

CHAPTER II.—HISTORY AND CHRONOLOGY.

PART I.—HISTORY.

Section 1.—The Relationship of the Department of Public Archives to the Historical Records of Canada.*

The Public Archives of Canada is a national institution. Created in 1872, it is directed by a Deputy Minister and attached to the Department of the Secretary of State. Its primary function is the custody and care of all inactive records of the Government that possess administrative value or historical interest. A secondary purpose is to gather public and private material relating to the history of the country in its broadest sense. Consequently, the objectives of the Archives are: first, to preserve such records and material for present and future generations; and secondly, to make them available to government officials, students of history, and general inquirers.

In the Archives are kept the commissions, proclamations, constitutions, acts, charters, and treaties in which are recorded and defined our national and provincial boundaries as well as our constitutional and political rights. There are deposited also numerous land grants, deeds, and surveys through which ownership is established on behalf of governments, institutions, and citizens. There too, in public or private records, will be found much information concerning public men as well as private persons. Thus in the Archives vital interests of the country, of institutions, and of individuals are preserved and safeguarded.

Unlike its European counterparts, the Canadian Archives has not limited itself to official records: it has also assembled all kinds of documentary material, manuscripts, maps, pictures, books, and historical articles, which are classified and grouped in their respective divisions.

The work of the Archives is at present organized under five divisions and an Administrative Section headed by the Dominion Archivist. These Divisions are: the Manuscript Division, the Map Division, the Print Division, the Library Division, and the Museum Division.

By its very nature, the Manuscript Division is that which essentially constitutes the Archives. It comprises, on the one hand, numerous and extensive series of official records of governments and, on the other, many collections of public and private papers. Together these embrace the basic material of the country's history. Constantly growing through transfers, donations, and purchases, the records include over thirty thousand large volumes and portfolios. It is inexpedient here to describe these series and collections, or even to enumerate them; it will suffice to indicate the main subject matters of their contents.

First, are to be found the instructions to and reports of those who discovered and explored our country; then follow the commissions and instructions which, under French rule, established the system of government and prescribed the duties of those who administered it. Next come the innumerable dispatches which passed between the Governors and the Intendants in Canada and the Ministers in France, dealing with every detail of the military, economic, and social life of the colony. To these must be added narratives of Indian and British wars leading up to the conquest of the country.

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