

TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN COUNCIL;

The undersigned, who by a Minute of the Privy Council, approved by Your Royal Highness on the 9th November, 1912, were designated a Royal Commission to enquire into the state of the records of the Departments of the Public Service of the Dominion with a view of ascertaining the nature and extent of the records; their state of preservation; the use made of them in conducting public business; the state of the buildings and places wherein the documents are deposited; the space they occupy; the facilities of access thereto by the Departments of the Government and by the public; and of the control exercised over the said records; have the honour to report:

That in the performance of the duty assigned to them they have visited all the Departments of the Public Service in Ottawa, beginning with the Privy Council Office which they inspected on the 11th December, 1912, and ending with the Department of External Affairs on the 28th November, 1913. Besides these Departments of State and their branches, they likewise visited, upon different occasions, the office of the Auditor General; the Senate; the House of Commons; the Library of Parliament; the Commission of Conservation; the

Railway Commission; the office of the Commissioner of the North West Territories; the Supreme Court; the Exchequer Court; and the Civil Service Commission; making in each case as thorough an examination as circumstances would permit. The total number of meetings held and inspections made by the undersigned and their Secretary is in the neighbourhood of two hundred. They now proceed to submit to Your Royal Highness in Council the results of their investigations.

1. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE RECORDS.

The records stored in the various Departments and public offices visited, consist for the most part, of files of departmental correspondence, books of accounts and vouchers, maps, plans, deeds, field notes, manuscript volumes, letter books, reference libraries, blue books and the like. They extend from the original record of certain grants made under the authority of the French King in 1651 and onwards, deposited in the office of the Registrar General, down to correspondence of the present day.

2. THE STATE OF PRESERVATION OF THE PUBLIC DOCUMENTS.

This varies. In most of the Departments, while the

current correspondence is well kept, the older documents are commonly relegated to basements, attics, and dark rooms, apparently rather as lumber to be got rid of than as records to be preserved, and too frequently are not so arranged as to admit of ready reference, or, in not a few instances, even of convenient access. In some cases there is no semblance of method, the older papers being stored in inaccessible places, without pretence of classification, or any precise indication as to what the collection may contain. The exposure of the documents to dust, damp, and other agencies, and in some cases their proximity to the heating apparatus of the building, contribute to the deterioration of the papers, while the inflammable nature of the shelving on which they are placed is a constant source of danger.

3. THE USE MADE OF THESE DOCUMENTS IN CONDUCTING PUBLIC BUSINESS.

In most of the public offices the constant use of the departmental files does not extend to those over five years old. Reference to documents beyond that date is for the most part occasional, and records older than ten years are seldom required. Most of the inquiries relating to

documents older than twenty years are purely historical, and the experience of the Militia Department, ( the only Department which so far has transferred its old records to the Archives ), is that these inquiries can be answered more satisfactorily by the Archivist, to whom all such questions are referred. The retention of documents therefore on account of these occasional inquiries is not recommended, as much more frequent use could be made of them in the Archives.

4. THE CONDITION OF THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND PLACES WHERE THE DOCUMENTS ARE KEPT.

As regards this feature there is no uniformity. In some Departments the files of correspondence of whatever age, are contained in steel cabinets and are readily accessible. In others, many of the older documents are stored away in wooden cupboards or boxes, sometimes loosely piled on shelves, or, it may be, on the floor of basement or attic rooms, where they lie for years, dust laden and forgotten, offering scant facilities for examination, and in some instances wholly inaccessible. The rooms in the upper stories of most buildings in which these documents are lodged are totally unfit for the storage of valuable records. The wood is old and dry and

there would be little prospect of saving any of the papers in the event of fire. One fact, everywhere observable, is that the preservation and care of the older records is the last thought of anybody. The congested condition of the offices, owing to the lack of room, is no doubt largely responsible for this state of affairs, as in many departments the ingenuity of the higher officials is sorely taxed to find space in which to transact current business. Under these conditions it is not surprising that documents, rarely, if ever, required for the conduct of the day's work, should be relegated to dark rooms and passages not suitable for other uses.

Several wooden buildings improvised as offices in various parts of the city whose upper rooms and passages, reached by old-fashioned wooden staircases, contain quantities of books and papers in various stages of neglect, with no protection of any sort against fire. The same is true in a modified sense of the attics and basements of the public buildings within the Parliament grounds, while the ever present danger is heightened by the use commonly made of corridors for storage purposes. The highly congested condition of the upper stories of the older portions of the Eastern, Western and Langevin Blocks, in the opinion of the undersigned is

largely adding to the risk to which these buildings are exposed, as in the event of an outbreak there would be no room to fight the fire.

In the course of their investigation the undersigned discovered, in a stable and in attics, whole series of papers, some of them very valuable; the very existence of which seems to have been forgotten. These papers have since been removed to a place of safety.

5. THE SPACE OCCUPIED BY THE RECORDS IN THE VARIOUS  
PUBLIC OFFICES.

The accompanying table shows at a glance the space taken up by the records in the Public Departments.

SPACE OCCUPIED BY RECORDS IN THE PUBLIC DEPARTMENTS.

	Rooms.	Contents.	Drawers.	Shelves.
		Cubic feet	No.	Linear feet
East Block	59	308,810	7178	22,633
West Block	74	353,473	13662	7,538
Parliament Bldg.	22	66,594	2082	10,240
Langevin & other Buildings	283	901,137	69950	36,803
Grand Total	438	1,629,014	92872	127,219

\* over 24 miles

N.B. In the case of rooms being used for office purposes as well as record rooms, the space used for records only, has been estimated.

It will be seen from this table that every available room in the various buildings is occupied with records, and moreover, that vacant houses and store rooms in different parts of the city are utilized for the purpose. It should also be borne in mind that with the increased business of the departments, the multiplication of files is growing rapidly, and that in the course of ten years most of the rooms now required for administrative purposes would be needed for storage. Ample accommodation therefore is required not only for the reception of the present records but also for the accretions of the future.

6. THE FACILITIES OF ACCESS TO THE RECORDS BY THE DEPARTMENTS OF GOVERNMENT AND BY THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING THE CONTROL OVER THE SAID RECORDS.

While every facility is afforded by the public departments for imparting information to inquirers, each department is the custodian of its own records, and no person is given direct access thereto save by the authority of the Deputy Head.

7. THE OVERLAPPING OF WORK IN THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS.

While not strictly coming within the scope of this Commission, the undersigned cannot refrain from calling attention to the overlapping of work in the several Departments of Government. This is perhaps most conspicuous in the making of maps, in which no fewer than sixteen branches of the Public Service are engaged, occupying a very large space and resulting in apparent duplication. The suggestion is made that the whole of the map making for the Dominion Government might be carried on more effectively and economically under the direction of a central authority.

8. THE FIXING OF A TIME LIMIT FOR THE RETENTION OF  
DOCUMENTS IN THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS OF GOVERNMENT.

The undersigned, while fully recognizing that special cases may call for special treatment in this regard, are of opinion that, as a general rule, files of correspondence, registers, indexes, books of account and so forth, belonging to any Department of the Public Service, should after 25 years, (or at an earlier date, if the Department so desires,) be removed to the Public Record Office, and deposited in the



section set apart in the Public Record Office for the use of the Departments from which the records in question have been transferred, and there to remain, as hereinafter recommended, under the control of the Department concerned, if considered advisable.

9. THE QUESTION OF THE PERIODICAL DESTRUCTION OF SUCH RECORDS AS MAY PROVE OF NO VALUE AFTER A LAPSE OF YEARS.

The undersigned realize the impossibility of laying down any fixed rule in this matter which shall admit of general application. They are at the same time equally sensible of the fact that some method of periodical destruction of documents which have outlived any value they might originally have possessed, is imperatively called for.

In some Departments, such as the Post Office, Customs, and Inland Revenue, whole classes of certain documents are regularly destroyed after a fixed period. In other cases, the authority of the Governor in Council is spasmodically sought for a like purpose, when the accumulation of papers renders some such measure of relief a necessity. Cases of this nature, however, are exceptional, and as a rule the

Departments suffer this accumulation of papers to continue unchecked, to their very great inconvenience, as well as to the detriment of the more important and valuable documents, which, engulfed by rubbish, share the common neglect, and if not speedily rescued, bid fair to participate in the common ruin.

Some organized system of ridding the public offices of much useless material with which they are now encumbered, being thus necessary, the undersigned suggest, that the permanent commission hereafter referred to, should be empowered to visit the Departments in turn periodically, and to determine, by detailed personal examination, what papers, books ( including blue books ) maps or other documents might safely be destroyed.

In framing regulations for the selection of papers to be destroyed every precaution should be taken to prevent the possibility of political considerations or other extraneous influences in any way entering into the question. Great care should also be exercised to see that no document which gives indication of others of importance, although, apparently , of no consequence in itself, should be destroyed. The undersigned are of opinion that the board of inspection to be created for this purpose should be guided by rules similar to those governing the destruction of Public Records in England, before becoming

operative, these rules should receive the sanction of Your Royal Highness in Council, and no papers should be actually destroyed without the specific authority of the Treasury Board.

10. GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS.

The undersigned, from the beginning of their investigation, have observed the great waste that results from the present method of distributing Government publications.

They consider this question comes within their province only in so far as the space occupied in the various Departments by publications issued from other Departments is concerned, and because of the lack of any system to provide against the supply of any particular Blue Book becoming exhausted.

The Act respecting the Department of Public Printing and Stationery, Section 22 ( 2 ) provides that :

The Superintendent of Stationery shall also have charge of the sale of all the official publications of the Parliament and Government of Canada which are issued for sale, as well as of the distribution of all public documents and papers to the officials and other persons who are entitled to receive the same without payment. R.S.C., c.27, s.6.

From the annual report of the Department of Public Printing and Stationery for the year ending March 31, 1912, it is gleaned

that Blue Books were printed during that year, not including  
Supplementary Reports, as follows:-

Distribution:		
Parliament	95,135	
Departments	119,800	
Stock	4,535	
Sessional papers (bound)	31,990	251,460

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The phase of this distribution to which the undersigned feel called upon specially to refer to is the allotment to any particular Department of copies of its own report, which speaking generally, is 500 English copies and about half that number of French copies.

While some of the Departments having an outside service, for instance the Department of Militia and Defence, distribute its Reports, in so far as the supply admits, among officers of the Militia Force, others have no such distribution to make, and to aid them in getting rid of their supply, they distribute them in part by sending from half to one dozen copies to each of the other Departments of the Service, to be followed in due course by a supply of French copies. It is these copies that accumulate in the various Departments, and so little attention is given to them that should a copy of a particular

Blue book be required, it is probable that application would be made to the Stationery Office for it.

This distribution to Departments is an absolute waste and should be discontinued. The only copies, as a rule, a Department requires of reports of other Departments, are the two copies supplied with the Parliamentary papers from the Distribution Office.

The question of Parliamentary Blue Books and the distribution thereof is not a new one. The Public Service Commission, 1912, deals with it in its Report, pages 343-346.

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS.

##### THE REMOVAL OF DOCUMENTS TO A CENTRAL REPOSITORY.

In the opinion of the undersigned the question here proposed for their consideration goes to the root of the whole matter. Some better plan than the present policy of drift must be devised if the public records are to be rescued from their present unsatisfactory condition. The undersigned, having given their best consideration to the subject, are of opinion that no reform can be permanent or effective which does not provide for concentration and unity of control.

The undersigned therefore recommends:-

*Public Record  
Office*

1. The creation of a Public Record Office, by the enlargement of the present Archives building, on plans similar to those submitted to the Prime Minister in which provision is made for
  - ( a ) The storage of all records, books, plans, papers, etc., not in current use, which now encumber the various departments of the Service.
  - ( b ) Rooms for the examination and segregation of documents and for the storage of all records which are to remain for a given number of years under the control of the departments from which they were received.
  - ( c ) Rooms and machinery for the destruction of all such records considered by competent authority to be useless.
  - ( d ) The natural expansion of the Archives for a reasonable length of time, and for the reception of all such documents as the various departments, after examining the records, shall wish to transfer to the Archives proper in the Public Record Office.
2. Immediately after the construction of the said building, all records, books, papers, plans, etc., over twenty-five years old, (or of more recent date, at the request of the department

concerned ), shall be transferred to the said Public Record Office, and there, under the supervision of a special permanent commission to be appointed for that purpose, carefully gone over, in the presence of a representative of the department to which the papers under examination belong. When the work of selection has been completed, the documents which it is decided to preserve, shall be transferred either to the Archives proper, in the Public Record Office, or into the section allotted *to that department*.

The authority of the Treasury Board should be sought for the destruction of all such documents as competent authority may consider useless.

3. That collections of papers of whatever age, at present kept in unsuitable and insecure places, be removed as soon as possible to safer quarters.
4. That the general interdepartmental distribution of Blue Books be done away with.
5. That there be published monthly, a list of all Government publications, issued by the King's Printer, and that a copy thereof be sent to the Deputy Heads of the Public Service with

a view of the recipients furnishing the Superintendent of Stationery with a number of copies of such books as they may require in excess of the copies distributed with the Parliamentary papers.

6. In addition to the foregoing recommendations, the undersigned consider that further measures should be adopted to render available to the public the valuable mass of historical material contained in the Blue Books, which are public records not less valuable than manuscripts. They therefore, recommend that a reference library for Government Publications for the Dominion should be established in connection with the Public Record Office. This library should contain, so far as practical, a French and an English copy of every publication issued by the Government of Canada, from the year 1792 to date. That the subjects of these books should be indexed, and printed on cards, and that the catalogue should be supplied to Heads of Departments and Deputy Heads, and be placed in the Library of Parliament and in other important libraries of the country. That members of the Government or other persons requiring information should be furnished with extracts from the said books by

*Blue Book  
Reference Library*



means of the photostat. That by this method any portion of a Blue Book can be speedily and economically reproduced, and often, more conveniently than by furnishing the complete book. Many of the early publications of the Government are exceedingly scarce and command high prices, and, at present, there is no place in the Dominion of Canada where a complete, or even a reasonably complete, collection of Blue Books is to be found. The undersigned are of opinion that this library would be of the utmost value to public men, who by means of the index, could ascertain at a glance all that had ever been published in this form on a given subject.

In connection with the use to which this Reference Library might be put, it is suggested that when any important question arises, the bibliographer of the Library could be requested to trace the historical development of the subject, and furnish the necessary references.

They are further of opinion that, with the ready means of obtaining from the Reference Library, the various departments of the Public Service would not consider it necessary to attempt to form Blue Book libraries within their own departments. During the course of their investigation the undersigned found hundreds of imperfect collections of

reports which are of no real service to anyone wishing to make a thorough investigation of the subjects to which they relate. Considerable economy would be effected by the establishment of this Library and in the course of a short time, the number of books printed and distributed would be greatly reduced and better service to the public insured. The undersigned also consider that this Library should contain a copy of each publication issued by the departments, whether published and distributed by the King's Printer or otherwise; and to insure the receipt of all such publications by the Library, it is suggested that no account for the printing of such publications be passed by the Auditor General unless accompanied by a certificate of deposit of such publications in the Library.

In presenting this report the undersigned desire to acknowledge the valuable assistance which they have received at all times from their Secretary, Mr. F.J. Audet.

The undersigned submit in the form of appendices to this report a detailed record of their visits to the several departments, including lists of documents contained therein.

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In conclusion the undersigned desire respectfully to emphasize the necessity, which in their judgement, exists for the adoption of prompt and thorough measures looking to the better organization and care of the country's records. A beginning has been made in the erection of the present Archives building and in the removal thereto of many documents of interest and value.

The undersigned submit that the result of these steps has been such as to justify further progress along the same lines. There are many valuable records scattered throughout the public departments, which ought to be co-ordinated and deposited in a place of safety, and for the reception of which there is no adequate provision. The Archives building is already congested and altogether inadequate for its present needs. In the meantime the documents referred to remain exposed to the risk of theft, fire, neglect and decay, and every year lessens their number and renders the rescue of those that remain more difficult.

For the reasons adduced the undersigned respectfully urge that ample accommodation be provided for the public documents with the least possible delay, and that their further recommendations touching the care and preservation

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of the records may receive the early and favourable consideration  
of Your Royal Highness.

Humbly submitted :

Joseph Paper

A. F. Jarvis

Alfred D. Doughty

W. H. H. H.

3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1914.