period during which the commissioner left the day-to-day business of the Indian Department in the hands of his experienced underlings, a situation that continued until the 17 March 1862 appointment of William Spragge as deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs.

- 17 Barbara Craig, “The Introduction of Copying Devices in the British Civil Service, 1877–1899,” in *The Archival Imagination*, ed. Barbara Craig (Ottawa, 1992), 108. In his study *An Introduction to the Use of the Public Records* (London, 1934), V.H. Galbraith makes the point that the manner in which the bureaucracy evolved in England ensured the development of separate recordkeeping systems and practices, from one department to the next. States that emerged as unified entities much later were better able to centrally control recordkeeping practices across departments. On this point, see also Luciana Duranti, “The Odyssey of Records Managers,” in *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, ed. Tom Nesmith (Metuchen, New Jersey, and London, 1993), 53.



of the Governor General, for example, from the late eighteenth century. The Offices of the Provincial Secretary in both Upper and Lower Canada also used bound entry books for this purpose. That said, there are examples of departments, such as the nineteenth-century British Foreign Office, in which full-text copies of outgoing letters were not retained. In that agency, the final draft of a reply was considered sufficient evidence of the office's action, and such drafts were kept with the incoming letters to which they related.<sup>18</sup>

Many archivists and users of nineteenth-century records are familiar with “press books” – the bound entry books in which an agency retained office copies of outgoing letters. Some form of technology for the production of copies using a wetted paper process and a letterpress was established in businesses as early as the 1820s.<sup>19</sup> There is no evidence, however, of a press having been used in the Indian Department headquarters (or any of the department's field offices, for that matter) during the period in which the civil secretary served as SGIA. Rather, reference copies of outgoing letters were laboriously reproduced by hand and bound into letter books. Yet in this practice, the Indian Department was certainly not unique among its contemporaries in the Province of Canada; handwritten entries are the norm in the letter books of the Office of the Governor General and those of the Provincial Secretaries in this period.

Neither was the Indian Department out of step with its contemporaries in its method of incoming document storage. The creation of folded docketts, duly minuted with descriptive information about the correspondent, the nature of the letter and the course of action taken, and the use of pigeonhole and tied bundle storage was standard practice in government offices of 1840–50. It was not until later in the nineteenth century that flat filing and vertical filing came into common use.<sup>20</sup> While some agencies, such as the Colonial Office, eventually bound correspondence considered to be sufficiently obsolete so as to require no further reference for operations, such was not the practice in the Indian Department.

18 See Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominions Offices*; see also *The Records of the Foreign Office, 1782–1939*, PRO Office Handbooks no. 13 (London, 1969). Craig notes, in “The Introduction of Copying Devices,” that in 1873 the Colonial Office adopted the practice of retaining the final draft as the office reference copy, obviating the need for letter books. For British North American examples, see the LAC inventory descriptions for the Office of the Governor General of Canada fonds (RG 7), and for the offices of the Provincial Secretary for Canada East (RG 4) and Canada West (RG 5), respectively.

19 See Barbara Craig, “The Introduction of Copying Devices,” for a description of the process by which letterpress copies were produced and how the technological innovations of the early nineteenth century related to document reproduction. She notes that the first British civil service use of the copy press appears to have occurred about 1850 in the Board of Trade, and that although letterpress copying was in use in ten larger departments by 1877 for outgoing correspondence, many other agencies relied on hand transcription until well into the 1890s. See also Yates, “From Press Book and Pigeonhole.”

20 For a discussion of this evolution in the American context, see Yates, “From Press Book and Pigeonhole.”

Not all agencies kept enclosures together with their covering letter, particularly voluminous ones or those that had to be distributed to many internal offices; rather, they were separated and maintained in their own series. The Indian Department headquarters generally did so, or if an enclosure was forwarded elsewhere, a copy was usually produced for retention in the docket. While the docket system is described by different historians of recordkeeping practices as a cumbersome one, best suited to small agencies (such as the Indian Department headquarters) whose business was focused on single-issue transactions and which processed low volumes of correspondence, a remarkable number of large and complex government offices continued in its use well beyond mid-century.<sup>21</sup>

The register – a key element of the correspondence management system of many mid-nineteenth-century British and British North American government offices – shows a great variation in format from one department to the next, even though the purpose of the tool was fundamentally the same in all. The register format used in the Indian Department headquarters was a relatively simple one in comparison with examples in other government agencies, particularly those that handled great volumes of correspondence and divided work among numerous departments, each of which often maintained its own registers.<sup>22</sup> For example, in the Indian Department headquarters, no separate registers were maintained to document the forwarding of correspondence to other departments, such as were kept in the Office of the Governor General for correspondence received by the civil secretary in his capacity as secretary to the governor general (RG 7, G 20). The Indian Department's correspondence was sufficiently limited in volume to permit the documentation of such actions in the main registers. As noted earlier, the Indian Department headquarters registers were not subject indexed, a feature that sets them apart from many contemporary registers. One can compare them, for example, with those used by the civil secretary acting in his capacity as secretary to the governor general. Here the register is considerably more complex (see RG 7, G 20, volume 380): entries are grouped together in the register in separate sections accord-

21 In addition to the many British examples of the use of the docket system, it was also employed in British North America, in such agencies as the Department of Agriculture from its pre-Confederation beginnings in 1865 until 1893 (see the LAC inventory description in the Department of Agriculture fonds – RG 17) and in the Department of Public Works (see LAC inventory description in the Department of Public Works fonds – RG 11). It is also found, of course, in the office most closely linked to that of the Indian Department (through the person of the civil secretary), the Office of the Governor General (see LAC, RG 7, series G 20). As late as 1913 in the United States, although most offices had abandoned the system, the Taft Commission still found it necessary to recommend its discontinuance (see Bess Glenn, "Taft Commission and the Government's Records Practices").

22 Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominions Offices*, provides an especially good description of registration practices and register format and indexing in a large and complex department from the 1820s forward.

ing to subject matter (e.g., “emigration,” “Indian affairs,” “miscellaneous”) or origin of the correspondence (e.g., letters from Nova Scotia, Washington, New Brunswick) and then globally subject indexed. The registration and indexing systems used in the Offices of the Provincial Secretaries for Canada East and Canada West are even more complex, with separate sections in the indexes for correspondence received from each of the various departments of government, from the judiciary, from the Legislative Council, House of Assembly, municipal offices, and “miscellaneous” sources (private individuals, corporate entities, and institutions).<sup>23</sup> Such a sophisticated indexing system reflects the fact that the Offices of the Provincial Secretaries served as important initial points of contact for a broad range of dealings with the colonial government. The Indian Department’s business was much more restricted in its scope and, therefore, its registration system much less complex in design.

### *b) Correspondence workflow*

In an office as small as the Indian Department headquarters, the manner in which correspondence was addressed was not complicated. The chain of decision-making was a short one. No written instructions specific to Indian Department correspondence management procedures have been located, but that is not surprising. The office relied on the knowledge, memory, and grasp of precedent of the experienced Vardon, assisted after July 1845 by the even longer-serving Solomon Yeomans Chesley.<sup>24</sup> Much of what can be discerned of the workflow that saw a letter move through the system from receipt to formal reply comes from a study of the entries made by the clerks in the registers. However, care must be taken in interpreting these entries, as found today, in that the records have come to us through the filters of operational use by post-1861 Indian Department inheritors and archival treatment at LAC. As will be discussed later, both successor department officers and archivists have altered the record to some extent.

Typically, incoming items were opened and registered by the clerk and pertinent identification information docketed onto the correspondence. A search was made of the registers for previous correspondence related to the subject at hand and, if any was found, the clerk retrieved the relevant docket(s) and passed it,

23 See, for example, the index found in LAC, Provincial Secretary’s Office, Canada East (RG 4), Numbered Correspondence Files series (C 1), vol. 757, and the corresponding register in vol. 758.

24 The workflow of another, albeit much larger, mid-century government office and the qualities expected of clerical staff are described well in Pellew, *The Home Office 1848–1914*. Her study also discusses at length the commissions that studied the British civil service at mid-century in a search for economies and efficiencies. While it is impossible to know what impact, if any, the findings of such investigations might have had in influencing office procedures in a small colonial agency, it is nevertheless useful to note this broader context.

along with the new item, to the SGIA for consideration. Some routine transactions could be handled by the clerk with no resort to higher authority.

Some matters required the clerk to solicit information from field officers before a reply could be prepared. Instructions for composing the text of a reply were written, often on available space on the incoming letter, and the docket returned to the clerk for drafting the response. Once approved, the text of the reply was entered into the letter book and the original sent. The register and the docket were duly annotated throughout the process, describing the course of action. The docket was then stored for possible future reference.

A few examples of how specific types of correspondence were processed help to illustrate the workings of the office and may give today's users direction in locating information. The most common transaction documented in the registers is the simple one, uncomplicated by external consultation. The "How Disposed Of" column in the register entry is annotated "Answd" or "Ansd" [Answered] in the clerk's hand, accompanied by a date or, in the earliest entries, a page number reference. When consultation with field officers of the Indian Department or with officials of other government departments was necessary before an answer could be provided by the Indian Department to a correspondent, the "Answd" register entry is normally qualified by a notation indicating that such consultation has been made, with whom and on what dates. In the simple business transaction scenarios described above, the incoming letter should be found among the correspondence dockets, identified by the register number assigned to it, and a copy of any answer should be readily located by date of reply (or page number) in the outgoing letter books.

A few letters were immediately identified upon receipt as being the concern of another department of government.<sup>25</sup> Typically, such correspondence was registered and a docket created in the Indian Department system. That part of the documents received (letter and/or enclosures) that was required by the other government department to complete its part of the transaction was forwarded to that department in original or copy form, depending on the circumstances. Yet the Indian Department also generated a docket in such cases to retain its documentary evidence of its role in the transaction. Although commonly this docket includes a copy of enclosures that accompanied the letter, that is not always the case. In some instances, the register entry refers the user elsewhere, to records

25 The other side of the inter-departmental correspondence flow is also illustrated in the Indian Department's correspondence, although usually the registers do not make this obvious and it is necessary to go to the dockets themselves to find the evidence. In the example of Indian Department Docket 47, a correspondence from 1860, the Superintendent General's Office docket number has been superimposed on a docket cover that originated in the Office of the Provincial Secretary, Canada West – a docket cover that bears a Provincial Secretary's Office reference number. The letter, clearly, was sent first to the latter office and then forwarded to the Indian Department for action.

within the Indian Department but outside the central correspondence management system itself. Notations such as “Filed with treaties” or “Filed with agents accounts” were obviously intended to point contemporary users to particular storage, the location of which was understood by the clerks. Precisely where documents identified in this fashion might be found today is not clear. In rare cases, all documents were transferred to another department, and no docket survives in the Superintendent General’s correspondence, leaving the register entry as the surviving evidence of the role of the SGIA in this transaction.

The “bringing forward” of dockets to be joined with related correspondence was a common feature of registry-based systems, including that of the Indian Department headquarters. In many cases, an incoming letter is registered in full according to its date of receipt, but the reader is directed to other items of related correspondence for information about the fate of the letter (i.e., its ultimate physical disposition). A common format for these entries is the “with Bloggs xxxx” type. For example, David McCall’s letter of 20 July 1855 (register 8486) relating to his claim to Stag Island bears the register notation: “Fyled [sic] with Talfourd 8881.” Tracing docket 8881, one finds that it comprises not only Agent Froome Talfourd’s 28 January 1856 letter reporting the Sarnia Chiefs’ decision to recommend McCall’s claim to Stag Island (register 8881) and McCall’s letter of 20 July 1855 (8486), but also seven other related registered dockets containing documents ranging in date from 1845 to 1853. This example documents a case in which the docket was “brought forward” – that is, it was incorporated with related correspondence received at a later date. In other instances, however, the movement of dockets is in the other direction. This can, at first, seem confusing to the user today as there does not appear to be an obvious pattern or explanation for why some correspondence was brought forward while other dockets were sent back to be stored with documents of an earlier date.

The correspondence management system seems to have been sufficiently well suited to the business needs of the mid-century Indian Department headquarters. While Indian policy in central British North America had evolved in the 1830s from one of benign neglect of an erstwhile military ally that had characterized the years immediately following the War of 1812–14 to one marked by a more active effort at “civilizing,” the full scope of the assimilation program was yet to be developed. The significant information collection, analysis, and management demands that such a policy would exert upon the department were only beginning to emerge. The department office was small. Much of its business was responsive and transaction driven. Great reliance was placed upon the officers in the field to manage the day-to-day relationship with First Nations. And correspondence was now managed at headquarters through a system of registration. It is interesting to note that the commissioners appointed in 1856 to investigate Indian affairs in the Province of Canada, while pointed in their remarks about the inadequacies of the office’s bookkeeping and accounting practices, documentation of Indian lands sold, and gathering of statistical infor-

mation, had nothing to say about the manner in which the correspondence was managed. Its methods and the tools used were typical for their day and apparently adequate to meet the demands placed upon them.

### **Use of the SGIA Records by Successor Offices**

Although the Bagot Commission had predicted increased effectiveness in the management of Indian affairs as one result of the creation of a unified headquarters under the control of the civil secretary, the final report of Richard T. Pennefather, Froome Talfourd, and Thomas Worthington, commissioners appointed in 1856 to investigate the Indian administration yet again, was less unequivocal in its assessment.<sup>26</sup> It decried the fact that the civil secretary could still direct only part of his energies to Indian matters, arguing that a “permanent head” was needed to guide the future course of the department. When making this recommendation, Pennefather had himself already served in the dual role of civil secretary and SGIA since February 1856. He was well positioned to understand the complexities of the work and the difficulties of trying to carry out an onerous mandate on a part-time basis.

By the time the commissioners’ final report reached the colonial secretary in London in May 1858, the decision had already been made to transfer the Indian Department from imperial to Canadian control. Only the mechanics of the handover remained to be arranged. With the passage in the Province of Canada in May 1860 of *An Act respecting the management of the Indian lands and property* (23 Victoria, Cap. 151), it was decreed that the administration of Indian affairs would be added to the responsibilities of the commissioner of crown lands.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, the Indian Department became a branch within the Crown Lands Department of the Province of Canada. Yet as Pennefather pointed out to the colonial secretary in a report dated 1 November 1860,<sup>28</sup> the passage of the recent legislation that designated the commissioner of crown lands as chief superintendent of Indian Affairs hardly solved the problem of part-time superintendence. As a member of the executive council (i.e., the government), the commissioner of crown lands was no more a “permanent” figure than had been the civil secretary. Governments came and went with regularity. Moreover, the commissioner of crown lands had to busy himself with the many

26 “Report of the Special Commissioners appointed on the 8th of September, 1856 to Investigate Indian Affairs in Canada,” *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada*, Sessional Papers, Appendix No. 21, 1858.

27 Section 1 of the Act states that the legislation was to come into effect on 1 July 1860. It received royal assent only on 30 June, and was not proclaimed in the *Canada Gazette* until October 1860.

28 LAC, Colonial Office fonds, CO 42, Canada, formerly British North America, Original Correspondence series, MG 11, CO 42/624.

duties of his department and was, like his predecessor, unable to give Indian affairs their due attention.

However, the Act gave the Governor in Council the authority to appoint officers and agents to carry out the legislation's provisions. This made possible the appointment of a permanent deputy head, such as then held office in the other departments of the province's public service. But the designation of such an officer to manage the Indian portfolio was still well over a year in coming. By authority of an order-in-council of 17 March 1862, William Spragge was appointed to this position, taking the title deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs (DSIA) – one he would hold until his death in office in April 1874.<sup>29</sup> Although the Indian Branch was to remain, for the time being, a subordinate agency of government, the appointment of a permanent deputy head was an important milestone in its administrative history, one that marked a new level of maturity in the development of the bureaucracy charged with the management of Indian affairs in the Province of Canada.

Spragge inherited the records created and maintained in the office of his predecessor. Without an inventory of the records of the outgoing SGIA's office, the precise nature of what the new DSIA acquired at this time cannot be known. The records arranged and described at LAC, in the Office of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs series, in particular the registers and dockets, show evidence of a transitional period during which the correspondence management system and tools of the previous administration were employed. Spragge did, after all, have the benefit of the continuing services of the experienced chief clerk, Michael Turnor, and accountant Charles Walcot. The register–docket–letter book system was retained, but by May 1862 a new set of correspondence registers had been opened – one that abandoned the straight numerical registration and docket numbering method of the SGIA's office in favour of an alphanumeric one.

As would be expected, there are many instances in which correspondence that originally comprised a docket created and maintained by the Indian Department headquarters while under the control of the civil secretary as SGIA was subsequently brought forward and incorporated into Spragge's records system. This was especially true for correspondence related to issues whose resolution spanned the point of administrative change within the Indian Department, and for correspondence that, although concerning questions thought to have

29 LAC, Executive Council Office of the Province of Canada fonds, Orders-in-Council of the Executive Council series, RG 1, E 8, vol. 77. Spragge was an experienced public officer, having first joined the provincial service with the Surveyor General's Department in 1829. At the time of his appointment as DSIA, he occupied the position of superintendent of land sales within the Crown Lands Department. Now, as permanent deputy head of the Indian Branch, it would be his duty, in the words of the order-in-council, "specially to guard the rights of the Indians."

been fully addressed years before, was found to have value as precedent-setting documentation for matters raised long after. In such cases, the clerk responsible for maintaining the records went back into the registers dating from the SGIA period and annotated them to reflect this movement of docketets. Entries bearing comments such as “filed away under B125/62” (a reference to Spragge’s alpha-numeric system) are common.

There is also evidence of docketets from the SGIA’s office having been brought forward beyond the Spragge years into successor systems of a still later date. Even the casual observer of the registers created in the SGIA’s office and, in particular, of the entries found in the “How Disposed Of” column, will distinguish a varied array of handwriting. Some is readily identifiable as that of the contemporary clerk who filled in the other columns of the register entries. In many other instances, however, the handwriting differs from that of the clerk. Some of these other annotations were the work of Spragge’s clerks. While I have made no attempt to identify all the different handwriting that appears in the registers, one hand in particular warrants comment at this point – the very distinctive script of George M. Matheson. An example of his annotations (the words “attached to 95452 of 1889”) is found in Figure 2 beside entry 6554, a letter from the Commissioner of Crown Lands of 9 February 1853. Matheson was a long-serving employee of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), the new name assigned to the Indian Branch when it achieved department status in 1880. His remarks would likely have been made early in the twentieth century when he was responsible for the headquarters records office operations and the records were still in DIA custody. Moreover, his notations appear almost exclusively in register entries relating to docketets that have been moved into the registry system introduced by the post-Confederation Indian Affairs Branch in 1872 – the Red Series – and which was in active use during much of the period of Matheson’s employment.<sup>30</sup> What is clear, as well, is that the “bring forward” practice, followed to its logical extension, has even resulted in the appearance today of a small number of documents from the SGIA’s regime on departmental files of those recordkeeping systems that succeeded the Red Series (which was itself largely superseded in 1923).<sup>31</sup>

30 For example, the register entries for two letters from Rev. O’Meara at Manitowaning, registered and stored originally in the SGIA’s correspondence as docketets 5094 and 5327, are annotated in Matheson’s hand “on 10155 of 1878.” Both letters are found today in Red Series file 10155 in RG 10, vol. 2065.

31 This is exactly what has happened in cases such as that of RG 10, vol. 7754, file 27026-1. Today this file, which documents the history of the survey of lands for the Restigouche reserve, is identified according to the file numbering conventions of the Thousand Series, one of the file classification systems introduced by the DIA headquarters in 1923. Yet file 27026-1 contains a number of brought-forward docketets of correspondence dating from the 1850s.



We know from his extensive writings in Department of Indian Affairs files that Matheson did a great deal of historical research into his department's records in the course of his work. He prided himself in being an expert in the administrative history of the department and was frequently called upon to trace historical events and policy precedents in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century departmental records. Whether in the course of his research he actually removed documents from predecessor systems and incorporated them into successor ones is not certain. He may well have simply found the evidence of such document relocation done by others and annotated the SGIA registers to facilitate the searches of those who came after him. One thing Matheson did do was create subject indexes for the correspondence of the SGIA's office – an act for which his contemporary colleagues were doubtless suitably thankful. As noted earlier, the registers were not subject indexed by their contemporary creators and users. Over his long career, Matheson produced dozens of tools to serve his operational research and that of his co-workers. Many "Matheson Indexes" survive today in RG 10, although three in particular are most useful in a search for headquarters correspondence dating from the period of civil secretary superintendence. A tool that Matheson titled "Index of subjects of importance noted in reading through Registers from 1842 to 1860" is today located in RG 10, volume 767. A companion "Index to Correspondence Previous to 1872" constitutes RG 10, volume 766. A five-box card index (RG 10, finding aid 10-179) is the most ambitious of his works, although also the most complex in that it mixes references from many sources, both archival and published, and its coverage is not limited to the period of civil secretary control. The most important thing for today's researcher to remember about the "Matheson Indexes" is the fact that they were created long before the records to which they refer came to be arranged and described according to the LAC system. Hence, none of Matheson's tools provides a direct reference to the current location of material at LAC. It is incumbent upon the twenty-first-century user of his tools to learn to recognize the relationship between his references and present-day descriptions of the records.<sup>32</sup>

The surviving evidence tells us little else about the circumstances of the custody of the SGIA's records by the DIA or of the use made of them between the time of their consignment to the DIA in 1880 and their transfer to LAC some thirty-three years later. As Matheson's annotations of the registers and the physical movement of documents make clear, the records were certainly consulted for operational purposes during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, although the frequency of that use would have diminished with each passing year. There is at least one example of a departmental exercise to reorganize its "old" records during this period. In 1885, the DIA hired the

32 The author is currently preparing a brief guide to help decipher the antique references found in Matheson's tools.

Reverend William Scott to, in the words of the order-in-council approving his appointment, examine, sort, endorse, and index “the very old records of the Department.” Although the evidence indicates that Scott was still engaged in this project in 1890 (he died in 1891), research to date has failed to produce an identification of the records upon which Scott worked, a description of the arrangement principles he applied in his endeavours, or a full statement of the extent and nature of his activities. While it may seem unlikely that Scott would have been tasked with sorting and rearranging records of a period as recent as 1844–61, the possibility that he had a hand in the arrangement of the SGIA’s correspondence cannot be entirely dismissed.<sup>33</sup> Documentation from this period also points to inadequate storage facilities for departmental records, a fact that may have contributed to the scattering and mixing of historical papers. However, the DIA was very conservative in its records-retention policies during these years, and there is no evidence that conscious weeding of the main correspondence docket and letter books took place; this certainty is tempered somewhat as regards the ancillary records created by the SGIA’s office.<sup>34</sup>

## Archival Custody of the SGIA Records

### a) *Initial arrangement*

The first DIA records transfer to the Archives Branch of the Department of Agriculture (later the Public Archives, now Library and Archives Canada) took place in November 1907. It was another six years, however, before the SGIA correspondence docket, registers, letter books, and a quantity of ancillary documents from the office were dispatched to LAC custody as part of a major shipment of pre-1872 records. Spurred by the findings of the Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Records of the Public Departments of the Dominion of Canada, whose investigators had inspected the DIA recordkeeping premises in December 1912, and by an impending office relocation, the department undertook a series of transfers in 1913–14. The surviving lists that describe the records sent to LAC at that time are instructive to a point.<sup>35</sup> While the lists do identify registers, cartons of letters received (which included docket and loose correspondence), and letter books, these document types are not further categorized according to office of creation. Inclusive dates indicated on the lists, however, make clear the inclusion of the SGIA’s main correspondence records

33 See LAC, RG 10, vol. 2294, file 58688 for information related to Scott’s appointment.

34 For a discussion of departmental recordkeeping practices during this period, see Bill Russell, “The White Man’s Paper Burden: Aspects of Records Keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860–1914” in *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–85), 50–72.

35 These lists are found today at LAC in both the historical records of the institution itself, in the National Archives of Canada fonds, RG 37, vol. 36, file 60-3-I[ndian]A[ffairs], and in RG 10, accession 2003-00021-6, box 7, file 1/1-6-10, vol. 1.

within these descriptions. With the exception of sections devoted specifically to records of the Toronto and Sarnia field offices and some obvious references to Lower Canada, the lists do not distinguish well between those records emanating from field offices and those created and/or maintained in headquarters. It has to be assumed, however, that at least some of the records for which provenance is not obvious would have been created in the office of the SGIA while many others were maintained there during the years 1844–61, having been inherited from predecessor offices or having become defunct during that time.

The archival arrangement of the large body of records acquired in 1913–14 was a task that fell initially to David W. Parker, the archivist who, as head of the Manuscript Division, took custody of the records. Parker certainly was responsible for the arrangement of some of the mass of material received at that time. An undated and unsigned note titled “Memo Re. Indian Papers” attests to the “reclassification” work he did, as do the comments made by him in a presentation to the American Historical Association and published in 1922. However, the memo indicates that he was able to carry out the arrangement only on papers up to the 1820s prior to his enlistment for service in the First World War.<sup>36</sup> Although Parker may well have left instructions for completion of the job, including that part related to the SGIA office’s records, or may even have played a more active role in directing its progress before his departure or after his return, the fact remains that the great part of the day-to-day work was carried out by Mary G. Phelps. It is the evidence of her hand, literally, that users today see everywhere among the records of both the SGIA and his successor, Spragge.

An undated memorandum prepared by Phelps and titled “Rough Memos re. Indian Papers” helps, but only to a point, to shed light on her arrangement efforts. This document provides the following comments about the state of the records when they arrived at LAC and what Phelps did to address the problem:

Papers for Registers 1844–47, 1848–52, 1852–56, 1856–60, 1860–61 [i.e., the five registers now known as RG 10, volumes 752–756], found more or less disarranged and arranged to compare with Registers. Much time spent looking for inclosures in mess of miscellaneous papers....

Miscellaneous 1845–1861 – Many of them probably inclosures but could not locate them. Some of these may belong to Toronto Office Papers. Did not attempt to separate them by offices.<sup>37</sup>

36 The memo is found in LAC, RG 37, vol. 36, file 60-3-1A; the published version of the presentation, “Some Problems in the Classification of Departmental Archives,” is found in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, vol. 1, 1922, 164–72. A Parker memo to Dominion Archivist Arthur Doughty, dated 11 March 1920, indicates that the archivist had completed only half the work of disentangling the DIA records before leaving for military service (see RG 37, vol. 303, file PAC History, pt. 3). See also Carman Carroll, “David W. Parker: the ‘Father’ of Archival Arrangement at the Public Archives of Canada,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 150–54.

37 Phelps is described in the *Civil Service List 1918* (Ottawa, 1919), p. 449, as an assistant

Parker and Phelps had a challenging task in bringing order to the “more or less disarranged” correspondence docketts from the SGIA’s office. Fortunately for today’s user, the understanding of archival principles related to arrangement had come some way at the Public Archives since the days of Archivist Douglas Brymner. As recently as 1895, during aborted discussions concerning the transfer of historical DIA records to the archives, the latter had proposed a schema that would have seen the DIA records broken up, rearranged by tribal affiliation, and bound.<sup>38</sup> Twenty-odd years later, however, the principles of respect des fonds and the sanctity of original order guided Parker and Phelps in their work.

As regards the records of the SGIA office, for the main correspondence docketts at least, they had the tools – the registers – that showed them what original order had been and, as Phelps’s memo indicates, used them to reconstruct it as faithfully as possible. Phelps’s terse explanation of her work shows that the records had suffered from some considerable mixing (the extent of which we will likely never know) in the sixty-odd years since their active use in the SGIA’s office and that archival arrangement was no easy task even with the help of the registers. In the course of arranging the correspondence docketts into the numerical sequence that reflected their registration, Phelps not only used the registers but also altered their content. Annotations in her hand appear throughout the pages of the five register volumes. An example can be seen in Figure 2 in the notation “with G 881/70” that appears in the ‘How Disposed Of’ column for letter 6590, correspondence received from the Commissioner of Crown Lands and dated 26 February 1853. What is not clear, and may never be known, is whether Phelps herself, having found the records in disarray, moved anything in the course of archival arrangement – whether she only annotated the registers to reflect what she had found or took a more active role in the arrangement and moved records to recreate their original order as she understood it. Likely she did a bit of both – moving some docketts but, in other cases, only annotating the registers to reflect document movements made by Indian Department staff long before the records came into her custody.<sup>39</sup> Phelps’s intervention did not stop

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librarian. She was an experienced public servant, having obtained a permanent position in the civil service in 1888. The memo is found in LAC, RG 37, vol. 36, file 60-3-1A.

38 LAC, RG 37, vol. 185, Brymner to Scott, 16 May 1895, 198–99.

39 It is important that today’s users be aware of the nature and extent of changes made to the records by archivists in the course of archival treatment, and the circumstances under which that intervention was carried out. Otherwise, how can they assess the possible implications of such actions for an understanding of the record? If one were to assume that all the annotations that today appear in the registers were made by clerks of the creating office or its DIA successors, and that the records maintain the arrangement integrity that they had at the time of their use in departmental business, for example, one might be drawn to conclusions about the role particular records played in individual transactions and about their reliability as documentary evidence of actions taken that are different from those one might make with the full knowledge that not only the organization of the records but also the records themselves had been altered during archival treatment.

with her register annotations. Possibly recognizing that her remarks written into the register entries might be insufficient to guide users to the current location of docketed items that were no longer to be found in their numerically defined place, she also inserted directional slips among the correspondence packages, indicating where brought forward/backward docketed items would now be found.<sup>40</sup> For this, the modern user can only be grateful. Given the cryptic and sometimes multiple and confusing annotations found in the registers, Phelps's clear markers make the tracing of docketed items a simple task.

The entry books of outgoing letters were the simplest to address. Their inherent chronological order and bound format made arrangement decisions straightforward. The "Miscellaneous, 1845–1861" documents that Phelps identified in her explanatory memo were more problematic. Her brief description makes evident her doubts about the provenance of these records. She suspected that some of the documents had once formed enclosures in the docketed correspondence; in the case of others, she speculated they might have belonged with the records of the superintendency office based in Toronto. Still others would certainly have been records inherited by successor headquarters offices and incorporated into their recordkeeping systems but now gone astray. Records in this last category would logically have to be arranged with those of the inheriting office. Phelps's memo highlights the arrangement challenge with respect to the ancillary records but reveals little about the principles upon which a solution was devised.

Without the benefit of a final arrangement and description schema, it is difficult to know for certain how the riddle was solved, or even whether parts of the puzzle were left for successors to piece together. What we do know is that someone, at some point over the following thirty years, imposed a structure upon the ancillary records.<sup>41</sup> That arrangement framework was codified in 1951 with the printing of LAC's *Preliminary Inventory – Record Group 10 – Indian Affairs*, the first in a series of publications in which the institution presented its holdings arranged and described according to the "Record Group" and "Manuscript Group" schema. Since the records lacked a structure such as that imposed upon the correspondence docketed items by the registers and upon the letter books by their physical binding, the archivist opted for an arrangement that combined

40 In some offices, this practice of inserting directional slips was carried out by the contemporary recordkeepers (see, for example, the description of the cross-reference slips used in the Board of Trade, in Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominion Offices*). That was not the case with the SGIA's office. One has to assume that its clerks relied solely upon their register annotations in order to trace brought-forward items. Phelps's handwriting is distinctive, and there is no doubt that she created the marker slips during archival arrangement.

41 Evidence supports the view that Parker and Phelps accomplished at least some and possibly all this work. Although the comments found in the memo cited earlier are inconclusive, the LAC file upon which that document is found includes many pages of lists in Phelps's hand. These items demonstrate some of the work she carried out in dealing with the miscellaneous records. Moreover, her distinctive handwriting appears on a number of the schedules that

chronological order with subject or document format association. S/he found a quantity of records that could be identified as drafts for outgoing letters and brought these together, arranging them in chronological order. How these drafts had become separated over the years from their related correspondence and why they were brought together only to September 1851 is not obvious.<sup>42</sup> As would be expected, many of the drafts are written in the hand of Chief Clerk George Vardon or that of one of his successors. Typically, the chief clerk's draft text was either approved as written (with the SGIA's initials under the abbreviation "Appd" [Approved] appearing in the margin) – in which case the text of the draft mirrors that of the fair-hand copy found in the letter books – or was amended, in the hand of the superintendent general, by the addition or removal of text. Some of the drafts, however, are written entirely in the superintendent general's hand. Some of the drafts end with the abbreviation "Entd" [Entered] and a page number – a reference to the location in the letter books of the final text. As well, curiously, incoming letters are found occasionally among the drafts – items not duplicated in the incoming correspondence docket.

A further body of ancillary documents is arranged in chronological order within broad subjects (dispatches, land papers, accounts and receipts, etc.). Nothing suggests that the order in which they are found today reflects that in which they were organized in the SGIA's office. And we have no way of knowing the thinking that would have gone into decisions taken on the arrangement of records that, although they dated from the SGIA period, would have been determined to belong more properly with the records of the successor office by virtue of inheritance. What we do know is that Phelps entertained some doubts about the provenance of the miscellaneous records. Her comment that she "did not attempt to separate them by offices" suggests that she may not have been entirely satisfied with arrangement compromises that practicality demanded be made.<sup>43</sup> Fortunately for today's user, LAC staff placed schedules – item-level listings of content – within most of the volumes.

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were inserted among the ancillary records to identify content. A few of the schedules are in her hand alone; others show additions that she made to the work of colleagues.

- 42 See RG 10, vols. 622–23. Curiously, a small number of items described as "miscellaneous draft letters, 1845–59" are located in RG 10, vol. 264, i.e., arranged and described in what is known today as the General Operational Records sub-series. A few of these drafts can be linked to registered correspondence by means of marginalia references to letter register numbers. Why such drafts are not included with those in RG 10, vol. 622–23 is not clear.
- 43 The miscellaneous records are found today in LAC, RG 10, vols. 263–72. Two volumes contain correspondence in unnumbered dockets. Some, but by no means all, of the letters are marked by the correspondent as being "private," suggesting that this correspondence might have been kept separate from the registered dockets in the SGIA's office by reason of its sensitive content. Such a practice was not uncommon in recordkeeping of the day. Much of the correspondence, however, deals with very mundane operational matters. As such, it is hard to distinguish between the subject matter of these letters and that of the registered correspondence.

In their work in the papers of the SGIA, Parker and Phelps were not labouring in an archival vacuum. Their custodial tasks must be seen within the context of the arrangement and description that was being undertaken among not only the other records acquired in the 1913–14 DIA transfers, but also those received from various other government agencies. That Phelps played a role in the processing of the records of the Office of the Governor General is certain; annotations in her hand appear frequently in the registers of correspondence received by the civil secretary that today are found in RG 7, series G 20. Her remarks in these registers are mostly cross-references that point to the location of dockets brought forward and united with related items in the records of the Indian Department. Similarly, her comments also point users to documents arranged into what she and her contemporaries referred to as the Toronto Office Papers – records described at LAC today in the Central Superintendency series of RG 10. And she had a hand in the arrangement of the registers and dockets of DSIA Sprage. She is the author of many annotations in the SGIA's registers that map the bringing forward of dockets into the correspondence management system created in Sprage's office.

#### ***b) Subsequent custodial activity***

Publication of the 1951 RG 10 inventory fixed the arrangement framework in print. In it the records of the “Civil Secretary as Superintendent General of Indian Affairs” series were presented in four sub-series: correspondence, letter books, drafts, and miscellaneous records. This publication was superseded twenty-four years later by the appearance of a revised inventory.<sup>44</sup> The arrangement structure of the “Records of the Civil Secretary's Office” series remained unaltered from that presented in the previous publication, and no records had been added to the series in the intervening years. In 1979, the SGIA records were microfilmed by LAC. With the political decision made earlier in the decade to address Native claims and to create an infrastructure within which they could be analyzed and adjudicated, the federal government committed to a massive archival research undertaking. In the belief that the relevant records should be held in a (more or less) neutral agency to facilitate this work, huge quantities of records were transferred to LAC custody from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) to be incorporated into Record Group 10. For its part, LAC embarked upon one of the largest arrangement, description, and microfilming projects in the institution's history. The SGIA's

44 Peter Gillis, David Hume, Robert Armstrong, *Records Relating to Indian Affairs: RG 10*, Public Archives of Canada, Public Records Division, General Inventory Series, no. 1 (Ottawa, 1975). The only change in the description was a cosmetic one – the replacement of the term “miscellaneous records” with the equally vague “general administration records” to describe the series known to Phelps as “miscellaneous records, 1845–1861.”

records were, of course, already in LAC custody and arranged and described. However, their filming was part of the exercise (an irony in that the federal government at that time did not recognize responsibility to address claims arising from the pre-Confederation administration of Indian affairs).<sup>45</sup> Dissemination of copies of the microfilm through sale to libraries and archives, other research institutions, and First Nations offices followed. The availability of the microfilm for borrowing through the inter-institutional loan system further guaranteed its use in the research community, both nationally and internationally.

The custodial upheavals of the 1990s at LAC, which came about as a result of the adoption of the fonds concept to replace arrangement and description based upon record groups and manuscript groups, left the SGIA records series largely untouched. Some small changes were made in the manner in which the series was described, but nothing fundamental was altered in the arrangement structure itself and no records were added to or removed from the series in this reassessment. More recently, one significant “addition” to the records has resulted from the LAC exercise of linking non-textual and textual media descriptions, where before the different media had been to a great extent described in isolation. As a result, the series description today includes, within the General Operational Records sub-series (the current designation of Phelps’s “Miscellaneous” records), two cartographic items. Ironically, both maps in question had originally formed part of the content of one of the miscellaneous textual records volumes and had been transferred for conservation reasons in 1994 to the Cartographic and Architectural Archives Division at LAC. They have now been reunited, intellectually if not physically, with the textual documents to which they relate.

### *c) The records today*

The Office of the Civil Secretary in the Province of Canada series description today presents the records in an arrangement of four sub-series: the original incoming letter docket and the registers are described in the Correspondence

45 The impact of claims research on LAC has not been fully explored. Nor can it be while many disputes remain unresolved and research carries on. While it is a subject far beyond the scope of the present paper, it is the author’s contention (based on his personal experience of many years as one of the archivists primarily responsible for RG 10) that LAC’s custodial work in the area of Indian Affairs has for decades been defined by the requirements of claims research to a far greater extent than may be widely understood. Much custodial effort and large sums of money have been directed toward those record series that figure most prominently in such research. In a climate of limited resources, records not frequently consulted in claims work have, perforce, been side-lined to an archival shunt. For example, the federal government’s reluctance to entertain pre-Confederation claims pushed custodial projects on records from the colonial period down the priority queue. Many of these records had come to LAC early in the twentieth century, their arrangement and description had been set for decades, and there was little pressure to reconsider this past work.



sub-series; the bound copies of replies to this correspondence, and of other outgoing letters, constitute the Letterbooks sub-series; draft replies to incoming letters are found within the Drafts sub-series; and miscellaneous ancillary records created and/or maintained in the SGIA's office in carrying out its administration of the Indian Department are located in the General Operational Records sub-series. This series description can be consulted at the LAC website.<sup>46</sup> Yet no records of the series are available online. They can be viewed on microfilm at LAC only, the institution having recently eliminated an inter-library loan system that has been vital to First Nations distant research access for decades. However, it is not unreasonable to expect that a digital version will be generated from the microfilm and the images made available online as part of the institution's ongoing digitization program.

The LAC online tools used to search for information within the series, in particular those relating to the correspondence docket – the core of the content – are problematic. Part of the trouble in locating meaningful references to records in the Correspondence sub-series through manipulation of the online tools is attributable to the failure of the description to explain the fundamental importance of the contemporary registers to the research exercise. The Correspondence sub-series description states simply “volumes 752–756 are ‘Abstracts of Letters Received’ forming a finding aid to the sub-series.”<sup>47</sup> No guidance is offered to the user as to how to manipulate the registers. More important, the relationship between the contemporary registers and the LAC-generated finding aid provided online is left unstated. And the truth is that the latter tool has value only when used after consulting the former.

The LAC-generated finding aid available online through the hypertext link in the Correspondence sub-series description brings the user to a list of 204 volume-level descriptions. However, this is nothing more than a “shelf list” – a tool prepared primarily to keep track of records by providing information about their *location* within an archival repository (e.g., a container number or a microfilm reel number). In the case of the Correspondence sub-series shelf list, it does not *identify* the correspondence found in the dockets in a meaningful way. For example, the shelf list entry for RG 10, volume 142 (the container that holds the first dockets created in the SGIA's office dating from May 1844)

46 While the LAC search engine “Archives Search” facilitates access to the description through use of a number of keyword search terms, series title being the most obvious, the quickest and surest route (albeit the one known and used only by archivists familiar with the institution's internal custodial processing system) is the MIKAN number 157445, which can be entered in the search screen of the search engine's “Archives Advanced Search” option.

47 The Correspondence sub-series description also makes reference, in the field titled “Finding Aid,” to finding aid 10-1. Researchers are well advised to avoid attempting to use the online version of finding aid 10-1 to search for SGIA office records. Finding aid 10-1 is an omnibus tool that lists records, largely in shelf list fashion, of not only the SGIA office but also a number of other RG 10 series.

indicates that the volume content comprises dockets 1 through 100. That fact is of use to the researcher only after s/he has determined, through analysis of docket content information (name of correspondent, precise date, and subject of correspondence) that one or more of those 100 dockets might be of interest. The contemporary registers are the only tools that provide such information; they are not available online.

Until the registers are digitized and added to the LAC website as a necessary companion to the shelf list, the online research potential of the correspondence dockets is severely limited. The distant user, who can consult neither the records themselves online nor the full finding aid, is left with the frustration of being directed to an online tool that purports to be a finding aid but is, in fact, useless as such when seen alone.<sup>48</sup> It is more than a little ironic that Parker and Phelps, nearly a century ago, understood only too well what is today obscured in the LAC-generated tools – the symbiotic relationship between the contemporary registers and the correspondence dockets. In a time of increasing pressure upon archives both to make research tools available online and to ensure that those tools stand alone, the example of the Office of the Civil Secretary in the Province of Canada is instructive. It is certainly not a unique case. As this article has shown, many agencies of colonial government in British North America employed registers to manage their correspondence. A number of post-Confederation federal government departments did likewise, some of them almost to the turn of the twentieth century. Until the contemporary registers to such records are made available online, rich documentation on a variety of aspects of the Canadian experience lies beyond the reach of the user who must rely upon online access.

One final aspect of the custodial history of the series should not be overlooked. To this point, the discussion has been framed within the confines of the arrangement structure laid down by Parker and Phelps and accepted by their successors (the author included). Idle speculation on whether they “got it right” may not be fruitful. Yet Phelps herself had doubts about the provenance of some of the miscellaneous records acquired in the 1913–14 transfers and assigned to the series. And Parker’s 1922 presentation to the American Historical Association speaks to the compromises made in the arrangement of a confusing body of Indian Affairs records. While no systematic attempt is made here to identify records described in other RG 10 series that might best be considered part of the Office of the Civil Secretary in the Province of Canada series, research to date points to at least one instance in which this is the case. The records

48 The problem is not unique to the online version of the tools. The paper version of the finding aid is no better than the automated one; it is the same shelf list in hard-copy form. Anyone consulting it at LAC will encounter the same problem as does the online user. The difference lies in the fact that the onsite researcher can consult the dockets, the registers, and a reference specialist who can explain their relationship and use. The distant user has recourse to none of these resources.

described today in the Indian Department Accountant series of the Indian and Inuit Affairs Program sous-fonds – RG 10, volume 693 – constitute a single letter book containing copies of memoranda and outgoing letters, dated 1846–57, relating to Indian lands. This letter book documents the work of Solomon Chesley, accountant of the Indian Department during the period of civil secretary superintendence. The volume was acquired by LAC as part of the February 1914 records transfer and is described on the list documenting that event as “Private Letter Book (Chesley) 1846–57.” The 1951 and 1975 published RG 10 inventories describe the volume within a miscellaneous subject-based series: General Land Records.<sup>49</sup> The item records activities performed in the headquarters of the Indian Department by an officer working under the superintendent general, and its contents do not duplicate records found in other entry books in the Letterbooks sub-series of the Office of the Civil Secretary in the Province of Canada series. It is the author’s opinion, therefore, that the item should be described as part of the records of that series.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

This study has focused on two aspects of the history of the records of the Indian Department. It looked first at how the headquarters office organized and managed its records, in particular its correspondence dockets and letter books, in the course of its business during the years 1844–61; it then sketched the route by which those records travelled from contemporary use through semi-active departmental storage to archival custody and to their present state of arrangement and description at Library and Archives Canada. As regards the management of the correspondence in the Office of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, the picture that emerges in 1861 is one of an agency coping with the recordkeeping challenges it faced, using a system that, while not innovative, was certainly typical of its day. Yet its business was becoming increasingly complex. The negotiation in 1850 of the Robinson–Huron and Robinson–Superior treaties had enlarged the First Nations population of the Province of Canada and

49 At the time of its microfilming, the volume was identified on the microfilm target as being a letter book maintained in the “Central Superintendency.” That is certainly incorrect; Chesley performed his accounting duties in the headquarters office of the Indian Department.

50 There are many records arranged and described today in RG 10 that would have been created and/or maintained in the SGIA’s office but which were subsequently inherited by successor offices and incorporated into their records and used in business by those offices. Such records rightly belong with those of the relevant successor offices. On the other hand, there remain in RG 10 today a relatively small number of records arranged into what can only be described as miscellaneous series organized by document type or subject (“Census Records,” “General Accounts,” “Various Land Sale Account Records”). Some records in such series date from the period of, and may have originated in, the SGIA office. Whether a reassessment of such records is warranted is, of course, something only LAC archivists can decide.

was bringing to the fore new aspects of the government–Native relationship; for example, northern resource development, with its conflicts over mining, timber, and fishery exploitation. And in the eastern part of the province, the creation of a number of reserves in 1851 and the restructuring of field administration in the wake of the retirement of the long-serving D.C. Napier in 1857 placed additional strains on the headquarters bureaucracy and its recordkeeping capabilities. The Indian Department/Indian Branch business was beginning to evolve from one of response and *laissez-faire*, characterized by transactions that required little linkage of individual letters, into one of action that would demand a more flexible and dynamic records management system than that provided by registers, docketts, and letter books. As can be seen in the pages of the registers, with their evidence of an increasing frequency of bringing forward actions and the melding of docketts, the cumbersome register–docket–letter book system would eventually stand in the way of effective business.

Some fifteen years later, the situation would be markedly different, and any strains identified by 1861 had developed into cracks. With the expansion of the new Dominion after 1867 came the extension of the mandate of the Indian Branch into Atlantic and Western Canada. The negotiation of seven treaties in six years between 1871 and 1877 placed a large First Nations population, stretching from west of Lake Superior to the Rocky Mountains, under the Indian Branch's charge. The recordkeeping system of mid-century became a casualty in the paper explosion occasioned by the new responsibilities of the administration, replaced by one more robust and based upon the file. In the self-aggrandizing manner of government ministers everywhere, the Hon. David Laird did not hesitate to take credit for rescuing the records of the Indian Branch from the sorry state in which he claimed to have found them in November 1873 when he took the reins of the recently created Department of the Interior, of which the Indian Branch had been made a part. His first annual report boasted:

The method of conducting the business in that branch was somewhat obsolete, the papers and records were in a state of confusion (the older ones being quite inaccessible when required), and, as a natural consequence, there was a heavy accumulation of arrears of work. Prompt measures were, however, taken to classify and arrange the papers and records and to introduce a simple and more efficient system of registering and filing papers, and of transacting business generally.<sup>51</sup>

As outlined in the second section of the narrative, the records of the Office of the Civil Secretary, serving in the capacity of Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, slipped gradually, although not entirely, from departmental use over the following decades. For the past century, they have been in archival care –

51 See the "Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year Ended 30th June 1874," *Sessional Papers*, no. 8 (Victoria, 1875), 38.

arranged, described, microfilmed, and made available to a clientele of First Nations and government claims researchers, academics, and family historians. Yet one suspects that this archive is not utilized to its full potential. This situation arises in some part from the nature of the records themselves and, in particular, from the cloak that mid-nineteenth-century records management practices have thrown around them. To the user whose experience with archival records has been limited to the online search of databases of neatly organized subject file titles, or whose research skills have been tested by nothing more taxing than the typing of keywords into a search engine, the world of docket books, letter books, and registers is a foreign one indeed. That said, it is incumbent upon archivists to make obscure terminology and arcane recordkeeping practices understandable to today's users. And it is equally the responsibility of institutions to ensure that avenues of research are fully opened through the adaptation of archival descriptions and tools that meet the needs of the online researcher.

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