



CANADA'S NEW RECORDS CENTRE BUILDING IN OTTAWA



VIEW OF CENTRE STORAGE AREA

Canada's New Records Centre

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Public Archives of Canada

MOTORISTS traveling along busy Scott Street in Ottawa's West End are intrigued by the huge blank walls of the new Records Centre in Tunney's Pasture. Because the office area with its bank of windows faces away from the main street the Centre is known to the public as "the building without any windows." But we who know the building consider it rather attractive. The front of the building, housing the office space, has a great deal of glass, with floor-to-ceiling windows on the ground floor and a solid band of windows on the other three floors. Except for the first floor front, which is of grey limestone, the outside construction is of buff brick.

The interior of the Centre is divided into 35 storage rooms, 17 offices, search rooms and various workrooms, a staff room, a conference room and so on. Its total floor area is over 200,000 square feet, with a net storage area of over 3½ acres. Only about one third of the storage area has been equipped with shelves, and here an adjustable steel library shelving has been used. Workflow is provided from the indoor loading dock to the reception room, to cleaning benches and fumigation chamber, and if necessary to the sorting room. Two freight elevators, one at the front and one at the back, provide access to the basement and upper floors.

When the Hon. J. W. Pickersgill formally opened this building on April 10 of this year, the hopes and planning of over half a century were realized. The Public Archives of Canada had developed into a full-fledged public records office.

As early as 1897 a commission, appointed by the federal government to report on the state of the public records, made its chief recommendation "a proposal . . . for centralizing the public records under the care of a Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Records." This recommendation was followed in 1903 by an Order in Council directing that public papers be "assembled in one place and

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put into the custody of one person," and in 1906 the first unit of the present archives building was completed. From 1912 to 1914 a Royal Commission made a thorough survey of the "state of the Records of the Public Departments of the Dominion" and came to the conclusion that the creation of a Public Records Office for the "storage of all records, books, plans, papers etc., not in current use, which now encumber the various departments of the Service" was essential. The commission further recommended the transfer of all government records "over twenty-five years old (or of more recent date, at the request of the department concerned)" to the proposed records office. Even then the records in the various government departments occupied 1,629,000 cubic feet of space. At this point the First World War intervened and nothing further was done until 1925. Then the Archives building was enlarged, but it was still much too small to serve in a comprehensive records program.

In 1933 the Public Works Department undertook to provide cheaper storage space for semiactive government records. The departments were requested to state their space requirements in a "plain storage building." Construction of the building was begun on the grounds of the Experimental Farm in the summer of 1937. Public Works planned to allot rooms to the various departments and asked the departments to specify floor space and office equipment required. The Public Works staff was to have custody of the records deposited, and it was anticipated that, with a motor car service to carry the records as required, documents urgently needed could be delivered within half an hour. But these plans were never realized. When the storage building was ready to receive records in March 1939 the policy was to let the departments retain custody of their own records. Each department transferred its own records and retained all responsibility for arrangement, shelving, and reference. Public Works kept one clerk in the building, who issued keys to departmental representatives on the presentation of a pass. This arrangement lasted only a short time; the space in this new building was soon urgently required for war purposes, and the records had to be shunted back to the departments. But even in this short time it became obvious that serious difficulties were arising from the lack of central control.

During and after the Second World War the volume of records created grew so fast that the necessity for action became clear, but the course of action was not nearly so obvious. The Public Records Committee was formed in 1945 to help in guiding and controlling records policy, and its first charge was to explore the possibility of

developing a Public Records Office as recommended by the Royal Commission of 1912. Nothing was done, however, until in 1949 William Kaye Lamb became Dominion Archivist.

Dr. Lamb in his first year at the archives outlined his plans for a Records Centre to the Royal Commission on Arts and Sciences and again in his annual report to the minister. Two years later specific plans began to be laid, and in three more years construction of the building was begun.

The Centre has a twofold task. First, it offers safe, economical storage for the vast number of dormant files in the many government departments and crown corporations in the Ottawa area, providing a ready reference to these files. Second, the Centre is attacking the problem of getting rid of the great accumulation of dead records now stored away in offices, attics, and basements all over Ottawa.

The accessioning procedure is simple. A telephone call from a department usually results in a visit from W. W. Bilsland, head of accessions. He fills out a comprehensive Records Transfer Request. The boxing of the records in cubic-foot corrugated cardboard boxes is done jointly by the Centre and by departmental personnel; this ensures joint responsibility for arrangement. The Public Works Department does most of the moving in bulk; smaller batches are transferred by the Centre's panel truck. In the Centre a shelf list is prepared and one copy of the shelf list together with a copy of the Records Transfer Request is sent to the Department.

The Reference Section prides itself on a 3-hour service on loans of files to any of the departments in central Ottawa. Requests come in by phone to D. T. W. Shadd, head of the section, and are recorded in duplicate on a Control and Request slip, one copy of which goes with the clerk and is slipped into the transparent pocket on an "Armorclad" charge out. The other copy goes with the file, is signed as a receipt, and returned to a tickler file. Instead of borrowing files, departments may send members of their staff to the Centre to use the files there; search rooms are available in the office area. Or departments may ask the staff of the Centre to do brief researches on their files.

A disposal section will be formed at the Centre in the near future.

In its very brief career the Centre has already served 16 departments and crown corporations and accessioned over 28,000 cubic feet of records. By the first of July 23,250 square feet of floor space in departmental offices had been cleared and equipment with

an approximate replacement value of \$32,000 had been released. In the month of June 263 loans and 39 interfiles were made.

The 1949 Archives annual report predicted that the Records Centre "would provide an orderly solution of the public records problem at minimum cost." We are now working to fulfil that prediction.

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