

SOURCES FOR ECONOMIC HISTORY IN THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA¹

by

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Before indicating the archives most useful for economic history, I would like to give a general outline of what the Public Archives has in store for researchers. First, let me use a few figures to indicate the extent of our holdings.

The Manuscript Division, which has been the mainstay of the Archives, contains that portion of government records which are judged worthy of preservation and they amount roughly to 45,000 linear feet. Private papers of individuals and records of private societies amount to approximately 15,000 feet and to that can be added a few thousand reels of microfilm copies of documents of which we could not obtain the originals. They include government records copied in London and Paris concerning the early history of Canada.

The Picture Division include something in the neighbourhood of 10,000 paintings, water colours and drawings which are original and unique; 75,000 lithographs and engravings; a photograph collection which is close to numbering 2½ million items and the film collection of Canadian newsreels, documentary and theatrical productions which is now undergoing a great expansion and which numbers some 17,000 reels (or 6,500 feet).

The National Map Collection has responsibility for both Canadian maps from the beginning of the history of Canada to the present and for a coverage of the world. The maps are completed by a great many atlases, ranging from the Ptolemy Geographica of 1508 to the most recent provincial atlases. In addition to that, the National Map Collection looks after plans of buildings and public works. Total holdings number over half a million different documents.

Our Library has over 80,000 volumes, including some 10,000 fairly rare pamphlets.

We also have a relatively small but quite interesting collection of medals, about 5,000 items, which relates to Canada and its history.

But in addition to all these that we shall call the historical

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records, the Public Archives is also responsible for a comprehensive program in the area of records management and it has records centres in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. While the Record Centre in Ottawa contains over 400,000 feet of records, those of Toronto and Montreal contain each about 100,000 feet, while the Vancouver Centre, which just opened, has already assembled about 25,000 feet of records from the government offices in the area.

These rather impressive holdings are the results of 100 years of activity. The Public Archives of Canada was created with the appointment of the first federal archivist, Douglas Brymner, in June 1872, nearly 100 years ago. He was appointed an officer of the Department of Agriculture because the Minister was then responsible, in addition to agriculture, for arts and manufactures. It is only in 1903 that the Bureau of Archives was given responsibility for government documents which until then had been under the responsibility of an officer in the Secretary of State. In 1912, the Archives were made an independent agency of government, a small department if you like, and since then, the minister responsible for the archives has usually been the Secretary of State. An important step in making the Archives really active in the field of records management was the opening in early 1956 of the Public Archives Ottawa Records Centre, in Ottawa. This led to the creation of advisory services and the implementation by the Records Management Branch to implement the comprehensive program approved by Cabinet in 1966. The purpose of the program was to insure the proper preservation of government records, the use of the best methods of filing and storing them, and the transfer for permanent preservation in the Archives of those of long-term research value.

Of particular interest to you in the history of the Archives, would be the activities of the Board of Historical Publications under Adam Shortt, which produced in the 1920's several volumes dealing with economic and financial activities in Canada. They were: Documents relating to Canadian currency, exchange and finance during the French period, 2 vols. (1925) - In its introduction to the book the author says the study of the currency and exchanges is "the most effective introduction to the economic history of the colony" - And Documents relating to Currency, Exchange and Finance in Nova Scotia (1935). Adam Shortt also prepared notes and documents relating to Upper and Lower Canada. They were never published, but they may be consulted at the Public Archives. He died in 1931. His influence has been widely acknowledged. Dr. O. D. Skelton called him: "The founder of the study of economic history in Canada, and its foremost practitioner". It used to be that, in the old days, at the turn of the century, archivists will write something like this: "We have not copied such and such a document; it consisted mostly of financial matters which are of little interest to history, but we have indicated the reference in case somebody might be interested". This was all changed; and with people like Adam Shortt and his assistant, Arthur Lower, the Archives actually acquired business records, notably large collections of lumber companies records.

The fact that interest in economic history was so slow to develop is all the more strange because economic factors were always dominant in the development of Canada, and inevitably had a tremendous influence on the history of the country. Under the French Regime, land never was highly productive and it was the fur trade which presided as the foundation of a French colony on this continent. And trade remained a constant preoccupation for the whole of the French Regime. Under the British Regime, while

the fur trade somewhat diminished in importance, lumber became the staple. Since Confederation, railway construction, the beginning of industrialization and latterly, the use of natural resources will come more to the front. But, I believe, it is not an exaggeration to say that most of the history of Canada was dominated by the importance of imports and exports and that some of the most serious political discussions centered on the question of tariffs and reciprocity. In this century, two aspects have gained in importance: industrialization and the welfare state. This, naturally, will produce important change in the quantity and the type of the economic records produced by the government and by private concerns. Canadian historians were rather slow to awaken to the economic aspect in history. Nevertheless, with men like Adam Shortt, Harold Innis, Donald Creighton, and more recently, Fernand Ouellet, Pierre Wallot and André Paquet, and many others, important contributions have been made and economic factors have been placed in a better perspective than has been the case in the past, where political and military aspects of life in Canada seems to be the most prominent feature that attracted the attention and interests of historians. And, it should be pointed out, these historians have made great use of archival sources, spending years at the Public Archives of Canada. What then are the holdings of the Public Archives which will be of special interest to economic historians?

For the French Regime, a great deal can be found of interest in the general correspondence between Canada and the Mother country and in other series of official records. Cameron Nish, for example, in his Inventaire des documents relatifs à l'histoire économique du Canada français (published in installments in Actualité Économique from 1967) covers official sources of which we have microfilm copies. Court records of New France, particularly those of the Prévôté de Québec preserved in the National Archives of Quebec, are rich in details about transportation and trade. So are notarial deeds preserved both in Quebec and in France and of which we have very incomplete copies. The Nouveau documents sur Champlain et son époque 1560-1622 that the PAC published in 1967 are largely concerned with economic matters. So are many of the series of documents copies in the Archives départementales and Archives maritimes of France. (See PAC, General Inventory, Manuscript, MGI-10, Ottawa 1971, first volume of up-to-date inventories of documents in PAC).

The same is true of the British Regime, both in local records and in correspondence with Great Britain, even if the series are essentially of a military or of a political nature. These we have, nearly complete, either in original or on microfilm.

Of particular interest are the censuses to 1871 (a list of them is given in Tracing your Ancestors in Canada, PAC, Ottawa, 1967), and the Blue Books, giving the general state of the colony, contained in the records of the Executive Council for Central Canada, 1824-1864, or in the Records of the Colonial Office for B.C., 1860-1870; Vancouver Island, 1863-1865; New Brunswick, 1821-1865; Newfoundland 1772-1903; Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, 1821-1866; P.E.I., 1821-1871; along with a great number of shipping and other statistics interspersed in several series.

Amongst the records of the Federal government departments and agencies, practically all have some interest for the economic historian. Bulletin nos. 1 and 2, already published, and no. 3 (to be published soon) of the Access Programme to Public Records, PAC, Manuscript Division (1969-1970), give an idea of the size and dates of the major holdings in government

records. Let us list here the most interesting for economic history:

Agriculture 1852-1955 - 2,000 feet
Atomic Energy Control Board, 1947-1955 - 5 feet
Board of Transport Commissioners, 1904-1965 - 200 feet
Canadian Commercial Corporation, 1944-1958 - 15 feet
Canadian Maritime Commission, 1940-1960 - 125 feet
CNR, 1830's to about 1961 - 3,600 feet
Finance, 1791-1968 - 2,100 feet
Fisheries Branch, 1883-1915 - 190 feet
Forestry Branch, 1894-1958 - 170 feet
Immigration Branch, 1873-1970 - 335 feet
Interior, 1873-1933 - 800 feet
Labour Department, 1900-1949 - 1,000 feet
Marine, including registers of vessels, 1762-1936 - 570 feet
Mines and Technical Surveys, 1885-1964 - 200 feet
Munitions and Supply, 1942-1945 - 192 feet
National Revenue, 1791-1968 - 200 feet
Northern Affairs, 1890-1962 - 800 feet
Public Works, 1765-c.1930 - 1,400 feet
Railways and Canals, 1835-1936 - 650 feet
Registrar General, charters of incorporations, etc. - 210 feet
Royal Commissions - over 90 Commissions, 1873-1969 - 960 feet
Trade and Commerce, 1880-1965 - 1,400 feet
Transport, 1916-1962 - 250 feet
Treasury Board, 1911-1956 - 800 feet
Unemployment Relief Branch, 1930-1942 - 230 feet
Vice-Admiralty Court, Halifax, 1784-1818 - 60 feet
Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 1940-1954 - 600 feet

There are also a fairly large number of papers and records from private sources which contain much information on Canada's economic development. I will name just a few of the larger collections:

For the fur trade and fisheries:

American Fur Co., 1803-1847 - 34 reels
John Askin, 1771-1864 - 13 feet
Arthur Dobbs, governor of North Carolina, 1754-1765 - 6 inches
Ermatinger Family, 1770-1872 - 20 feet
John Hargrave, 1821-1865 - 4 feet
Hudson's Bay Co., 1671-1871 (a few records to 1925) - 1817 reels
Robin, Jones & Whitman, 1760-1910 - 48 feet
Dr. Kupp's collection of Dutch documents, 1590-1695 - 8 inches

For Land Settlement and Railways:

British American Land Co., 1830-1936 - 2 feet
Isaac and Peter Buchanan, 1813-1883 - 40 feet
Merritt Family, 1775-1897 - 8 feet
Sir Edward Watkin, 1861-1887 - 1 foot plus 2 reels
Wright Family Papers, of Hull - 1 reel

For Lumber Companies:

Mossom Boyd & Co., 1839-1941 - 120 feet
Bronson Co., 1833-1952 - 190 feet

Gilmour & Hughson Ltd., 1845-1926 - 125 feet
W. & J. Sharples Reg'd., 1854-1923 - 42 feet

For Financial Institutions:

Bank of North America, 1836-1918 - 8 feet plus 14 reels
Bank of Montreal, 1817-1925 - 2 feet plus 7 reels
Baring Bros. & Co., 1818-1872 - 37 feet
Glynn Mill & Co., 1850-1881 - 2 feet
Merchants Bank of Canada, 1864-1924 - 4 feet and 3 reels
Molson's Bank, 1869-1924 - 4 reels

For Industry and other fields:

Cooperative Union of Canada, 1906-1952 - 83 feet
Sir James Dunn (electricity, steel...), 1904-1956 - 200 feet
Sir Joseph Flavelle (munitions...), 1896-1938 - 32 feet
Kerry and Chace Ltd., (engineering), 1887-1938 - 30 feet
Massey Family (trade and industry), 1823-1965 - 45 feet
Massey-Flanders (architects), 1954-1968 - 60 feet
Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation - records to be received shortly -
120 feet, and many others, most of which are listed in the Union List of
Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa,
1968.

While government holdings are considerable and very important, and likely to increase in the near future, it is quite evident that the holdings from private sources are inadequate. There are many reasons for this. The secrecy of many business firms on their operations and fear of a tarnished image if their records were open to consultation. An ignorance, in the past, and even now, of the possible research value of their records, which, as a consequence, have been allowed to disappear. But also, one must admit it, the reluctance on the part of archival institutions, who suffer a chronic lack of space and staff, to acquire large quantities of business records which, in addition to taking much valuable space, will require often long months or years to properly organize, and for very few researchers.

A Business Archives Council was created in 1967. But its beginnings were not auspicious as it succeeded, for lack of consultation, in antagonizing most institutions; the result is that the Council has barely survived and very little can be put to its credit.

An attempt will be made later this year to adopt a policy in collaboration with the provincial archives in order to solve this problem. New buildings planned for Records Centres, both by the federal and provincial Archives, might provide the needed space. Many business firms remain to be convinced that researchers have a legitimate interest in their records, and that they should be opened to research either on their premises or deposited in an archival institution.

Even in the field of government records, some improvements are needed. One case in point is the reluctance of Statistics Canada at opening records to research. I understand that the Canadian Historical Association and other associations are preparing a brief for the opening of the censuses without waiting 100 years. Other departments will have to be prodded into accepting at least the 30-year maximum delay which was announced two years

ago by the Prime Minister.

But one must take into account the fact that archives, in the past, have been treated very parsimoniously, and are only now being given space and staff to start fulfilling their role.

I may add that historians have not been clamouring, either, for "economic" records.

We are now revising our Union List of Manuscripts in Archival Repositories and will likely extend it, in the near future, to become a guide to sources in Canada and encompass all records, even if kept in the institution that created them.

An effort will be made to acquire more papers and records for economic history. At the same time, it should be remembered that similar efforts are being made to cover other areas which have also been neglected in the past, the arts, literature, the sciences, sports and leisure occupations, etc.

In our acquisitions programme and in our selection, we would welcome your cooperation and suggestions. We have found that this method was the most satisfactory as well as the most effective. Informal advisory groups have already been formed in several fields: medicine, pure science, sports, cultural communities, labour, architecture, cartography, and useful contacts have been established through the many national associations which are depositing their archives, on a continuing basis, in the Public Archives.

We would like you to believe that the preservation of records of economic interest is not only our responsibility, but also yours. And that it is partly through your interest, your assistance, even through your prodding, that the original sources on the economic development of the country will be preserved and utilized.