

Parliamentarians and the Public Archives

Carman V. Carroll

The Public Archives of Canada has long assumed responsibility for collecting historically valuable parliamentary papers, specifically the private, personal and constituency papers accumulated by prime ministers, cabinet ministers, members of parliament and senators. The private papers of parliamentarians may be defined as the correspondence and subject files, including recordings, photographs, tapes, memoranda, diaries, etc., which document their parliamentary careers. The disposition of the papers is entirely at the discretion of the parliamentarian for there are no legal statutes requiring deposit in the Public Archives of Canada or any other repository. It should be mentioned, however, that cabinet ministers' records dealing with their ministerial responsibilities, as opposed to their personal, political and constituency papers, should remain with their departmental records. The recently introduced Treasury Board Directive (Chapter 460 of the Treasury Board Administrative Policy Manual) makes the distinction between ministers' personal papers and departmental records.

The quality and quantity of parliamentarians' papers vary considerably. For its part the Public Archives of Canada is limited to what it can collect by staff and space constraints. In determining which parliamentarians' papers we wish to acquire we are guided by our mandate to collect material of national significance, by our perception of the "influence" of the individual and our need to document political and other activities throughout the country. Thus we try to ensure that all political parties and all regions of the country are represented as fully as possible among our holdings. If we do not collect the grist the historians will have nothing to mill.

Over the years, through gifts primarily, the Public Archives of Canada (PAC) has acquired an impressive collection of papers of federal parliamentarians. For the past dozen years a more systematic approach has developed to identify and collect papers which are potentially the most representative of parliament and the country. Many contacts are made, usually at election time, when as a result of retirement, defeat or cabinet changes members of parliament are faced with immediate decisions about their records. Before describing more specifically what the PAC wishes to acquire and what services it has to offer parliamentarians, a word is in

Carman V. Carroll is a graduate in history from St. Francis Xavier University and the University of New Brunswick. Formerly Chief, Prime Ministers Archives at the Public Archives of Canada, he is currently Chief, Public Affairs Archives, Manuscript Division.



Sir Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist 1904-1935.
(Public Archives of Canada)

order about its activities in this area over the first one hundred years of the Archives' existence.

Early Collecting

The Public Archives did not actively solicit parliamentarians' papers until after 1948. Despite this it had acquired a small number of significant acquisitions before this time, notably prime ministerial papers. One of the first major acquisitions was the Sir John A. Macdonald papers which were purchased from Lady Macdonald in 1915 through the intervention of Sir Joseph Pope, Macdonald's former private secretary and biographer. Other significant acquisitions included the transfer of the Alexander Mackenzie papers by W.L.M. King in 1924, the Mackenzie Bowell papers in 1921, the donation of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier papers in 1925 and the gift of the Sir Charles Tupper papers in 1926. Still other important acquisitions included the papers of Edgar Dewdney in 1919, Adolphe-Philippe Caron in 1908, George Etienne Cartier in 1909, George Foster in 1936, Rodolphe Lemieux in 1947, and Charles Murphy in 1936.

Dr. W. Kaye Lamb's appointment as Dominion Archivist in 1948 set the stage for a more vigorous acquisitions policy over the following twenty-years. Significant additions to the prime ministers papers were realized (W.L. Mackenzie King, Arthur Meighen, Robert Borden among them) and the number of collections of members' and senators' papers grew substantially. The defeat of the Liberal government of Louis St-Laurent on 10 June 1957 resulted in a new initiative by Dr. Lamb which has had far reaching consequences. The opening of the first federal records centre in 1956 in Ottawa provided the PAC with a much needed storage facility for government records and Dr. Lamb recognized an opportunity too good to miss. Cognizant that all too often valuable archival material was lost because departing ministers had neither the time to review files nor a secure space to store their papers for an extended period, Dr. Lamb wrote J.W. Pickersgill, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and the person responsible for the PAC. Dr. Lamb offered defeated ministers a secure storage area to deposit their papers, without them having to make a hasty decision on what to retain and what to dispose of. Because of the importance of the Dominion Archivist's initiative, his memorandum is worth reproducing in full:

Memorandum for Mr. Pickersgill

Re: Personal Papers of Members of the Cabinet

The Public Archives will be glad to be of service to any retiring Minister who may be in need of a secure place in which to deposit his personal office files, pending sorting and final disposition.

The new Records Centre at Tunney's Pasture contains locked rooms in which these files can be placed for safekeeping, and the Centre can also furnish sorting space in which papers may be examined at a later date.

The Archives will be glad to furnish storage cartons, specially designed to accommodate loose papers

and correspondence, if this will be of assistance. Records can, of course, be accepted in filing cabinets, boxes, or other containers.

I feel that it is of the utmost importance that decisions regarding the disposition of personal papers should not be made hastily. In the past, many useful and valuable files have been destroyed simply because action had to be taken quickly. The facilities for storage and sorting that I am able to offer through the Public Archives make this quite unnecessary.

I shall be glad if you will mention this matter to your colleagues in the Cabinet.

June 12, 1957

Wm. Kaye Lamb

Dominion Archivist¹

While the offer to assist did not stop some ministers from "cleaning house" prior to departure, a number did take advantage of the Archives' offer, thus setting a precedent that has since been followed many times over. Dr. Lamb did not restrict his offer to ministers, however, for he also recognized the value of the party leaders' papers. George Drew, who retired as Conservative leader in 1956 and M.J. Coldwell, leader of the C.C.F. were offered and accepted this service. In his report on the activities of the Public Archives for the years 1955-1958, Dr. Lamb wrote of these early transfers. "The Archives has received on deposit, for safekeeping a number of highly important collections of recent political papers. . . . It is hoped that ultimately title to these collections may pass to the Archives, and that they will be added to the great wealth of post-Confederation papers now in the keeping of the Manuscript Division".² As Dr. Lamb pointed out, the collections on deposit remained the property of the depositor with the final disposition of the papers to be determined as a later date. Between 1957 and 1962 St-Laurent himself, William Hamilton, George Marler, Paul Martin, Lester Pearson, J.W. Pickersgill and Robert Winters all availed themselves of the deposit system.

After the defeat of the Conservative government in 1963, Mr. Diefenbaker and many of his ministers used the deposit service and this resulted in a particularly valuable source of archival material for the period. After his retirement in 1968 Mr. Pearson deposited his own extensive collection in order to have access to these and other necessary sources for his memoirs project. This also contributed to a greater awareness of the historical value of these parliamentary papers and the need to preserve them and gave impetus to others to follow suit. One additional change was the regular deposit of papers by ministers still in office who, because of change of portfolio or lack of space, had to make alternate arrangements for storage. In all, between 1957 and 1968, the deposit system resulted in some 62 different accessions received from 25 ministers and party leaders.

Recent Acquisitions Activities

The years after 1967, when the Public Archives of Canada moved from its Sussex Drive location (now the Canadian War Museum) to its new building at 395 Wellington Street, were a period of significant growth for the Manuscript Division and indeed the entire



The stock area. (Public Archives of Canada)

Public Archives. The Public Archives arranged for the formal acquisition by gift of some deposit collections and work proceeded by trained archivists and assistants to sort, arrange and describe these politicians' collections.

By 1972 the PAC, under Dr. W.I. Smith, the new Dominion Archivist, experienced a number of important changes which affected many archivists including those working with political papers. A systematic national acquisitions programme (SNAP) placed emphasis on an active and orderly acquisitions programme as part of the senior staff archivist's duties. In the political sphere this included a reinforcement of the deposit and donation programmes and resulted in a strengthened acquisitions policy for political papers. The SNAP programme saw the PAC begin active collecting in new areas – labour, science and technology, arts and culture, among others – in response to new research trends. While one might expect this spelt a downgrading in importance for political papers, in reality it resulted in more diversified use of political papers as new uses were found for the more traditional sources.

In 1972 the federal election resulted in a Liberal minority government which took its toll on sitting members. A number of ministers were also defeated. The Archives recognized that it had to act quickly if it hoped to acquire a good selection of papers. Telephone calls to executive assistants and secretaries elicited some favourable responses but in other instances we were too late. Material had either been returned to the former member's constituency or disposed of as being of no further value or interest. Once our staff was within the confines of Parliament Hill, we made further valuable contacts. Defeated MPs and ministers were particularly gracious with their time and some pleasant hours were

spent acquiring significant collections and gaining interesting insights regarding the politicians themselves.

Shortly after the 1972 federal election, Archives' staff went to the Hill to collect the papers of a defeated minister. A funereal atmosphere hung over his dimly lit office. The archivist felt very much part of the burial party especially when the secretary, grief struck by her minister's defeat at the polls, greeted a sympathetic caller, "Ah yes, and now the end, the Archives are here." I have been struck by how calm defeated parliamentarians can be during those first weeks after a hectic election campaign when we must do most of our packing and shipping of material. On another occasion an MP enriched the bow tie collection of the two Archives employees with a gift of his own personal family bow tie. Still another defeated MP felt his papers should go directly to the Archives and be opened immediately in order to show his ungrateful constituents just how hard he had actually worked on their behalf.

Acquiring material brings with it numerous stories and occasionally great anticipation prior to actually receiving the papers. Some years ago we were told that several Sir Robert Borden "love" letters had been found in a former residence of the former Prime Minister. While this was somewhat out of character with my own preconceptions about Sir Robert, I nonetheless pursued the lead. In this case the "love" letters turned out to be several post-cards written to family members and not at all what the caller had led us to believe! Copies were obtained for our already extensive R.L. Borden collection; Sir Roberts's reputation remains in tact.

The 1974 federal election resulted in better planning on our part with favourable results and during the 1974-1979 period con-

tacts were made with ministers at the time of change in portfolios and resignations. By 1979, when the long awaited election was called, the Manuscript Division was ready to swing into action. The defeat of the Liberal government resulted in a flood of material coming to the Public Archives with nearly all ministers and a good number of departing members contributing to the flow. In all, over 3000 cubic feet of their files came to the Archives. The 1980 election also added to our holdings although at an understandably smaller rate given the Conservative government's short tenure in office. Among the depositors were Mr. Clark and Mr. Trudeau.

Over the years we have witnessed serious losses of material because people charged with the responsibility for papers did not know where to turn for help. A number of good archival "hunting" excursions took place in the Parliament Buildings where papers were squirrelled away over time. But imagine the dismay of the archivist who arranged to visit the basement of the Centre Block some years ago in order to look over a treasure trove of old documents only to learn from a vigilant member of the custodial staff that "all that old stuff" had been taken to the dump in order to comply with fire regulations!

Gift and Deposit Programmes

The Public Archives accepts parliamentarians' papers either as outright gifts or as deposits. The former results in the papers being donated to the Crown in right of Canada; the latter does not bind the depositor to donate the material although it is certainly the Archives' hope that the papers will eventually be donated.

Should a member of parliament or senator donate papers to the Public Archives upon termination of his or her parliamentary duties, access to the material is not automatically given to researchers. Once our staff has had the opportunity to survey the papers, remove duplicate material and select for permanent selection that which is considered to be of lasting historical value, recommendations on access are made to the donor who has final authority in this regard. Usually we recommend that the files remain closed for a period of 15-20 years after their leaving office although for specific research requests donors may choose to grant access. It should be pointed out that the personal, private and constituency files accumulated by parliamentarians are exempt from the recent Access to Information and Privacy Legislation.

We place dormant collections in secure storage areas reserved for this purpose. We can provide a limited retrieval for this material, however, if retrievals become burdensome (more than once a month), we ask the depositor to take back the papers as we do not have the resources to provide a regular retrieval service. When depositing files, members should prepare a file list of the contents in order that both parties have an accurate record of the transfer. This also assists in any retrievals. Collections on deposit are not worked on by our staff and thus remain in the same condition as they are received. They are not listed in our main indexes so researchers are usually not aware of their existence. However should researchers ask about a particular collection on deposit, we will acknowledge its existence and grant access only upon receipt of written authorization from the depositor. Researchers using such collections are faced with certain difficulties as the archivist is usually not aware of the contents and not in a good position to provide research advice.

Why donate to the PAC?

Why should a cabinet minister, member of parliament or senator consider donating his/her private papers? The Archives offers a wide range of facilities to donors and it has gained an international reputation as a leader in the archival community. The "total archives" concept, a PAC innovation identified with Dr. Smith, provides within one repository a facility which collects private papers on all facets of Canadian life as well as the historical records of the Government of Canada. Furthermore the PAC collects archival material in all its formats – textual, photographic, cartographic, iconographic, machine readable, sound, television, film, etc. This provides our vast and varied research clientele with an unparalleled wealth of research material. Researchers studying the Second World War, for example, benefit not only from the official records of the Department of National Defence and other departments, but also from the availability of the Honourable J.L. Ralston, and General A.G.L. McNaughton papers as well as many other collections of private papers held in the Manuscript Division. The recent publication of volume one of the Paul Martin memoirs provides a good example. Mr. Martin donated his extensive collection to the PAC and it was used extensively in the preparation of volume one. But many other sources at the Public Archives were also used including departmental records and the private papers of Mr. Martin's contemporaries in the Commons and Senate who also have donated papers to the Archives.

A parliamentarian's collection provides a mirror of a constituency and region reflecting the issues, concerns and problems of its people at a particular time and for this reason should be preserved for future generations of researchers. One should not think of these papers as useful only for political studies for they may be used effectively to study social, cultural, economic, linguistic and many other questions of interest to researchers. Given the increasing involvement of government in people's lives through social programmes and the like, it is beneficial to see how the community responds to and is affected by these programmes.

What is the process of government and how do the concerns of constituents, as evidenced in their correspondence to parliamentarians, get translated to action in Ottawa? What influence does a member have on policy and persuasion? How has this changed over the years? What are the major tasks of a member or senator and how do these differ among the regions, or between the party in power and those in opposition? These are but a few of the important questions for which researchers seek answers among the private papers of parliamentarians held in our repository.

What does the Archives Want?

I have been surprised over the years by the number of parliamentarians who do not consider their papers to be of lasting historical value. But having, I hope, made the case for the importance of having a well-documented collection of parliamentarian's papers, I will now deal specifically with what is most important in a collection to an archivist and offer some suggestions as to what can be disposed of quickly by parliamentary staff. Selective weeding, if done properly using criteria developed and understood by everyone in the office, serves the member well and, from an Archives'

point of view, ensures that the best information survives over the long term.

As every parliamentarian, and certainly as every parliamentarian's secretary knows, the volume of paper entering offices is ever increasing. Some is of absolutely no value to the MP and should be disposed of. Publications readily available in libraries, information and promotional literature of no interest to an MP or his riding usually fit this category. Other material can be kept for a short period and then disposed of. This has several advantages to the office. First, the office has the information when needed and once this need has been usefully served it may be discarded. Second, office and storage space are used most efficiently and one is not burdened by unimportant material. Copies of Hansard, published committee reports, acts and the like, usually withdrawn by our staff during archival processing, fit into this category. Some might be of value to our library, however, in many instances this material is available in most libraries. An important exception should be mentioned. If the printed material has been annotated in a significant way by the member or senator then it takes on an added archival significance and is kept with the collection for these notations may provide important evidence about a member's thinking or position on an issue.

Housekeeping files pertaining to the operation of the parliamentary office should be kept for a period but likely will have little longterm archival significance save for a representative sample. Again routine culling using a disposal schedule established by staff in consultation with the member can make for immediate efficiencies in office management and be helpful for the archivist when the material reaches the archives.

The case work performed by members in response to constituents' demands takes up a good deal of time and consequently this makes up a major part of his archives. Most of this should be kept for even after a particular case is closed the file may be important for reasons of precedence. Is the Public Archives interested in retaining all of these files, even the so very routine and repetitious ones? The answer is likely "no". Those cases which are affected by legislative changes should be retained as they document important policy changes. A sample of the routine will be retained by the Archives. For long runs of files which are unusually similar (UIC cases for example) information retained on a file card may suffice and the files themselves may be disposed of after an appropriate period.

Many members maintain files on various government departments where they file correspondence, memoranda and the like. These are usually important for archives. Files relating to a member's responsibilities within the political party are also of interest. These often deal with his responsibilities in the House, organizational concerns among other matters. Some of them may duplicate material emanating from the political party itself which will likely find its way into the Archives as the major political parties donate their files to the Public Archives, however, the archivist can take care of this.

The member should also retain a full set of his speeches and addresses especially those given outside the Commons as they are not often available elsewhere in complete form. Speeches by others should be retained if they relate to a specific interest of

the member. An organized set of newspaper clippings may be useful to future researchers, however, indiscriminate clippings on a variety of subjects without order will receive little further attention from the archivist and will likely be recommended for destruction. A further complication is the high acid content of newsprint. Acidic paper deteriorates very quickly and adversely affects any paper it comes in contact with.

Of particular importance to the archivist are any indexes, lists, and other aids, developed in the members' offices to assist their staff in retrieving information from their files. These should be transferred to the Public Archives along with the papers as they might continue to be used as finding aids or form the basis of PAC finding aids.

As we can see, there are no hard and fast rules on what to keep, how long to keep it or what might be of most value to future historians and researchers. But from our experience the foregoing general comments can be applied to the day to day operations of a member's office and the long term retention of material for the Archives. The biggest problem an archivist faces is the wholesale destruction of material without having had the opportunity to advise on the matter. When in doubt in these matters it is best to consult an archivist.

What the PAC does with Collections

The Public Archives of Canada provides specific services for material entrusted to its care. First and foremost it provides a secure home for the historically valuable material, gets it under initial control and respects whatever temporary access restrictions are placed on the papers by the donor or depositor. Although, deposit collections are not processed in any way, once a collection is donated an archivist surveys the collection, determines whether there is a workable organization already in place, establishes an intellectual arrangement on paper and then sets about selecting material for permanent retention.

Material not meeting our selection criteria is set aside along with duplicate speeches, etc. to be returned to the donor or disposed of with the donor's permission. The collection is organized into series by type of material, by function or by chronology depending on its contents, and an inventory entry – a brief description of the papers is prepared. A unique call number is assigned and a finding aid is prepared to assist researchers in determining whether the collection might be of use to them. Cross references to the major subjects and names in the collection are prepared as an assistance to our research clientele. A copy of the finding aid, which is essentially a file list to the collection, is sent to the donor along with the archivist's recommendations on access. Once the donor has responded to these matters, the archivist's work has been completed and the papers take their place in our stacks.

From my experience some MP's papers are very well kept and information is easily assessable. Among those still active in the Commons, Stanley Knowles' papers stand out as the shining example of how files should be maintained. He has taken a direct role in developing a system that works for his office. A good number of members have sought his advice in this area over the years. Mr. Knowles' files contrast dramatically with those of a former cabinet



The Public Archives moved to its new location in 1967. (*Public Archives of Canada*)

minister which arrived in green garbage bags after the minister had retired from office! Time spent in developing and maintaining an efficient and effective filing system will pay immediate benefits to the parliamentarian. There are also long term benefits to the archivist and historian.

The Public Archives of Canada is interested in acquiring the historical papers of parliamentarians as soon as possible after they leave parliament. Our reasons are simple. This is when the collection is likely to be most complete. Removal from the office may result in loss or serious deterioration over time. Parliamentarians do, however, have legitimate reasons for taking their papers with them and one alternative is to will the papers to the PAC.

One problem area is the case of a federal parliamentarian who has also had a distinguished provincial career. Where should the archival collection be housed? The George Drew papers, for example, are at the Public Archives of Canada but contain a large section relating to his years as Ontario Premier. A more recent example is the Honourable Robert L. Stanfield. His papers reflecting his career as Premier of Nova Scotia, are quite properly with the Public Archives of Nova Scotia while those created while he was a federal member and Leader of the Conservative Party remain with the Public Archives of Canada. A similar case is the Honourable T.C. Douglas. The PAC has his federal papers as MP and Leader of the New Democratic Party; the Saskatchewan Archives Board holds his provincial Premier's papers. While archivists do not encourage breaking up a collection, in the two preceding cases the split is quite clear cut. In all three cases we will eventually arrange a microfilm exchange with the other repositories mentioned. However, given the cost of microfilming, it is only possible to contemplate this type of arrangement for special cases.

Most of the comments on members' papers apply equally to senators' papers. Our contacts may be made during a senator's tenure or more often upon retirement for the upper chamber. Senator David Croll has recently deposited papers with us and Senators Marshall, Forsey, Carter, Hayden, Desruisseaux and the family of the late Senator Hays have all made recent contributions to our national historic record.

We must also understand that some parliamentarians prefer to donate their papers to another repository. The original R.B. Bennett papers are housed at the University of New Brunswick and the John G. Diefenbaker papers are the property of the University of Saskatchewan. In both cases the Public Archives of Canada has ensured that its researchers are well served. The Bennett papers have been microfilmed and we are in the process of filming the Diefenbaker papers. These two cases are exceptional ones for the PAC does hold all other prime ministerial papers.

The Public Archives is restricted in what it can do for the private and personal papers of parliamentarians because of the limited resources available and because of its already considerable mandate. The volume of the material is such that the PAC cannot possibly contact every parliamentarian regarding regular transfers of papers. Our storage space is limited and of constant concern to us. Therefore, members and senators should retain papers as long as possible. An archivist's time is more profitably used in reviewing a series of cabinets and boxes for transfer rather than on a piecemeal approach or annual transfers of a box or two. Once the storage situation has reached crisis proportions in the parliamentarian's office, the archivist can be called for assistance!

The Future

The continued growth in the number of members of parliament, the arrival of new technologies to assist members and their staff, as well as the increasing amount of correspondence received by parliamentarians make for increased space problems. This requires, I feel, new efforts to deal with the immediate paper burden problem to ensure a complete and useful archival record. I believe new members and their staff should be briefed not only on office procedures but also on matters relating to archives. The Public Archives could assist the House of Commons in this and in other endeavors by preparing for instance, an information package indicating the services it has to offer. The use of records managers specifically assigned to assist parliamentarians could also be considered. These and other measures will require additional resources to carry out which would be more than offset by the attendant gains.

Ultimately the Public Archives' goal is to have a very representative collection of papers of Canada's parliamentarians in order to provide our vast research clientele with a valuable research source now and in the future. For as Dr. Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist from 1904 to 1935 said, "Of all national assets archives are the most precious; they are the gift of one generation to another and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilization."³

Notes

¹Public Archives of Canada, *Dr. W. Kaye Lamb papers*, MG 31 D 8.

²Canada, *Report on the Public Archives For the Years 1955-1958*, Ottawa, 1959, p. 21.

³Arthur Doughty, *The Canadian Archives and its Activities*, Ottawa, 1924, p. 5.