Diplomatic Records, Archival Description, and the Canadian Department of External Affairs in the 1920s

By

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of

Angela Eleanor Shumilak

and

Donald Joseph Milburn

Abstract

This thesis examines records created through diplomatic activities and considers approaches to their archival description, using those created by the Canadian Department of External Affairs in the 1920s as a case study. Although diplomatic records have long been a major component of the holdings of many archives around the world, and have been widely used in the study of international relations, their own history has rarely been a subject of study. The objective of the thesis is to explore the history of this genre of record with a focus on how archivists can provide users with access to more authentic and meaningful diplomatic records. Chapter One will provide a broad overview history of the diplomatic genre as well as the place of such contextual knowledge about the creation and characteristics of these records in our understanding of them. Chapter Two will introduce a key strategy that archives can implement to more effectively relay contextual knowledge to archival users through the function of description. Chapter Three will then introduce a case study, building upon the approach identified in Chapter Two, and based on Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s. This department and period in its history have been chosen because important new steps were taken to widen information gathering and improve recordkeeping in order to support the historic expansion of Canada's diplomatic role in that decade. The result was the creation of diplomatic records that are among the most important, voluminous, and yet still understudied holdings of Library and Archives Canada.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The practices of diplomacy engage society's most powerful and influential. They draw upon the protocols and traditions of the past while confronting the ever-evolving realities of the current international system. Some of society's most prominent institutions and organizations are those established to engage in and facilitate diplomatic activities. The need to cultivate skilled diplomats has produced entire fields and schools of thought dedicated to the 'art' of diplomacy. At the state level, governments and individuals invest considerable effort in developing a diplomatic corps that best pursues the interests of the state on the world stage. At all of these levels, diplomatic actions direct political, economic and cultural affairs.

In the process of conducting foreign affairs, vast amounts of records are constantly being created. The treaties, conventions, statutes, acts, declarations, resolutions, guarantees, reports, publications, correspondence, memorandums—even personal records of diplomats and officers—are familiar products of these activities. Records are the product of the daily functioning of international relations and are facilitators of these processes. Perhaps more than other records, diplomatic records carry an unusual, far-reaching importance; at times they have provoked hostilities and war or alternatively, have served to reconcile states. They form the tangible bases of collaborative endeavours between nations and are the locus of international policies. It can be said that records are the primary instruments with which nations perform the procedures of diplomacy.

In another light, records are witnesses to diplomatic actions, and come to form the basis of future decisions and endeavours. They document policies, decisions, relationships and actions and show the crystallised "richness and complexity of diplomatic activities."[1] They also reflect the values and beliefs of the societies and times from which they emanate. In short, records are the 'evidence' of diplomacy.

Owing to this role, diplomatic records have achieved a distinct status, and one that carries great weight in public life. These records are closely guarded by states and are among the few records regularly published by governments and compiled into official histories. Eventually, these records are declassified and transferred to national repositories where they are preserved and made available to the public. Such records constitute an extensive proportion of archival holdings and are often among the most requested materials by researchers.

Few other records have been so distinctly set apart in society. Diplomatic records are enshrined in international law and are at times held above the laws of state jurisdictions. The diplomatic bag exemplifies this privileged position in a vivid way. The 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Law distinguishes the contents of such bags as "inviolable" and prohibits the opening or detention of diplomatic containers. The Convention elaborates further, pronouncing "all" records of a diplomatic mission as likewise, inviolable, as well as the private papers and correspondence of diplomatic agents.[2] Along with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Law are numerous protocols and procedures that have been codified to deal with the management and interpretation of

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[1] Jovan Kurbalija, "Hypertext in Diplomacy," in *Language and Diplomacy.* eds. Jovan Kurbalija and Hannah Slavik (Malta: DiploProjects, Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, 2001), 312.
[2] United Nations, *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations*, 18 April 1961, Articles 27:3, 27:2, 24, 30:2.

diplomatic records. Such careful attention and reflection, on an international scale, is unprecedented among record genres.

This thesis defines diplomatic records as a unique genre of record in society. It contends that by seeking to understand and examine this genre in detail, in particular, by studying what some have termed 'the history of the record,' archivists can provide users with access to more authentic and more meaningful diplomatic records. The objective of the thesis is not to achieve an exhaustive analysis; rather, the aim will be to introduce this genre of record, identify some of its unique characteristics, trace aspects of its history and evolution, consider its place in archival institutions, and explore the role that archivists can play in illuminating the history and context of creation of diplomatic records.

Chapter One will put the analysis in the framework of current archival discussions. This dialogue stems from recent shifts in the archival profession, starting in the late 1970s, when archival theorists began to emphasize study of the history of records. This chapter will contribute to the discussion by applying this thinking to the diplomatic genre. Chapters Two and Three will look more closely at strategies that archives can adopt to more fully relay this knowledge to record users. Chapter Two will examine approaches to archival description. It will trace the evolution of current descriptive systems and will look at examples of how these systems have been implemented in archival settings. It will then suggest ways in which current systems can be augmented to offer greater contextual knowledge to users, particularly as they relate to diplomatic records. Chapter Three will then provide a working, yet basic, example of this proposal through a case study exploring the societal-political-constitutional context of Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s. This department and period in its history

have been chosen because important new steps were taken to widen information

gathering and improve recordkeeping in order to support the historic expansion of

Canada's diplomatic role in that decade. The result was the creation of diplomatic records

that are among the most important, voluminous, and yet still understudied holdings of

Library and Archives Canada.

Before proceeding further, it is here necessary to establish a working definition of

the diplomatic genre of record, where diplomacy is defined as "a dialogue between states

in an anarchic systemic structure of independent political units."[3] Simply put, a record

genre encompasses all documentation of a certain form or type. Thus, the diplomatic

genre can be seen as including all records produced through, or in documentation of,

diplomatic activities. This rather broad definition would include primary materials and

personal records, such as those mentioned previously, in all forms and media. Textual

records, moving images and sound records, non-traditional forms of records and,

increasingly, electronic records, are all considered inclusive in this definition. While

taking note of this broad definition, the following study will follow a more focused

perspective and will centre primarily on textual records created in a western diplomatic

context. From here, the analysis will explore key aspects of diplomatic records and, it is

anticipated, will serve as a platform for further study of this complex and dynamic genre

of record.

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[3] Donna Lee & David Hudson, "The Old and New Significance of Political Economy in Diplomacy,"
Review of International Studies (2004): 354.

Chapter One

The Diplomatic Genre and Contextual Knowledge

Records have always been a key part of diplomatic activities. In fact, the word diplomacy itself stems from the Greek word *diploma*—a word literally meaning "folded paper."[1] Scholars have of course long been attuned to this and have used diplomatic records as a rich source with which to examine the tangled events and complex personalities of past incidents. Students of diplomatic and political history have studied these records extensively, piecing together historical events as they evolved and offering added insight and analysis. This was particularly true when, increasingly in the early twentieth century, foreign offices began to make their archives more readily available to members of the public. As records were declassified and opened, scholars were given the opportunity to access these records in greater numbers. Not surprisingly, the number of historical narratives increased with this greater availability.

Yet despite the great interest in, and use of, diplomatic records, there has been a significant absence of attention to the records themselves. This is not to say that past treatment has been superficial; rather, past uses have focused primarily on the information and data contained in records. Few studies have considered the nature and characteristics of the genre as a whole or its role and place in society.

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[1] Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2010), 20.

Despite this lack of engagement, there has been growing attention to these issues in recent years. Keith Hamilton, Keith Wilson, Uri Bialer and others have examined diplomatic records in such studies as *The Practice of Diplomacy* and *Forging the Collective Memory: Government and International Historians through Two World Wars*.[2] The latter study traces the recordkeeping system of the British Foreign Office during the interwar period and details its dramatic transition to a heavily record-dependent bureaucratic institution. As these authors demonstrate, the enormous increase in the creation and dispersal of records prompted politicians and diplomats to reconsider longstanding recordkeeping practices. Along with this, the authors also look at the government's efforts to produce an official history of the First World War, early debates relating to the accessibility of foreign office archives to members of the public and the influence and consequences of diplomatic propaganda. The study demonstrates the important place of records within the workings of diplomacy.

The 2001 Conference on *Language and Diplomacy*, Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, Malta, centered on the study of diplomatic records. The conference featured diplomats, historians, and political scientists who analysed the nuances of language within diplomacy and at the same time, these studies considered the nature and characteristics of the diplomatic record genre. Included among the studies presented at the conference was Norman Scott's "Ambiguity Versus Precision: The Changing Role of Terminology in Conference Diplomacy," which examines the terminology used in diplomacy, such as the use of intentionally ambiguous language and phrasing. Dietrich

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[2] Keith Hamilton & Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration,* (New York: Routledge, Second Edition, 2011); Keith Wilson, ed., *Forging the Collective Memory: Government and International Historians through Two World Wars* (Oxford: Bergham Books, 1996).

Kappeler, a Professor of Diplomatic Studies, traces some of the history of diplomatic

records in "Texts in Diplomacy;" focusing on changing protocols, forms and technology.[3]

Another conference participant, Jovan Kunbalija, addresses implications emanating from

electronic diplomatic records. Added to these were analyses of language and rhetorical

patterns in diplomacy, the role of diplomatic interpreters and translators, and the

characteristics of peace agreements. The studies presented at the Malta Conference

underscore the importance of diplomatic records as a unique genre as well further

highlight the need to examine them in greater detail.

Other analyses of diplomatic records are found, indirectly, in the various studies

that focus on diplomatic theory and history. Barbara Farnham's "The Impact of the

Political Context on Foreign Policy Decision-Making" or Markus Mosslang and Torstan

Riotte's *The Diplomats' World* are not primarily studies of diplomatic records, but still

provide insight into the processes surrounding the creation of these records.[4] Of course,

historians have always relied upon diplomatic records in their explorations of historical

events and individuals. Scholars employ diplomatic records as the key source of

information and evidence in historical studies and at times, have provided insight into the

societal context of diplomatic records, including into the processes that led to their

creation.

The studies brought forth are a bases from which to explore the genre further;

however, these works have only highlighted certain aspects of diplomatic records, not the

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[3] Dietrich Kappeler, "Texts in Diplomacy"; Norman Scott, "Ambiguity versus Precision: The Changing Role of Terminology in Conference on Diplomacy," in *Language and Diplomacy.*

[4] Barbara Farnham, "The Impact of the Political Context on Foreign Policy," *Political Psychology* (June 2004); Markus Mosslang and Torstan Riotte, eds., *The Diplomats' World: The Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Studies of the German Historical Institute London Series, 2008).

genre as a whole. This is perhaps surprising, given the extensive treatment of other groups of records, particularly by those in the archival profession. Like these genres, diplomatic records are also distinctive and seeking to understand them more fully will aid in the archival management, description, and ultimately use, of diplomatic records.

Part of what makes a genre unique is the way in which it has evolved and developed over time while also retaining its central features and characteristics. The diplomatic genre, which itself has a long and varied history, dating back thousands of years, is no exception. Some of the earliest surviving diplomatic records are from the ancient era. Consider the Armana letters, created during the fourteenth century BC. These letters, etched in clay tablets and featuring a cuneiform dialect of ancient Mesopotamia, document diplomatic relations between Egypt and neighbouring kingdoms in the Middle East. From ancient times also come some of the first peace agreements. The Kadesh Treaty, signed between the Hittites and Egyptians, survives in two versions and is widely recognized as the earliest known peace treaty. Another example, a diplomatic message sent between the kings of Ebla and Hamazi around 2400 BC, features elements familiar to later versions of diplomatic records, including a long list of titles and appellations following the names of the rulers.[5] These and other ancient documents reflect a diplomacy that was still rudimentary in practice, lacking "clear and nuanced communication." At the same time, the records and treaties of the era indicate a "sophisticated level of dynamics and formalities" which were to be built upon and developed in later centuries.[6]

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[5] Kamel S. Abu Jaber. "Language and Diplomacy," in *Language and Diplomacy*, 52.
[6] Black, *A History of Diplomacy,* 19.

Treaties occupied a central position in the diplomacy of ancient Greece. In the famous work, *The History of The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides writes of alliances and conclusions of peace agreements between warring city-states, the latter of which includes the Peace of Nicias in 421 BC.[7] The era also witnessed some of the early precursors of the diplomatic corps. Although lacking a specialized diplomatic terminology, the Greeks did appoint certain individuals the informal title of *proxenos* (or honourary consul), issued through proxeny decrees. The decrees gave *proxenos* authority to act as representatives abroad and to promote the interests of their respective cities, as well as encourage cooperation with the city in which they were posted.[8]

Diplomatic activities within the "ecclesiastical" society of medieval Europe necessitated the rise of message bearers, or nuncios. Those in the position of nuncio were commissioned by the Papacy to deliver messages as well as gather information to be sent back to the sending chancery, or directing office.[9] Operating within this system, the nuncio was "the most basic instrument in all forms of contact."[10] Still, the communication system of Medieval Europe was both unreliable and slow, so much so that news was all too often regarded "a luxury commodity."[11]

The situation improved considerably when, beginning in fifteenth century Italy, a new diplomatic officer emerged—the resident ambassador. These individuals acted as

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[7] Ibid., p. 20; Frank Adcock and D.J. Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 123.

[8] M. B. Wallace, "Early Greek 'Proxenoi,'" *Phoenix,* 24 (Autumn 1970): 189-190.

[9] Black, *A History of Diplomacy,* 28.

[10] Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 41-533* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

[11] Black, *A History of Diplomacy,* 49.

spokesmen and 'observers' for rulers and increasingly served as "negotiators" abroad.[12]

But above all, the main task of an ambassador was to "keep a continuous stream of

foreign political news flowing to his home government."[13] Dispatches were sent

frequently, even daily, in some instances. One Venetian ambassador purportedly drew up

472 dispatches in a single year.[14] Added to dispatches were detailed reports of

observances and incidents, as well as *relazione*, reports given at the conclusion of a

mission.[15] These communications became a crucial component in the conduct of

diplomacy and led to the establishment of "embryo foreign ministries."[16] They also

greatly enhanced the quality and accuracy of information and more fully ensured that a

ruler's interests would be served and protected abroad.

The adoption of more organized diplomatic protocol prompted some attention to

be paid to the issue of storage of diplomatic records. Over time, this consideration was to

result in the emergence of early diplomatic archives throughout Europe and eventually, in

North America. In Germany, efforts to better preserve these records began as early as the

thirteenth century. In 1599 Erasmus Langenhain was appointed the first state archivist

and subsequently began to provide "something like systematic administration" for the

papers of Prussian nobles.[17]   By the 1700s, the central administrative bureaus regularly

deposited foreign office papers in the *Geheim-Staats-Archiv*.[18] France, like other

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[12] Michael H. Cardozo, *Diplomats in International Cooperation: Stepchildren of the Foreign Service* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), 3.

[13] Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1955), 58.

[14] Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 41.

[15] Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy,* 97.

[16] Hamilton & Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy,* 33.

[17] Herbert L. Osgood, "The Prussian Archives," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 8, No. 3 (Sept., 1893): 495.

[18] Ibid., 496.

European powers, began assembling a rudimentary collection of foreign affairs material. French efforts can be traced to the late seventeenth century and by 1761, a model repository had been built in Versailles that also came to house the papers of French foreign ambassadors.[19]

In North America, the United States established its diplomatic archives significantly later than its European counterparts. The records created by the Department of State were initially "maintained by the bureaus and offices that produced or accumulated them."[20] In 1870, the Chief Clerk's Bureau was first assigned the task of managing the archives and rolls and indexing records as they were gathered; this responsibility was soon after transferred to the Bureau of Indexes and Archives.

A key moment in diplomatic records history came with the Congress of Vienna in 1815, convened to formally secure the boundaries of states within Europe following the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars. During the proceedings, "the first formal rules for the conduct of diplomats and diplomacy" were officially articulated and defined.[21] The Regulation adopted by the Congress became "the first international instrument to codify any aspect of diplomatic law" and laid down important precedents for future diplomatic endeavours.[22] At this time, too, the French language became "generally accepted" as the *lingua franca* of the western world of diplomacy. For centuries earlier,

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[19] France Diplomatie, "Three Centuries of History," accessed 5 March 2012, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/ministry/archives-and-heritage/history-and-organisation-of-the/three-centuries-of-history/ministry/archives-and-heritage/history-and-organisation-of-the/three-centuries-of-history/article/historic-presentation.
[20] General Records of the Department of State, "Part I: The Central Files of the Department of State 1789-1949," 1, accessed 5 March 2012, http://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/state-dept/finding-aids/inventory15-part1.pdf.
[21] Cardozo, *Diplomats in International Cooperation,* 4.
[22] Eileen Denza, "Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations," *United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law* (2009): 1.

Latin had served, unchallenged, as the predominant language of diplomacy, largely due to a foundation "based on literary models which were unchanged for 1500 years."[23] Along with changes to language were advances in modes of communication. At this time, the first telegraph systems were developed and utilized, thereby providing faster, and more efficient, means of communicating within the diplomatic world.

In the twentieth century, the First World War had a major impact on the diplomatic structures and records. Access to diplomatic records was 'liberated' to some extent following the war's conclusion. The conflict had underscored the importance of records in the eyes of governments, particularly in relation to the issue of the origins of the war. This question prompted governments in Europe to turn to archives in an effort to influence public opinion through the dissemination of carefully filtered information. Germany was particularly aggressive in its campaign to counter allegations of German 'war guilt.' Beginning in 1922, the Foreign Ministry oversaw the publication of forty volumes of diplomatic records as a means to "buttress its rejection" of responsibility for the war.[24] The documents included in *Die Grosse Politik* were carefully selected, and in some cases records themselves were even altered, "with potentially damaging sections deleted."[25] At the same time, with increased access to the documents deemed most "important," the Foreign Ministry announced that access to other files would be refused.[26]

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[23] Joseph M. Brincat, "The Languages of the Knights: Legislation, Administration and Diplomacy in a Multilingual State (14th-16 Centuries)," in *Language and Diplomacy*, 266.
[24] Holger H. Herwig, "Clio Deceived: Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany After the Great War," in Wilson, ed., *Forging the Collective Memory*, 95.
[25] Ibid., 96.
[26] Ibid., 98.

Other European powers soon responded to the publication of German volumes with more 'accurate' versions of their own. These included France's *Documents Diplomatiques Français* and the *British Documents on the Origins of the War*. The publication of the latter was announced in 1924 after a realisation that Germany "had become adept in the use of open diplomacy, and that the British Foreign Office was in danger of losing the debate on the origins of the war."[27] In a published letter explaining the undertaking, Secretary of State Austen Chamberlain declared that the volumes would be of great value to "the historian anxious to present a full and fair account of recent events," implying that German efforts had decisively fallen short of this goal.[28]

All of these issues, including the opening up of more recent foreign affairs records to researchers, prompted the pursuit of a more thoroughly professional approach to archival practice. At this time, Hilary Jenkinson of the British Public Record Office, was inspired to publish what would be considered a seminal study on war records and archival practice: *A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making*. In it, Jenkinson asserted that postwar attention to records exposed a need to ensure that documentary evidence was captured and preserved. His study became the first English effort to define the "rules governing the administration of ordinary Archives," and proved crucial as a foundation of ideas upon which the archival profession would be built.[29]

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[27] Keith Hamilton, "The Pursuit of 'Enlightened Patriotism': The British Foreign Office and Historical Researchers During the Great War and Its Aftermath," in Wilson, ed., *Forging the Collective Memory*, 209.
[28] G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, Vol. XI (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1926), accessed 6 March 2012, http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/1914m/gooch/firstpps.htm.
[29] Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922), xi.

Along with issues relating to diplomatic records and archives during the interwar era came some of the first international diplomatic organizations and agencies. The establishment of the League of Nations in 1919 and the United Nations in 1945, served to provide forums where information could be received and exchanged in a collective manner. In 1961, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations was signed by members of the UN. Widely considered "the most successful of the instruments drawn up under the UN framework," it marked a turning point in the history of diplomatic records as it codified protocol relating to the creation and transmission of written communications.[30] The Treaty was joined by another important UN initiative in 1969, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which formally established and defined international treaty protocol.

By the end of the twentieth century, with the development of the computer and, later, the World Wide Web, came diplomatic records in electronic form. The emergence of these and other technologies exponentially increased in the numbers of diplomatic records being created, but at the same time, has brought new complexities and dynamics to the forefront.

Records have always been a key part of diplomacy. Yet, as this brief overview has demonstrated, these records continuously evolve over time, in light of new circumstances and due to changing functions and procedures. Even today diplomatic records are changing, as states face new challenges and international trends and as new technologies are incorporated into practice. The proliferation of global terrorism, environmental issues, worldwide pandemics, and other phenomena, has and will continue

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[30] Denza, "Vienna Convention," 1.

to have an impact on the ways in which diplomatic records are used and created. Most

recently, record security has become a particularly pressing issue. The exponential

increase in the number of electronic records has brought with it concern about long-term

preservation, as well as a risk of security breaches. The danger of the latter is being aptly

demonstrated during the ongoing WikiLeaks incidents, where thousands of classified

electronic documents have already been released into the public domain.

Although diplomatic records are continuously evolving, their evidential nature, as

well as their role as facilitator, has remained unchanged. Records are and will remain a

central part of diplomatic processes. This is true, for one, because diplomatic records

form the tangible legacy of a nation's involvement in world affairs. Even more, they

authenticate a state's legitimacy. The ability to engage in foreign relations is a sign of a

state's independence and autonomy; in this way, diplomatic records serve as an indicator

of a nation's sovereignty.

Tracing the history of the diplomatic genre demonstrates its many unique

characteristics, forms and purposes. It is a distinct group of record. But there is also

much to be gained from understanding the history of the records themselves, in addition

to the genre as a whole.

The call to study the history of records has been made clearly within the archival

community, but it is still a relatively new development. Traditionally, archivists followed

a "content-based, historical documentalist" approach to archiving.[31] According to this

approach, records were managed according to content and subject and ascribed a single

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[31]Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 31.

creator or provenance. Beginning in the late twentieth century, however, archivists began

to reassess these prevailing practices and at the same time, reconsider the nature of

records as well as the role of the archivist within archival institutions. A leader in this

new thinking, Canadian Hugh A. Taylor, called for archivists to consider the societal

influences on records creation and use. In other words, he was emphasizing an archival

system in which *context*, not content, became the central focus and emphasis.

In the years following, others contributed to the discussion. Terry Cook argued

that modern-day archiving needs to have a "knowledge" rather than an "information"

basis and posited provenance as the key to this system.[32] These arguments later formed

the basis of a new approach to appraisal. Tom Nesmith agreed that the contextual

dimension of records was not being translated into archival institutions, where

artificially-constructed arrangement, description, and other schemes were obscuring this

reality. He therefore called for archivists to acknowledge the importance of history; in

effect, to become 'historians of the record,' in order to uncover and understand more fully

the context from which records emanate.[33] Without this knowledge, Nesmith asked:

> how can appraisal, description, and reference be done with such
> records without knowing in considerable depth how, why, when,
> where, and what records have been created and survived and how
> they were used—or hidden and destroyed?[34]

Nesmith argued that studying the history of records is critical, not only in terms of

research but for the way in which this thinking affects all levels of archival practice.

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[32] Ibid. p. 36.

[33] Tom Nesmith, "Archives From the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982): 6.

[34] Tom Nesmith, "What's History Got to Do With It*?:* Reconsidering the Place of. Historical Knowledge in Archival Work," *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004): 22.

The arguments surrounding provenance and the 'history of records' approach are continuing to transform the archival landscape. These discussions can also add to our understanding of diplomatic records and in the process better facilitate their use. Still, the question remains—what is important to know about records in general and diplomatic records in particular? Archivists have identified several key concepts, or archival 'tools,' to help uncover the many layers of a record's context, the most important of which include societal provenance, organizational history, custodial and archiving history, material literacy and symbolic significance. By incorporating these ideas into archival thinking and processes, diplomatic records can be more authentically portrayed, managed and used.

One of the most fundamental characteristics of a record is its provenance. Simply put, provenance refers to a record's source or origin. This concept has been ingrained in archival thinking and practice since the very beginning of the profession. Questions surrounding the 'who' or 'what' of a record's creation have, in one way or another, played a key role in all archival functions that an archivist performs. Still, the answer to the question—what is provenance—has undergone a dramatic shift in recent years. In the past, provenance was interpreted in singular fashion. Records were ascribed one literal source or inscriber and based on this, were arranged and described in one *fonds* or record group.

Several factors prompted a 'rediscovery' of provenance, or a renewed appreciation of the centrality of provenance through a deepening understanding of it. For one thing, the nature of organizations altered dramatically in the mid twentieth-century— changing from mono-hierarchical structures to increasingly complex, horizontally

structured entities. In the 1970s, the emergence of electronic records revolutionized past conceptions of records creation. In the face of these shifts, archival theorists increasingly turned a critical eye to the 'one record, one creator' concept of provenance.[35]

Out of the thicket of change came a very different view of provenance, based on the recognition that multiple factors play a part in a record's creation. Societal factors, for example, could no longer be disregarded. Thus, the idea of "societal provenance" stems from the reality that records have "societal origins". To fully understand the processes which led to a record's creation requires knowledge of the society from which it emanates. But this idea of societal provenance is "not just another layer of provenance information to add to other ones."[36] Records are created by societies, for societal purposes. They reflect societal values and beliefs and facilitate societal processes. Thus, societal provenance is not merely one aspect of provenance—the "societal dimension infuses all others."[37]

Nesmith demonstrates the value of incorporating societal provenance into archival analysis through his study of the nineteenth-century journal of a North West Company fur trader. Studied through a traditional archival lens, the journal has a single creator, a European explorer by the name of Johann Steinbruck. Yet as Nesmith points out, this perception discounts the influence of Aboriginal societies with which Johann was closely interacting, nor does it consider Johann's conflicting German and French Canadian

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[35] David A. Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (1985-1986).
[36] Tom Nesmith, "The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records of Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal–European Relations in Western Canada: Implications for Archival Theory and Practice," *Archival Science* 6 (2006): 352.
[37] Ibid.

identities or the fur trade industry of which he was a part. All of this essential data is lost when a narrow version of provenance is applied.

Societal provenance is no less important in an analysis of diplomatic records. In fact, it becomes, perhaps, particularly crucial. Records created for diplomatic purposes are, by nature, international in scope and character. A study of societal provenance must therefore take into account these many, global, layers of context.

This is made particularly clear through a comparison of two very distinct diplomatic settings. Consider, for instance, the diplomacy of medieval Europe. Society at this time was organized hierarchically, with the Catholic Church as "the supra-national body" at the head and a number of "jarring congeries of hostile sovereignties" in a position of deference below.[38] The idea of 'statehood' did not yet exist at this time; rather, European society saw itself as a single entity, united under the umbrella that was Christendom. Directed by Papal rule, Europe was governed and administered by Canon Law, which came to preside over issues of international law, including questions relating to sovereignty and the conduct of treaties.[39] Those in close service to the Church were among the most highly educated and politically adept and, therefore, were also the key players in an emerging system of diplomacy.

The contrast between the medieval system of diplomacy and that of twentieth-century interwar Europe is stark. The conclusion of the First World War and subsequent Versailles proceedings revealed that the secretive and elitist strategies of prewar diplomacy had contributed greatly to the commencement of war. Adept leaders and

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[38] Black, *A History of Diplomacy,* 123 ; Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy,* 15.
[39] Hamilton and Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy,* 31, 32.

politicians perceived a growing antipathy towards these practices. At the forefront, President Woodrow Wilson espoused a new 'open diplomacy' based on the democratic will of an informed and engaged public. Although the transformation was neither immediate nor complete, the diplomatic system increasingly became the prerogative of elected leaders and trained diplomats rather than traditional elites. The public were drawn into diplomatic issues and debates by various means, including organized propaganda campaigns and media efforts. At the same time, an awareness that states needed to act more openly and collectively prompted the establishment of international agencies and organizations, or forums in which ambassadors, diplomats, and world leaders could exchange information and ideas relating to issues of international significance.

These examples portray two distinctive societies possessing two very different systems of diplomacy. The interwar era, as in medieval Europe, was characterized by particular cultural, political, religious, and other, realities. The eras also possessed unique systems of diplomacy and the records created in both these settings were reflective of these differences. In the medieval period, proclamations, treaties, dispatches and other records reflected the hierarchical order of Christendom. Papal clerics and nuncios operated in a "quasi-religious" framework and a ruler's legitimacy and authority was closely associated with the Church. The Catholic court system, which administered Canon Law, left its imprint on the major records and treaties of the era.[40]

In contrast, the postwar era was a time in which diplomatic spheres were extending beyond neighbouring states—beyond continents even—and flowing along

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[40] Black, *A History of Diplomacy,* 23.

global trends and currents. During this time of transition, diplomacy was becoming less elitist, increasingly 'public,' and new diplomatic forums and tools were emerging. Records created in this era evidenced a diplomatic corps and international organizations which faced increasingly complex and weighty issues and the widespread use of propaganda demonstrated a diplomacy that was directed increasingly by public opinion. In both medieval and interwar Europe, societal context is key to understanding the records created by diplomatic activities, not only for the information they contain but for the societal functions they document and the insight they provide into the organization and structure of diplomatic processes. In other words, knowledge of the societal provenance of diplomatic records must be a central part of archival practice, not only to aid those who study the documents but for the archivists who process, manage and facilitate use of diplomatic records.

Archivists must necessarily be aware of the societal forces that shape records, but at a more specific level, they must also gain knowledge of the history of organizations that created and used them. This is particularly critical in light of current organizational models. In the past, organizations were more simply structured, in a hierarchical, self-contained manner. In contrast, their twenty-first century successors are enormously complex entities, organized as networks rather than hierarchies, are constantly being re-structured, and are increasingly difficult to document. Since organizations are key records creators, knowledge of their characteristics and organizational make-up are essential to the management of the records they produce. This can also shed light on the records themselves, by securing a more complete and authentic picture of the records' provenance.

David Bearman and Richard Lytle were among the first to re-emphasize the connection between organizational history and provenance. Observing that records are the product of organizational activities, they argued that archiving should rest "on a detailed understanding of both the structure and processes of the organizations which created the records in question."[41] Such an understanding should consider that modern organizations are "poly-hierarchical" and "living organizations" and reflect the ways in which records are appraised and archived.[42]

Another important figure in the archival world, German archivist Hans Booms, suggested that the functions and activities of organizations reflect and mirror societal values. Thus, he encouraged archivists to research and analyse the functions of records-creators in order "to help them connect documentary needs."[43] This thinking was built upon by Terry Cook, albeit on a more philosophical level. Cook advocated a new approach to appraisal based on "the larger or 'macro' context of the records" as evident in the activities and functions of record creators, rather than on subject content.[44] Cook's hypothesis came to form the basis of the theory of macroappraisal, an approach to appraisal eventually adopted as the official appraisal scheme of Library and Archives Canada.

Functions-based organizational histories prove extremely useful when applied to diplomatic organizations. As is true with other government departments and agencies, diplomatic organizations are complex entities that continuously change in size and purpose, reflecting international trends and events. And, as will be explored in Chapter

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[41] Bearman & Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," 16.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 30, 31.
[44] Ibid., 31.

Three, they also have unique systems of managing the information and records they produce.

Consider, for instance, the organization of the United Nations, unarguably the key international diplomatic body. The UN has gone through some profound changes across its history. Its forerunner was the League of Nations, a failed international experiment which dissolved in 1945 after transferring its mandate to its UN successor. At the signing of the UN Charter, fifty member-states were present. Since that time, the organization has grown, restructured, and changed in mandate, purpose, geographic location and outlook. It has overseen sixty-four peacekeeping missions and has established numerous programmes and specialized agencies. Some of the organization's original entities, such as the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, are now defunct. Others, including the World Food Programme and Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, have been established in the years since its inception. The United Nations of today, with its 192 member states, hardly resembles the organization of 1945.

All of these changes, relating to the history, structure, purpose, size and role of the UN, reflect the context in which its records were created. The records, in fact, document these changes. Thus, any analysis of the organization's records must, necessarily, be based on knowledge of the organization itself. By appraising, describing, and arranging diplomatic records in light of the functions of the organization that created them, rather than by subject or media, archivists can more authentically portray how records were created, how they fit into an organization's information management system and how they were used.

Knowledge of the organization itself—its structure, evolution, activities, etc.—helps re-create the context in which the records were created, but it is also necessary to be aware of the records' recordkeeping and custodial past. Understanding how information was created, relayed and stored within the organization can provide insight into the records' context. In addition, on a more practical level, it also enables archivists "to locate, acquire, describe, and make available" these records.[45]

That this information is essential is aptly demonstrated by Terry Cook's analysis of the Canadian Department of the Interior. Cook traces the department from its inception in 1873 until after its abolition in 1936. During that time, recordkeeping in the department shifted from a rudimentary, cumbersome 'docket' filing system to more user-friendly, subject-based system. The eventual abolition of the department resulted in some records being dispersed among various federal departments while others were sent to the western provinces, the latter having then been given full control over provincial resources and land. By tracing the recordkeeping and custodial history of the Department of the Interior's records, Cook reveals the difficult task archivists face when seeking to preserve provenance. At the same time, he points out that changes in a record's custody offer insight into how records mirror "the same complexity as the department which created them."[46]

Records created through diplomatic activities pose many unique challenges. Rarely are these records contained within a single department or agency. More likely, records are scattered among departments, organizations and individual states. For

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[45] Terry Cook, "Supplement: the Archival Legacy of the Department of the Interior," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88): 74.
[46] Ibid., 78.

example, records relating to UN peacekeeping missions will be found with the principal

organization which headed the operation, with the states which directly participated in

peacekeeping or in other support-role activities—even with organizations or countries

which were not tangible contributors or participants. The 'scattered' nature of diplomatic

records is also evident in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Due to the

Organization's distinct international structure and mandate, each one of the nineteen

member states retains copies of key records and documents. In addition, each member

must individually "decide what may be declassified and publicly disclosed" before a

record or grouping of records can be declassified by the Council and released to the

outside world.[47]

Knowledge of a record's custodial history provides added context, but a record's

'story' does not end when it ceases to be actively used by an institution or organization.

After disposition, "even after crossing the archival threshold," records continue to acquire

new layers of significance and meaning.[48] In fact, archivists themselves "create value"

through the decisions they make when they appraise, arrange, describe, digitise and

preserve archival records.[49] It is important to recognize that such decisions, in effect,

"shift" a record's provenance—they change a record's meaning and influence the ways in

which it is accessed and used.[50]

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[47] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Guide to Archives of International Organizations," accessed May 2011,
http://www.unesco.org/archives/sio/Eng/presentation.php?idOrg=1026.

[48] Lori Podolsky Nordland, "The Concept of *'Secondary Provenance':* Re-interpreting Ac ko mok ki's Map as Evolving Text," *Archivaria* 58 (Fall 2004): 147.

[49] Richard Brown, "Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995): 133.

[50] Nordland, "The Concept of *'Secondary Provenance,'"* 153.

The impact of such decisions can be seen when tracing the history of the UN Archives. From its inception in 1945, the organization had a working archives, although it was not formally instituted until the following year. In its early existence, the archives resembled more a "registry office or a documents library" than a formal archival institution and staff tended to occupy their time acquiring and preserving official publications at the expense of other types of UN records. Also, since archiving and records management were administered separately, there was often confusion as to the delineation of responsibilities, or the whereabouts of inactive records. Practices began to change over the succeeding decades; by the 1970s, the UN had adopted more efficient archival methods, regulations and facilities. Around the same time, it also began collaborative work with other international archival institutions, which involved, among other things, the acquisition of external diplomatic collections.[51]

Like its UN counterpart, the NATO Archives also experienced changes in its archiving and recordkeeping processes. Due to its unique status as an intergovernmental military alliance, each NATO agency, department, and member archives "was responsible for the preservation of it (sic) own records."[52] It was not until its fiftieth anniversary in 1999 that the North Atlantic Council made the decision to open the archives to members of the general public. Subsequently, the Archives adopted new measures and devised new programmes as it adapted to a significantly expanded user-base. In the case of both the UN and NATO archives, decisions relating to recordkeeping had an impact on the records acquired (or not acquired). Decisions made by

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[51] Alf Erlandsson, "Archives of the United Nations," *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978): 6.

[52] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Guide to Archives of International Organizations," accessed May 2011, http://www.unesco.org/archives/sio/Eng/presentation.php?idOrg=1026. Lawrence S. Kaplan,"The Development of the NATO Archives," *Cold War History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (2003).

administrators and archivists largely determined how records were archived, and therefore, how they were 'valued', by each respective organization.

The study so far has focused on the intangible indicators of a record's history. Knowledge of societal provenance, along with the organizational, custodial and archival histories of a record, adds layers of contextual information for archivists and researchers to use when examining diplomatic records. But another aspect of a record, its physicality, is likewise a component of its history. The decision to create a record in a particular format, structure or material, is itself based on specific "beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged."[53] A record's materiality can itself prove significant.

Through their role as historians of the record, archivists can assist in interpreting a record's material nature and past by becoming 'materially literate.' The ability to 'read' the physicality of a record; in other words, to "decode and interpret the significance of the material composition and construction, and of the physical state, of a tangible record," is based on the assumption that decisions made about a record's material form are made with purpose and intent.[54] Thus, the decision to pen a letter on stationary or to submit a memorandum via email, or even a decision to change a record's composition—from analog to digital, for instance—are all influenced, one way or another, by particular societal beliefs and goals.

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[53] Jules David Prown quoted in Ala Rekrut, "Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 13.

[54] Ibid., 11.

Archivists must likewise seek to 'read' the materiality of diplomatic documents. Like other records, diplomatic records exist in an array of forms and materials. These physical characteristics are part of the contextual make-up of the records and as such, are sources of information and meaning.

Consider, for instance, the Treaty of Kadesh, concluded in 1258 BC at the end of a long and ultimately unresolved conflict between the Egyptian and Hittite kingdoms and widely considered to be the earliest known international peace treaty. The Treaty has survived in two forms—one on papyrus and the other on a clay tablet—but the original form of the Treaty, the official version, was inscribed on a silver plaque and presented to the two respective rulers. The decision of Rameses II and Hattusili III to inscribe the text on a silver plaque—a durable and valuable material—tells something about the way in which the Treaty was perceived at the time. This was no ephemeral peace; rather, the decision to reconcile the two kingdoms, as well as form an alliance, suggests that the diplomatic resolution carried with it an air of permanence and deep significance in the eyes of both rulers.

This sentiment is evident in the treaty itself. Repeatedly in the introductory paragraphs, body and conclusion, are found references to the notion of the "eternal treaty" and "the good treaty of peace and of brotherhood, setting peace [between them (?)], forever." Even more explicitly, the rulers resolve that they have "established this bond by treaty on a silver tablet…to settle forever among them a good peace and a good

fraternity."[55] Thus, the idea of the Treaty of Kadesh as a lasting peace was "physically manifested" in the materials used to create it.[56]

The Treaty of Kadesh demonstrates the value of 'material literacy,' but this thinking can also be applied to other diplomatic records. Consider, for instance, the ornate seals, signet rings, ribbons and illuminated manuscripts which were widespread in early medieval Europe. The use of such devices in diplomatic texts helped to authentic documents. "*Authentica sigilla*" appeared on official documents as a means to prevent forgeries, fraud and other abuses.[57] At the same time, these tools also imbued records with a level of grandeur, as well as reflected personal power, wealth and status. Contrast this with a very different type of diplomatic record—the passport—which appears in fairly standard forms around the world. In this instance, the size, shape and form of personal passports are indicative of their purpose and use as verification of identity and as documents of international travel. In all these instances, physicality is an important part of the record, not only as an indication of its purpose and use but also as a reflection of the individual and societal beliefs which led to its creation.

A record's unique 'material culture' contributes to its context and history, but along with these physical attributes are other deeply-rooted perceptions and beliefs. At times, a record, or group of records, is imbued with a certain "impractical" and symbolic

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[55] The text of the treaty can be found on the Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, accessed October 2011, http://www.kultur.gov.tr/ES/belge/2-28517/kadesh-war-and-peace-treaty.html.
[56] Rekrut, "Material Literacy," 36.
[57] Pierre Chaplais, *Essays in Medieval Diplomacy and Administration* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1981), 169.

significance that extends beyond the information it contains.[58] Such ideas carry an

immense "psychological weight" for individuals and communities alike.[59]

As a result, throughout history, societies have acted collectively to safeguard and

preserve certain diplomatic records as a means to sustain their "most central and deeply

rooted memories."[60] Such records serve to remind people of key moments in their

nation's history, or landmarks in civilization as a whole, as well as represent principles

and ideas that form the very foundation of states and societies.

This is why an enlarged reproduction of the Treaty of Kadesh is displayed at the

headquarters of the United Nations. The existence of the wall hanging is not a matter of

décor, nor has it been placed in such a prominent location chiefly because of its important

historical link. Rather, the Treaty's significance stems from its symbolic implications—

as a reminder of an important moment in diplomatic history and as a reflection of the

UN's peacekeeping purpose and goals – in short, the basis of the organization's very

existence.

Consider, also, the American Declaration of Independence. The Declaration,

which itself was not entirely an original work, was one of about ninety other such

declarations in the revolutionary era. Although initially published in various broadsides

and newspapers, the Declaration document itself was practically forgotten during the first

one-hundred years of its existence. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the

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[58] James M. O'Toole, "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," *American Archivist*, Vol. 56 (Spring 1993): 238, 258.
[59] James M. O'Toole, "Cortes's Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records," *Archival Science*, Vol. 2 (2002): 52.
[60] Pehar, Dražen, "Historical Rhetoric and Diplomacy—An Uneasy Cohabitation," in *Language and Diplomacy,* 120.

document began to gain a profile of some significance. By 1952, when it had been transferred to the National Archives, it had acquired a very different symbolic and historical status. Originally drafted by the thirteen colonies for the purpose of diplomatic protocol, it gradually became a physical symbol of the nation's enduring republican spirit and identity. Today, the Declaration of Independence has become a document to be 'visited' and viewed and has been preserved—literally enshrined—in a state of the art facility in the National Archives in Washington D.C.

Other diplomatic documents carry a more subtle symbolic significance. Consider again the passport, a document with a practical purpose but also one that emphasises a particular identity and place in the world by binding individuals to specific locations and communities. Passports transmit to the bearer a sense of belonging as well as reinforce feelings of national entitlement and patriotism. Other diplomatic records convey a meaning that is negative, but just as psychologically binding. The Munich Accord of 1938 is one such example. Originally lauded as a solution to the European crisis during the interwar era, it has since become a symbol of betrayal and futile "appeasement" of tyranny. Archivists should continue to be aware of the "symbolic, emotional, and psychological power" of diplomatic records—a 'sixth sense' of archiving, in a way—in order to more fully convey their context and meaning.[61]

Starting in the late twentieth century, important discussions about what archivists need to know about records began to take greater hold in the archival profession. During this time, as the culture of recordkeeping and record creation began to shift, archivists made considerable efforts to reassess what was then current archival theory and practice.

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[61] O'Toole, "Cortes's Notary," 45.

These efforts led to new ways of thinking about the philosophy of archiving, especially surrounding the central issue of provenance. In the process, such concepts as societal provenance, organizational history, custodial/archiving history, material literacy and symbolic significance, came to the forefront and reflected an approach to archiving more fully centered on contextual information and on the idea that archivists should seek to become historians of the record.

This thinking can have a profound influence on the manner in which archivists manage records. In the case of the diplomatic genre, the application of this approach provides an opportunity to uncover many layers of knowledge surrounding the creation and use of diplomatic records. By researching and gaining knowledge of the context or history of diplomatic records, archivists can continue to facilitate the use of more authentic diplomatic holdings.

One way that this can be achieved is through archival description. Approaches to description have evolved considerably since the early twentieth century, largely in response to the changing nature of modern records and record creators. Yet the established systems in many ways fail to realise the potential of what can be relayed in terms of contextual knowledge. Chapter Two will explore this issue more closely, looking at the descriptive systems that are currently in use, and considering the strengths and limitations of them. It will then suggest ways to enhance current descriptive norms with added layers of context.

Chapter Two

Unleashing Context: Descriptions as Portals to Archival Knowledge

Descriptions serve as gateways to archival holdings, providing direction to researchers as they wade through seemingly endless sources of information captured in archival records. Descriptions highlight different facets of a record, outlining such things as the scope and content of the information in the body of records and about the records' creator or creators, lists of *physical* attributes (such as media, extent, etc.), lists of reference or location codes assigned to records by archival institutions which, in turn, provide insight into the records' place within the overall arrangement scheme, and so on.

The description process is vital to users of archival holdings by making more manageable the process of searching and pinpointing specific information and material. Users often fail to grasp, however, that the individual archivist plays a very active role in the descriptive process. The decisions made by an archivist about how to describe records are selective, at times even arbitrary. As Terry Cook observes, archivists continually 'reappraise' the value of records by selecting which ones to describe, by emphasizing certain aspects and characteristics, or by writing detailed or less-detailed descriptions. In this way, the archivist becomes "the conscious co-creator rather than the neutered caretaker" in his or her work.[1]

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[1] Terry Cook, "The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape," *Canadian Historical Review,* Vol. 90, No. 3 (Sept., 2009): 504, 532.

In Canadian archival practice, archivists have, likewise, projected their own value conceptions and priorities onto archival collections by way of description. Since the late 1980s, Canadian descriptive practice has centered on what is commonly known as the *fonds*, a term defined as "all of the records created, used and accumulated by a single organization, individual or juridical person during the transaction of daily business."[2] This means of grouping records together came to serve as the foundation for all archival descriptions and was widely regarded as the best way to preserve the provenance (i.e. "source") and original order or arrangement of records. The adoption of the *fonds* approach in Canada came largely out of research done by the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, a committee established by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists to investigate the possibility of a systematic approach to description in archiving. In its 1986 report, the bureau's Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards concluded that "the standardization of archival description was both possible and desirable for both users and keepers of archives" and suggested that a committee be formed that could define rules for description at the *fonds* level.[3] From this work came a comprehensive system, "Rules for Archival Description" (RAD), which was created in an attempt to standardize the implementation of the fonds approach. Using RAD as a guideline and tool, archivists were able to achieve greater uniformity in the ways in which descriptions were created and designed, thereby providing users with a higher degree of consistency across Canada's various archives.

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[2] Jeff O'Brien, "Basic RAD: An Introduction to the preparation of the *fonds*-and *series*- level descriptions using the Rules for Archival Description," SCA Outreach Service (Oct., 1997): 4. Accessed 1 September 2011. http://lib74123.usask.ca/scaa/rad/rad4.pdf.

[3] Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1990 [revised 2008]), xv.

By the mid 1990s RAD had come to overshadow all other approaches to description within Canada, and the fonds-based system of description had become so influential that Dutch archivist Peter Horsman was later to call it "the international standard for describing the fundamental organizing unit of archives."[4]

Despite this prominence, another approach to description was at this time steadily gaining momentum and interest. In the early 1960s, a young employee at the Commonwealth Archives Office of Australia, Peter Scott, had begun to question the reliability of the Record Group approach to description. The Record Group was an application of the fonds concept adopted in the US at the National Archives in the 1940s before being put into practice in its Australian counterpart. It was also widely adopted in Canadian archives. Archivists using the Record Group approach brought together for description a number of recordkeeping systems (each called a "series") created by an institution or a subordinate entity of it and assigned them a single primary creator. Scott considered the practice of linking records in the group to one single creator to be a serious limitation of this approach and indeed a significant distortion of their provenance. This practice, he argued, posed numerous challenges that came to light most acutely when dealing with the records of modern organizations and agencies. As Scott pointed out, many record-creating agencies did not fit into the one-creator for one-Record Group approach. Rather, he maintained that records series were often the product of two, even *multiple,* creators across time. Imagining a typical scenario, he pointed out that a record series could be created by one agency, "transferred to one or more other agencies in the course of administrative changes and then…transferred to archival custody" by yet

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[4] Peter Horsman, "The Last Dance of the Phoenix, or The De-discovery of the Archival Fonds," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002): 2.

another still.[5] Institutions whose records did fit the one-record one-creator model upon

which the Record Group approach was based were later dismissed by one of Scott's

followers as "freaks of administrative stability" and not at all typical of ever-changing

modern organizations.[6]

Scott emphasized the record series, rather than record group, as a new focal point

of archival arrangement and description. The major characteristic of this system was the

separation of "descriptions of agencies that generated records from descriptions of

records."[7] In doing so, it became possible to describe distinct series of records – their

extents, types of documents within them, and filing structures – while also linking series

to the various agencies between which they had been transferred over time. Most

importantly, Scott argued that by using the series as the "primary record unit," archivists

could "link archives with far greater accuracy to their appropriate context."[8] Thus, record

series could be linked to their multiple creators, which would provide additional layers of

the administrative context of their creation as well as a clearer grasp of provenance.[9]

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[5] Dan Davies, "Thinking Outside the Box: Re-Imagining Archival Description with the 'Series' System (M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Winnipeg/University of Manitoba, 2003), 24.

[6] Bob Krawczyk, "Cross Reference Heaven: The Abandonment of the Fonds as the Primary Level of Arrangement for Ontario Government Records," *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999): 133.

[7] Davies, "Thinking Outside the Box," 26.

[8] Peter J. Scott, "The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment," *The American Archivist,* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1966), 502.

[9] By advocating for the series approach, Scott was a pioneer in recognizing the more complex contextual history of most institutional records. That said, others who followed in his footsteps saw additional aspects of that administrative context that also ought to be recognized. In the 1990s Australian archivist Chris Hurley added significantly to this line of thinking. Suggesting that Scott's notion of provenance needed further interpretation, Hurley pointed to an even wider context, which he termed "ambience," or "the context of provenance," that shaped the creation of the records. This involved identifying more specifically additional related administrative entities and actions that shape the creation of a particular record series. The contextual essay system proposed in this thesis shares Scott and Hurley's concern to explore enhanced contextual approaches to archival description. See Chris Hurley, "Ambient Functions – Abandoned Children to Zoos," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), 21.

Scott's series-centered vision became the descriptive approach of the Commonwealth Archives Office of Australia in 1964.[10] It was not confined to the Australian scene. Indeed, the model had an impact on international archival practice, and this impact extended to Canada's archival community. In the late 1990s, the Archives of Ontario (AO) made the decision to revamp its descriptive system in a major way. It discontinued adherence to the *fonds*-centred system as codified in the RAD formula. The AO embraced the path chosen by the Australian archives and become the first major Canadian institution to adopt the series system. In an article justifying the move, Bob Krawczyk emphasized the difficulties that had arisen when trying to apply the one-creator concept to the multi-provenance records of the Ontario government. Dismissing the fonds system as "dangerously arbitrary," Krawczyk underscored the importance of separating "information about the creators from information about the records", a move which he believed the series approach facilitated.[11]

The Archives of Manitoba recently followed the example of its counterpart to the east. In 2001, it implemented a series-centered approach to the arrangement and description of its Manitoba government and Hudson's Bay Company records, accessible through its new online Keystone Archives Descriptive Database. In doing so, it moved away from the original, self-described "artificial," arrangement and towards a system which promised to more accurately portray "the complexity of administrative history, organizational relationships and records creation within the context" of the Hudson's Bay

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[10] Krawczyk*,* 28.
[11] Krawczyk, "Cross Reference Heaven," 142, 145.

Company and Manitoba government.[12] The new Keystone Database allows 'Record

Creators' to be separated from individual series and items, and therefore is seen to better

capture the structure and evolution of creating agencies.

The fonds versus series debate continues to dominate discussions within the

archival community. Numerous conference papers, articles and books have appeared as

archivists offer criticism and commendations based on their own theoretical leanings and

experience. But the fonds/series dichotomy has failed to overshadow all discussions

surrounding description. There are those within the archival community who are looking

beyond this debate, expressing amounts of dissatisfaction with both descriptive

approaches and seeing in them major weaknesses and shortcomings. This is due, in large

part, to the perceived limitations of relying wholly on traditional descriptions as the only

resource available to researchers attempting to grasp the 'big picture.' As archivist Lori

Nordland observes, descriptions and finding aids do serve an important role in forming

"researchers' initial impression of most records"; however, she also points out that

information presented in them is basic and often lacking other information necessary for

more effective and thorough research. The solution, as Nordland urges, is to develop

other descriptive tools to allow metadata "to be more prominently displayed" to archival

researchers.[13] Like Nordland, archival educator Barbara Craig lauds the efforts to

develop professional standards for description, but also points out the shortcomings of

efforts which focus almost exclusively on record content at the expense of record context.

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[12] Archives of Manitoba website, accessed 1 September 2011,
http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/holdings/arrangement.html.
[13] Nordland, "The Concept of 'Secondary Provenance'": 150, 159.

The latter is crucial, she contends, and should be "an integral part of any full archival description."[14]

The belief that record context should be at the forefront of description is well in tune with current thinking about the nature of records and the archivist's role in conveying this information to users. Such ideas first began to surface in the 1970s, when intellectual currents within the archival community emphasized context in the application of historical knowledge in archival work. This proved a significant departure from the traditional, subject-based, approach to archiving that predominated during the early twentieth century. Rather, the emphasis on a new aspect of historical knowledge advanced a different role for archivists, as historians of the record itself. As part of this new role, archivists were encouraged to focus on and study the many varied aspects of a record's context.

This thinking prompted a reassessment of the knowledge required to accomplish archival work. As was noted in Chapter One, a broader understanding of the provenance of the records or the context in which they were created, came to the fore. This entailed analyzing all aspects of the record/creator relationship, including the recordkeeping and filing systems, methods of record creation, and channels of communication within the organization. Records are a reflection of the organizations which create them. As such, records become 'evidence' of an organization's activities, development, and evolution over time—the archival characteristics of these records create distinct historical strata within each organization. An understanding of the history of organizations (i.e. records

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[14] Barbara L. Craig et al., "Exploring Perspectives and Themes for Histories of Records and Archives. The First International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA), 2005," *Archivaria* 60 (2005): 3.

creators) and their recordkeeping practices can then be translated into archival practice. In the words of Cook, such knowledge enables archivists to

> perform the basic archival functions of locating and appraising all the relevant records, re-creating (on paper) their *provenance* and original arrangement within the context of their original parent body, describing this multi-textured and layered *fond* clearly, and conveying this crucial sense of context and original order to researchers.[15]

Thus, by studying a record's history and context and by incorporating this information into archival practice, archivists can ultimately help facilitate access to more meaningful records.

Consider, for instance, how this thinking can help shed light on the records of the Hudson's Bay Company. Its records, over time, reflect the company's unique trans-Atlantic character, showing "the relationship between transportation, communication, and efficient commercial operations over long distances."[16] As the HBC evolved, this relationship changed, as did its records and recordkeeping practices. Often, individuals became key facilitators. Archivist Mark Walsh shows how Clarence C. Chipman, appointed Chief Commissioner in Canada in 1891, orchestrated changes in the company's information practices to correspond with its transition to "modern commercial management." The new file and registry systems that he worked to implement show an organization "on the verge of entering the twentieth century" and reveal the struggle

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[15] Terry Cook, "Supplement: the Archival Legacy of the Department of the Interior, *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88): 81.

[16] Mark Walsh, "By Packtrain and Steamer: The Hudson's Bay Company's British Columbia District Manager's Correspondence, 1897-1920," *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985): 127.

between past practices and future objectives.[17] This wider understanding of HBC records

is lost unless its specific administrative context is comprehended.

How then can an archivist's role as historian of the record be more fully realised,

and his or her goal of creating context-driven descriptions be implemented and achieved?

One suggestion, offered by Cook, centres on the idea of archivists 'opening up'

descriptions in order to showcase some of the "deeper contextual elements enveloping the

complex creation, uses, and relationships of records" throughout the records'

existences.[18] Tom Nesmith explores this concept in great detail in "Reopening Archives:

Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice." In the article, Nesmith

calls archivists to look to enrich a user's experience by giving him or her "an accounting

of the broader history of the records and archiving."[19] One means of imbuing this

contextual knowledge, suggests Nesmith, is by making available "a series of essays" to

help illuminate diverse archival themes. According to this argument, existing descriptive

systems could be augmented by various essays or "histories" which explore the context

of records in archival collections. These essays would be optional for researchers to use

but readily available to them as an additional source of information. The essays could

offer an overview of the contextual nature of records and highlight and expand upon

different aspects of this context. This may include a deeper look at organizational

structures, creators, systems and information technologies. In the words of Nesmith, the

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[17] Ibid., 134.
[18] Cook, "The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country," 531.
[19] Tom Nesmith, "Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice,"
Archivaria 60 (Fall 2005): 270.

ultimate achievement of such tools would be to help users "read an archives" by directing

them to look beyond the information contained in records and to the wider context.[20]

In recent years, archives have utilized web-based technology to create resources

which share many of the same characteristics as those advocated by Nesmith, Cook and

others. These tools have appeared in various forms, with varying attention to detail;

nevertheless they offer rich contextual information often lacking in traditional descriptive

norms. As an example on a smaller scale, the Archives of Manitoba recently launched an

online exhibition featuring the sessional journal of the Legislative Assembly of

Assiniboia of 1870.[21] The exhibition goes beyond what is found in the record's

description, exploring the historical significance of the journal itself and answering

questions surrounding its creation. Beyond the journal, the exhibition provides an

overview of the Legislative Assembly's history and functions and details surrounding the

record's custodial history which ultimately led to its acquisition by the archives.

Library and Archives Canada's (LAC) website provides on a much larger scale a

collection of virtual exhibitions on a variety of topics and themes. Take, for example, an

exhibition centering on the diary of W. L. Mackenzie King – "A Real Companion and

Friend." The purpose of the exhibition is to look beyond the diary itself to the context in

which it was created. It considers King as author, looks at his earlier forays into writing,

provides an analysis of the diary as a genre as well as traces its evolution during the era in

which King lived, explores important themes elucidated upon in the diary and lists

external sources which offer additional contextual information about the life and

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[20] Ibid., 272, 273.
[21] The Archives of Manitoba website, accessed 1 March 2012,
http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/leg_assembly/index.html.

contributions of King. In addition, the exhibition examines the elusive custodial history of the record, "including the decision to save the texts for posterity", which, it is noted, stood in direct opposition to the wishes of the author himself.[22]

Among the other LAC virtual exhibitions is a detailed look at the archives' Aboriginal documentary heritage. As noted in its introductory page, the exhibition's goal is to illustrate "the complex and often contentious relationship between the Canadian government and Canada's Aboriginal people."[23] It does so by examining three themes, presented in a series of essays. Included among these is a guide to the main administrative records of the government (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs) and Aboriginal peoples—the Red and Black Series—consideration of key treaties, surrenders and agreements, and an examination of records relating to Aboriginal soldiers in the First World War. In addition, researchers are provided with a separate overview of the three themes written to reflect "an Aboriginal perspective" on the records.[24]

Virtual exhibitions demonstrate the potential of what can be achieved by going beyond traditional descriptions and finding aids. They explore the many layers of context and in the process contribute to a more complete understanding of a record's history. But despite the effective qualities of exhibitions, and the ways in which they enrich, illuminate, and guide a user's understanding by highlighting important information relating to key record collections, these online resources in many ways do not go far enough. These tools are by necessity selective, typically representing only a small

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[22] Library and Archives Canada (LAC) website, accessed 1 September 2011, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/king/index-e.html.
[23] LAC website, accessed 1 September 2011, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/aboriginal-heritage/index-e.html.
[24] LAC website, accessed 1 September 2011, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/aboriginal-heritage/020016-1000-e.html.

fraction of the information available in archival institutions. Indeed, online exhibitions are intended to probe topics and themes that are of most historical and cultural significance, drawing attention to the 'star records,' so to speak. They bring flavour and visual interest to archives' websites and are geared to appeal to visitors and draw them in to investigate more fully what the archives has to offer. They are rarely included as part of the routine activities of an archives staff; rather they typically represent exceptional projects, commissioned over a brief period of time and then added to websites as special features. Often, but not always, these resources are finite in scope and detail. In other words, they are 'contained' as single online entities that are neither added to nor related to other web pages or tools.

Perhaps one of the key limitations of the online exhibitions and similar resources presented by many archival websites is that there often appears a separation between exhibitions and the records themselves. Some records are certainly identified and referenced, but the vast numbers of related records are excluded from having any direct linkage or identification. This is of course intentional, as these types of exhibitions are not created for the purpose of directing researchers to all relevant holdings and material. In contrast, however, some exhibitions have been created which *are* intended to serve as guides to archival information. In these examples, users are provided with overviews of records on a particular theme or subject and may then be directed to relevant record creators or titles of series. In both of these cases a separation often remains. Virtual exhibitions or guides may point inward to records that are available but the opposite is rarely true. In other words, actual descriptions or finding aids accessed via online

databases or catalogues typically do not point users outward, to resources and tools that have been created and could provide valuable context and background detail.

In this way, it may be worthwhile to reassess how archives utilize essays, histories, exhibitions and guides on the websites they have created. It may be possible to expand on current uses, to even go beyond traditional approaches to creating and using online tools, in order to more fully capitalise on the technology that is available.

Perhaps one way this can be achieved is by expanding continuing efforts to provide users with a more complete understanding of what can and should be known about records in archival holdings. Archives should look for ways "to feed the existing formal descriptive systems" with contextual information, but should do so in a way that avoids overwhelming users by inundating them with excessive amounts of such information.[25]

One possible solution, proposed here, is to modify some of the current approaches to description. The suggestion draws upon the numerous examples of online tools and resources available on many archives websites, such as virtual exhibitions and record guides, but also looks to Nesmith's suggestion of a more contextually-enhanced description system. What is here proposed is that the two be incorporated into a single unit. In other words, rather than separating the information found in exhibitions/guides from descriptions and finding aids, thereby forcing users to access these tools at specific and detached access points, it is suggested that essays (in various forms) be directly embedded and contained in descriptions themselves. In doing so, users would have

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[25] Nesmith, "Reopening Archives," 271.

within reach key contextual information relating to the specific records they are searching for. The benefit here would be that they would avoid having to 'jump' from record catalogue descriptions to essays; rather, the access point would be the same for both. In this proposed system, essays would exist not as replacements for descriptive norms; rather, they would serve to complement and enhance them by more fully capitalising on available web technology.

The combining of descriptions with essays could prove a fairly straightforward process, not requiring a complete overhaul of existing systems but rather dependent on a series of key adjustments. The archives website is increasingly becoming the starting point for archival research. At the forefront of these sites, online record catalogues and databases are primary instruments with which users can search for information. In the past this was accomplished by sifting through card catalogues and indexes located in reference rooms, a slow and often tedious process. Online catalogues have greatly expedited the search process. They have also proven more comprehensive. Users can search in general the entirety of an archives' descriptive holdings. They can also customize their searches according to specific dates, media, creators, etc. and thereby narrow results to meet the criteria most relevant to their research.

From these results, users can select descriptions of groups of records or individual items. The online catalogue is, in essence, a network of information supported by a common interface and accessible instantly and from any location. Yet it is apparent that archives have not fully capitalized on what is afforded by this design. Descriptions typically provide basic information about records, about creating agencies, about

institutional procedures, etc., thereby satisfying primary research enquiries. But what if users require more information than traditional descriptions are equipped to provide?

In answer, why not give users the option of accessing more detailed historical and contextual information directly from descriptive pages? Utilizing a 'network' scheme, essays could be built into descriptions as links which would direct users to a separate web page with additional information. One specific approach is to use finding aids as a platform for added context. Finding aids are often built into online descriptions and therefore are already readily available for consultation. Drawing from a wiki-type layout, keywords and phrases found in finding aids could serve as links to essays that have been prepared. In turn, essays may themselves be linked to other essays which could explore related facets of context.

Consider the United Kingdom's National Archives' (TNA) website as an example. The archives offers a diverse collection of online guides and exhibitions on records in its holdings. On the topic of slavery, for instance, there exist a number of resources, including a lesson plan geared to complement school curricula, an "Abolition of Slavery" exhibition, and an "in-depth research guide" entitled "Slavery: British transatlantic slave trade" that provides an introduction to "the major original sources at TNA" that relate to the slave trade during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and includes a collection of digitised material. These tools also point to corresponding TNA records.[26] The detailed research guide, for instance, lists series "BT 6/191-193" for registers of ships involved in the colonial trade in the eighteenth century and provides a

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[26] The National Archives website, accessed 30 August 2011, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/lessons/lesson27.htm; http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/slavery/; and http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/slave-trade-slavery.htm.

link to the online catalogue. If accessing the catalogue directly, however, users would not be provided with a means to locate these relevant guides and exhibitions. This could, however, be accomplished through only minor modifications. For instance, descriptions could include a brief list of related themes and topics related to the BT 6/191-193 series, such as the British Admiralty and transatlantic trade. These could appear as links which would serve to direct users to essays that have been prepared. In this way, users would have the option of accessing additional context on the topic they are researching.

The website of the Smithsonian Archives has built into its catalogue a feature similar to what is being proposed here. Descriptive pages in its catalogue include a list of "Index Terms" which are linked to other related records in Smithsonian holdings. The 'National Museum of Natural History Department of Botany' collection, for example, identifies prominent individuals linked to the field of Botany, including Mason E. Hale.[27] By selecting this link, one is provided with all catalogue search results for records which relate directly to Hale. Building upon this example, a similar feature could be included in online descriptions which direct users to essays exploring record context. These could be included in addition to the current index of related Smithsonian collections.

As for the essays themselves, they would most likely vary to some extent from institution to institution, depending on specific needs and objectives. However, many of their basic features could remain the same. As a general outline, they would offer a view of the wider context from which the records emanate and insight into how this contextual information can be applied to research. Essays could aim to provide a "narrative" which

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[27] The Smithsonian Archives website, accessed 30 August 2011, http://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_arc_216841?back=%2Fcollections%2Fsearch%3Ffa%3Dtrue.

users can then "take into the search for information in the actual descriptions of the records."[28] A narrative may focus on creating agencies, for example, and explore the history and evolution of an organization, responsibilities and functions of its offices, background of key individuals, history of technology used for communicative purposes, and recordkeeping systems. Essays could point to the societal or political environment. They may touch upon related record creating entities and they may even seek to explain the *absence* of records.

Take, for example, a hypothetical body of records of a department or agency, such as a nineteenth-century railroad company. A description at the highest level would typically include such things as an overview of record content, an administrative history, a list of controlling or subordinate entities, location codes and a link to a corresponding finding aid. The latter would break down the company's records and would provide further details and research direction. Working with finding aids, keywords found in them could be used to signal the existence of essays. For instance, records dealing with the company's relationship with local and federal governments may link to an essay on contemporary government policies relating to transportation or on government response to the proliferation of the railroad industry.

Other records of the hypothetical agency may document employees and labourers employed by the company. Keywords here could link to an essay which explores early railroad construction processes, including a look at company administration in dealing with the recruitment of foreign workers. These essays could, in turn, direct users to related essays which centre on the personal experience of employees. Here could be

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[28] Nesmith, "Reopening Archives," 272.

listed private manuscript collections found in the archives which contain journals or correspondence of those who were witnesses to these experiences.

Essays could also go beyond record context. For instance, they could illuminate the thinking behind archival procedures such as appraisal and description and focus this information around specific collections of records.[29] The National Archives of Australia (NAA) website features a number of guides and resources aimed at providing users with insight into archival processes. On the 'Collections' page of the website, researchers have the option to access information on the institution's guidelines and policies. This includes a tutorial on "how the records are arranged and controlled" according to the NAA's distinctive Commonwealth Record Series System. The rationale of the tutorial, as expressed in its opening paragraph, is based on the knowledge that "knowing about the context in which records are created can help researchers to find the records" as well as achieve a greater understanding of them.[30] Incorporating a network system of essays into descriptive pages, as outlined here, could "offer as a full a *conception* of the history or contextualities of the records as can be provided."[31]

An essay approach would need to be conceived of systematically, with clear goals, guidelines, rules, and processes for implementation at each institution or across institutions.[32] At the same time, the actual format of essays may vary, depending on the

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[29] For a discussion of an hypothetical essay that would explain the appraisal process for a body of records, see Tom Nesmith, "Documenting Appraisal as a Societal-Archival Process: Theory, Practice, and Ethics in the Wake of Helen Willa Samuels," in Terry Cook, ed., *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions, Essays in Honor of Helen Willa Samuels* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011).
[30] National Archives of Australia website, accessed 1 September 2011, http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/research/crs-system.aspx.
[31] Nesmith, "Reopening Archives," 272.
[32] A standardized approach may also include the creation of shareable metadata (i.e. descriptive metadata that are able to be shared across institutions as well to wider groups of participants. Such metadata would be created specifically for aggregated environments.) See Jenn Riley and Kelcy Shepherd, "A Brave New

nature of the institution and the resources available. They would not need to be restricted to text only but could feature digitized images, diagrams and maps, even podcasts or videos. They could also provide links to records in other institutions. The creation of essays could be approached in a number of ways. They could be institution-led. Many of LAC's guides, for example, are prepared by staff members who specialize in and manage the records directly. Such individuals have extensive knowledge of the scope and extent of the records, of the particularities of record creators, of evolving filing systems over time, and of registry processes at their most complex levels. They also hold insight into the ways in which collections are approached and used by researchers, including common difficulties that may arise. Archives staff are able to draw upon this unique perspective and knowledge and can help guide researchers to an understanding of different facets of the collection. In doing so, they can encourage greater self-sufficiency among a wider research audience – including both onsite and remote users.

The Smithsonian Institution Archives follows a similar approach. The website features a blog which explores the history and holdings and of the institution as well as examines some of the "challenges" faced in the ongoing preservation of collections. Blog articles are contributed by Smithsonian staff and relate to their specific areas of expertise.[33]

A further approach to the writing of essays could sometimes involve commissioning scholars and other professional writers to prepare them. Library and Archives Canada has taken this approach with its *Old Messengers, New Media*

World: Archivists and Shareable Descriptive Metadata," *The American Archivist*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009).
[33] Smithsonian Institution Archives website, accessed 20 March 2012, http://siarchives.si.edu/blog.

exhibition, which explores the legacy of two leading twentieth-century Canadian

philosophers of communication, Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, and considers the

role of archives as a communication medium in light of their ideas.[34] The exhibition was

the product of collaboration by LAC with two academics, but was also contributed to by

other leading academics in the field of communications studies.

Essays could also be the product of user participation. Archives could offer

members of the public the chance to contribute research and findings through monitored

systems of submission and by incorporating Web 2.0 technology. With this approach,

essays could exist as part of an ongoing editing process, with users continually adding to

existing essays or creating new ones.[35] As an example, the Smithsonian Institution

Archives has created a "Discussion Forums" page at its website that allows users to post

topics that can then be discussed by a wider web-based audience.   TNA takes another

approach through its "Your Archives" wiki, which facilitates shared knowledge of

archival information and British history among users. Related is its

Wikipedia:GLAM/TNA collaboration dedicated to improving Wikipedia articles relating

to its holdings.[36] Members of the public are encouraged to participate in a multitude of

ways, including through translation work and archives research.   The "Free a

Photographer Challenge," for instance, calls for assistance in providing biographical

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[34]LAC website, accessed 25 September 2011, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/innis-mcluhan/index-e.html.

[35] The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections website at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, is a recent example of such participatory archiving that draws upon Web 2.0 technology. The project, headed by Elizabeth Yakel of the University of Michigan, includes about sixty personal and organizational collections relating to the US and Allied military campaign in Russia in 1918-1919. The site has been heralded as an example of the 'next generation' of finding aids since it allows users to collaborate with archivists in providing greater contextual information. See Elizabeth Yakel, "Who Represents the Past? Archives, Records, and the Social Web," in Cook, ed., *Controlling the Past* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), 257-278.

[36] The National Archives website, accessed 25 September 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:GLAM/TNA.

details relating to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographers. These examples could be modified and tuned to fit the essay concept, while still operating according to this concept.

By incorporating essays into descriptive systems, archives can help provide users with valuable insight with which to pursue a greater understanding of records. Additional contextual information serves to enrich record content and this, in turn, ultimately leads to greater self-sufficiency among users of archival material. By taking full advantage of web technology and online systems through an essay-based system, archives have an opportunity to make available more holistic and meaningful record collections.

Chapter Three

Implementing the Essay Approach: A Case Study of Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s

Incorporating essays into description systems is a means to enhance existing web-based archival description. Essays would provide users with immediate access to key information. They would serve as vehicles through which archivists could add valuable contextual knowledge not facilitated by regular descriptions and finding aids. The possibilities for implementing this approach are endless and at the same time reflect that archives are evolving, living institutions and participants in the co-creation and re-creation of records and information. In this way, an essay system can be seen as a logical outcome of how thinking has changed with regard to the role of archives and the nature of the records themselves.

The implementation of essays could be a straightforward process, not requiring a complete overhaul of online systems. Formats and features could easily be amended to suit specific needs but the main objective of injecting catalogues with added layers of contextual knowledge would remain the same. The following chapter presents a case study of how a series of essays might be structured and implemented. Although this represents only a basic example of how such as system could function and work, it offers an idea of the type of information that can be relayed in the essay format.

One way in which archivists can make records more meaningful is to help researchers identify the "administrative structure and related functions" of record-

creating organizations.[1] This knowledge is reflected in the records themselves. As Lisa Friesen notes, understanding the functions of an organization provides clues as to the nature of its records and at the same time, influences how "records are created, used and archived."[2] Building upon this thinking, and drawing upon the 'essay' concept, the following is an analysis of Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s with a focus on its evolving record creation and recordkeeping processes. This era was chosen as a means to illustrate the essay concept because of its significance as a major turning point in Canadian diplomatic roles. Although many facets of the department could be explored using an essay approach, the following five essays will focus chiefly on the political-legal-constitutional dimension, first presenting an overview of External Affairs in the 1920s and then exploring legations as record creators, changes in the sending and receiving of departmental information, recordkeeping staff, and new recordkeeping procedures at the headquarters in Ottawa.

The External Affairs department of this era presents a distinct administrative and recordkeeping context. From this context, the political-legal-constitutional dimension proves especially central to an understanding of the department at this time. This aspect influenced changes to the record creation and recordkeeping processes within External Affairs, and ultimately influenced its transition to a major record creating branch of the federal government. The history of this transition in the department has largely remained unexplored by archivists, although some recent histories of records have examined other

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[1] Lisa Friesen, "'Every Requisite Information": Contextual Provenance in the Records of the Commissioner's Office of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1884-1910," M.A. thesis, Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba, 2005, 3.
[2] Ibid.

aspects of Canadian government record creation and keeping.[3] The goal here is to provide an overview of the department and its evolving information management system that can then be used as the basis for further analysis of External Affairs and the records it created. What is implied here is that an understanding of the growth of External Affairs during this era, and the information management system that evolved, provides crucial context for a researcher or archivist seeking to utilise the records created by the department.

The following five essays explore the functions and activities of a federal Canadian department. As such, they relate most directly to records located in the holdings of Library and Archives Canada, particularly those which comprise the many volumes found in the Department of External Affairs *fonds,* Record Group 25 (RG 25). In a real-life scenario, it is possible to conceptualize a great many ways in which these essays could be linked to relevant sections of the description of RG 25. In this case example, a more basic or limited approach is all that can be provided in order to illustrate how a more fully developed one could function. LAC has a standardized descriptive system for government records, which can be accessed via a search in the archives' online catalogue. A search can produce descriptions of thousands of records. The most

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[3] For a sample of these studies, see: Terry Cook, "Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898-1958," in Kenneth S. Coates and William Morrison, eds., *For Purposes of Dominion: Essays in Honour of Morris Zaslow* (North York: Captus Press, 1989); Brian Hubner, "'An Administered People': A Contextual Approach to the Study of Bureaucracy, Records-Keeping, and Records in the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs, 1755-1950" (MA thesis, Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba, 2000); Sean Darcy, "The Evolution of the Department of Indian Affairs' Central Registry Record-Keeping Administrative Systems: 1872-1984," *Archivaria* 58 (Fall 2004); Brian Masschaele, "Memos and Minutes: Arnold Heeney, the Cabinet War Committee, and the Establishment of the Canadian Cabinet Secretariat During the Second World War," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998); Bill Russell, "The White Man's Paper Burden: Aspects of Records Keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860-1914," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-5); Brian Hubner, " 'This is the Whiteman's Law': Aboriginal Resistance, Bureaucratic Change and the Census of Canada, 1830-2006," *Archival Science* (September 2007).

general description is of the *fonds* as a whole. As an example, the *fonds*-level description

for RG 25 is provided below. Researchers will find links in it to various internal

components of the *fonds* or "lower level" elements such as *sous-fonds* (or all records of a

particular sub-unit of the department), series (or various filing systems the department

used) and individual files within them. Records can be further sorted by date and media.

A key feature of this system is that a description of series and files follows a very similar

structure as the *fonds* description. As can be seen in the RG 25 example, the main

features of this structure are the physical "extent" of the records, information on the

"arrangement structure" about where various series and their files are within the *fonds,*

very general "Scope and Content" notes highlighting key subjects documented by certain

types of records in the *fonds*, and a brief overview "Biography/Administrative history" of

the department. If LAC were to adopt an essay approach like the one proposed here, it

could link essays to these existing features of the descriptive system. Only minimal

adjustments to existing descriptions would be needed to start. Key terms in the

descriptions could serve as links to related records and essays. As the system evolved

more essays and related key term links could be added.

One way to inform researchers about the availability of the essays and provide

access to them is to create a separate field about them in the most general *fonds* level

description of RG 25. It could serve as the primary access point to existing essays since

researchers will often start with the *fonds* description. This field could include a link that

directs users to a 'Table of Contents' page which would list essays relating to External

Affairs. The same field could also be added to each of the lower-level descriptions of RG

25. As a preliminary example, the new field could appear as follows below, under

"Learn More About these Records":

Description found in Archives[4]

Title	Department of External Affairs fonds [multiple media].
Fonds consists of	[63 lower level description(s)](#)
Arrangement structure	[Show Arrangement Structure](#)
Bilingual equivalent	[Fonds du ministère des Affaires extérieures [supports multiples]](#)
Date(s)	1803-1995
Place of creation	No place, unknown, or undetermined
Extent	1364.99 m of textual records. 59 microfilm reels. 119 photographs 75 b&w prints, 25 b&w negatives, 19 coul slides. 417 maps 2 architectural drawings 1 atlas : (36 leaves) 249 audio reels (ca. 255 h, 42 min, 30 s) 192 film reels (ca. 156 h) 100 videocassettes (ca. 92 h, 12 min, 43 s) 65 audio cassettes (ca. 63 h, 15 min) 30 audio discs (ca. 3 h, 25 min)
Language of material	English Added language of material: French

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[4] Library and Archives Canada, Department of External Affairs *fonds*. Accessed 1 September 2011. http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_n br=49&rec_nbr_list=49,16243,19996,17231,103440,14072,18924,14073,12458,134302.

Scope and content	Fonds consists of records created and/or maintained by the Department of External Affairs and its predecessors. Researchers are cautioned that unprocessed textual records and records in other media are not reflected in this description. One photo series consists of the visit of Indian Prime Minister Jawâharlâl Pandit Nehru, Mrs. Nehru, and Mrs. Indira Ghandi to Vancouver, Niagara Falls and Ottawa, Canada, 1949. The visitors were received by Prime Minister Louis Saint-Laurent, William Lyon Mackenzie King and various diplomats of India from Dept. of Foreign Affairs in Canada. Photos taken by National Film Board, Capital Press Service, Yousuf Karsh, Not and Merrill, Bill and Jean Newton and Canada Wide Photo. Audio-visual material can be found in the following lower level records: Canadian High Commission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland sous-fonds; Canadian Embassy to France sous-fonds; Vimy Ridge celebrations series; Historical Division series; and Miscellaneous Audio-Visual Material from the Department of External Affairs series.
Conditions of access	***Multiple media - for use in descriptive records only*** 96: Restrictions vary ***Archival reference no.*** R219-0-2-E ***Former archival reference no.*** RG25
Finding aid	Finding aids are available. See lower level descriptions and accession records in ArchiviaNet (the NA website). (Other)

Learn more about these records	*Click here to access essays and guides that provide information about these records and the organizations and individuals who created them.*
Creator / Provenance	Canada. Dept. of External Affairs. Dept. of External Affairs.
Biography / Administrative history	The Department of External Affairs was created in 1909 by an Act of Parliament,(8-9 Edward VII, C. 13, "An Act to create a Department of External Affairs, assented to on 19 May 1909). Prior to 1909 Canada did not have one body that was responsible for the conduct of foreign policy. This function was completed in a myriad of fashions and by numerous departments. At Confederation Canada had one official channel to the world through the Office of the Governor General. He reported to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Great Britain and in Canada the Governor General communicated formally with the Office of the Privy Council, ie: the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. At the time of Confederation Parliament was responsible for the regulation of trade and commerce and defence, but there was no suggestion that Canada should act as an independent entity in external relations. The conduct of Canada's foreign affairs was in the hands of the British Foreign Office. Correspondence regarding the appointment of foreign consuls, extradition and passports was the responsibility of the Secretary of State along with foreign visits and ceremonies. Trade matters were dealt with by the Department of Trade and Commerce and the Departments of Agriculture and then Interior were responsible for all matters relating to immigration. All foreign policy aspects of issues like fisheries, waterways and boundaries were the responsibility of the specific department involved. The Department of External Affairs was formed in 1909 to be responsible for the conduct of Canadian relations with other countries, albeit still within the umbrella of the British Empire. The Under-Secretary reported to the Secretary of State until 1912 when the department came under the direct

responsibility of the Prime Minister. This remained until 1946 when "An Act to amend the Department of External Affairs Act" (10 George VI, Chapter 6: assented to 28 May 1946) gave responsibility for the department to the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Responsibilities in the early years included the issuance of passports, the research and production of confidential documents on international matters, participation in international negotiations, responsibility for foreign consuls in Canada and the official channel of communication in areas of commercial relations, immigration and defence even though External Affairs was not the department of primary responsibility.

The advent of the First World War greatly increased the department's responsibility though its mandate remained the same. The 1920's brought increasing work in the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization specifically. The recruitment of better educated foreign service officers allowed the department to expand into an ever demanding international situation. In the late 1920's responsibility for the three new posts abroad, Washington, Paris and Tokyo, were given to the department.

In 1931 the ability of the Canadian government to exert more independence in the conduct of its foreign policy was broadened by the passage of the Statute of Westminster in Great Britain. This Statute recognized the equality in status between each of the Dominions and the British government. This growing independence was evidenced throughout the 1930's as Canada as a nation and the department in particular exercised increasing control over its foreign policy decisions. The entry of Canada into the Second World War signalled another milestone in Canada's responsibility for its own foreign affairs and the department in 1939 had matured enough to handle this increasing responsibility.

The Second World War had a very considerable effect on the expansion in the duties and size of the Department of External Affairs. The creation of new posts abroad needed for the conduct of the war included establishing new High Commissioners in other Commonwealth countries, the opening of new posts in Latin America, establishing a wider

range of consular activities around the world and establishing and expanding diplomatic relations with Canada's allies and with the exiled governments of occupied countries in London. The war also added additional responsibilities to the Department's normal functions which included censorship, intelligence and security, psychological and economic warfare, control of aliens and refugees, treatment of Japanese-Canadians and economic activities relating to export controls and the procurement of supplies. By 1943 additional responsibilities in international negotiations relating to post hostilities problems emerged as another preoccupation of the department.

In 1946 "An Act to amend the Department of External Affairs Act" was passed by Parliament,(10 George VI, Chapter 6: Assented to 28 May 1946). This amended act allowed for the first time since 1912 that a Minister of the Crown, not the Prime Minister, would have responsibility for the Department of External Affairs. The main function of the department continued to be the protection advancement of Canadian participation in international organizations. It provides for Canada in representation in foreign countries, negotiates treaties and agreements and collects information regarding developments likely to affect Canada's international relations.

In the early 1980's, in a move to consolidate all foreign service operations, the Department of External Affairs took on additional responsibilities in the areas of trade and immigration. The Foreign Branch of the Commission for Employment and Immigration was moved from the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (Order in Council, P.C. 891, 31 March 1981). On 12 January 1982 the Trade Commission Service and International Marketing was moved from the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce(Order in Council, P.C.11, 12 January 1982).

On 7 December 1983 the establishment of the Department of External Affairs under Part 1 of the Government Organization Act was completed. This Act provided for the appointment of a Minister for International Trade to assist the Secretary of State for External Affairs regarding international Trade. The Act also provided for the possible appointment of a Minister for External Relations to assist the

	Secretary of State for External Affairs regarding Canada's international trade relations. In 1989 the department's name was changed to the Department of External Affairs and International Trade. In 1992 the immigration function returned to the Department of Immigration. Soon after the election of November 1993 it was announced that the department name would be changed to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to reflect the existing independence Canada has in the conduct of its foreign policy.
Additional information	*Source of title* (SC Elizabeth 11,Chaper 167, part I, section 2) *Accruals* Further accruals are expected.
Source	Government
Other system control no.	0FD097
MIKAN no.	49

By following this link provided, the researcher would be directed to the Table of Contents. Using the case study presented in this chapter as a model, the five essays relating to External Affairs could appear grouped under the following heading within the Table of Contents page:

The Department of External Affairs in the 1920s: Records Creation and Information Gathering for New Diplomatic Roles

1.   Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s: The Changing

        Political and Constitutional Context

2.   Foreign Legations and Record Creation

3.   The Sending and Receiving of Diplomatic Records and Information

4.   Recordkeeping Staff

5.   Recordkeeping Procedures at Headquarters

By selecting one of the titles listed above, a user would be directed to the full text of the essay. The essay itself would in turn facilitate access to records in the RG 25 *fonds* by linking key terms to corresponding finding aids or descriptions. For example, the key term "Washington," found in the essay "Foreign Legations and Record Creation," could direct a user to the finding aid or description for the "Canadian Embassy to the United States of America" *sous-fonds* (RG25-B-2). Conversely, an access point would also exist in the *sous-fonds* description, in the event that a user started his or her search from there. In this way, descriptions and correlating contextual information can be webbed together through an online interface. This is a key feature of the essay model. By providing multiple, interconnected, access points to essays and description tools, archival records become enriched by a greater depth of contextual knowledge. At the same time, this information becomes much more highly accessible, and more intuitively so, than information that is available in many existing archival systems.

The design presented here, if implemented, would fill a gap that is common in current descriptive systems. Although tools such as finding aids are available and help

guide researchers to records, they are not created to relay comprehensive knowledge of records and the information they contain is often skeletal. On the other hand, descriptions of institutional records often include administrative history information, but these fields are necessarily limited – even at the highest descriptive levels – and lack the kind of detailed analysis that essays can be created to provide.

As an example, the administrative history found in the description for the "Canadian Embassy to the United States of America *sous-fonds*" contains less than seven hundred words for records spanning more than forty years of the embassy's existence. The sections dealing with the establishment of the embassy include the following:

> The Washington Legation was officially opened on 18 February 1927 to serve as the official channel of communication and decision making between Canada and the United States in all matters relating to bilateral relations. Its purpose is also the defence of Canadian interests and Canadian citizens. Because of the importance of Canadian-American relations in the conduct of Canadian foreign policy, the Washington Embassy has always been an important post. Foreign policy decisions on any number of issues, not just Canadian-American relations, are discussed and acted upon at the Washington Embassy.[5]

The above description, although useful, can only relay an overview of the embassy's history and establishment. Alternatively, the essay system would not be bound by the same limitations. Essays can be used to probe deeper, or analyze selected aspects of the embassy's history that would not be appropriately covered in an initial or introductory and necessarily general overview description such as the one above. In this way, the approach of connecting essays to catalogue descriptions achieves a goal that is fundamentally different from what is currently being done in them.

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[5] LAC, Canadian Embassy to the United States of America *sous-fonds*. Accessed 1 September 2011. http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=58&rec_nbr_list=58,45981,474,134322,136622,11357,136630,136617,136631,136619.

The model outlined above is proposed as a preliminary means of implementation. The key ingredient here is having an online descriptive catalogue which is readily accessible to a wide user-base. The essay approach recognizes the value of using this online tool to serve as the gateway to greater contextual information. Although currently at a conceptual stage, the project could prove an ever-expanding one. New essays could continually be added to the LAC website as they are created and projects like these could feature as part of the regular workings of the archives. However, in order to provide a better sense of how the essay concept could translate into actual practice, the following section introduces five original essays on various aspects of External Affairs record creation and information gathering in the 1920s. The essays highlight some types of contextual information that can be made available through this form, and exist as a basic model for this approach.

1) Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s: The Changing Political and Constitutional Context

The Department of External Affairs of the mid 1920s, and the information management system which followed, proved a far cry from the department at its origin. The office, in its earlier days, had a very different role and function. It was only during the next two decades, under the guidance of key leaders and in light of significant world

events, that the department would make the transition from minor office to central foreign agency.[6]

The original architect of the department was Joseph Pope, the Under-Secretary of State to Prime Minister Laurier beginning in 1896 and one of the "most experienced public servants" of the era.[7] Pope's decision to advocate for an office of external affairs was neither rooted in nationalism nor in a desire to secure for Canada a more influential voice in world events. Rather, the main impetus stemmed from what had become a chronic information management problem within the government of Canada.

What was clear to Pope was that the Dominion, in the early twentieth century, lacked a "complete record" of correspondence, memoranda and despatches relating to its history and evolution. Although the nation had amassed a collection of key documents, retrieved from the British Foreign Office, much of this literature was scattered and disorganized and all too often, impossible to retrieve in times of necessity. The reality of the situation was aptly demonstrated during the 1903 Alaska Boundary dispute in which Pope played a leading role. The conclusion of the dispute and Britain's unfavourable ruling was based, in large part, on Canada's inability to provide crucial evidence and

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[6] A valuable resource for the history of External Affairs is the published records of the department found in the series *Documents on Canadian External Relations*. The volumes were produced by External Affairs beginning in the 1960s. Volume three (edited by Lovell C. Clark for the years 1919-1925) and volume four (edited by Alex I. Inglis for the years 1926-1930) are particularly related to the material covered in the following five essays. Although the primary purpose of these publications is to provide copies of many thousands of documents created by External Affairs, rather than a focussed explanation of the contextual provenance of the many and varied records series in RG 25 to which most such individual documents belong, the volumes provide valuable information to support the work of understanding that context, particular record creation and recordkeeping practices, and information flows in the essay system proposed here. Publication of *Documents on Canadian External Relations* was discontinued after the volume for 1960 appeared in 2007.

[7] James Eayrs, "The Origins of Canada's Department of External Affairs," in Hugh L. Keenleyside, James Eayrs, et al, *The Growth of Canadian Policies in External Affairs* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1960), 15.

documentation in support of its boundary claims.[8] Recognizing this, Pope soon after

appealed to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service for permission to develop, in his

words, "a more systematic mode of dealing with what I may term, for want of a better

phrase, the *external affairs* of the Dominion."[9] After some hesitation on the part of

London, the bill establishing Canada's Department of External Affairs was granted royal

assent and came into effect 1 June 1909. The department was solely intended to serve as

a conduit of information between Great Britain—which would continue to control

Imperial foreign policy—and Canada's federal departments and ministries. At its head

was to be the Secretary of State (a position held by the office of the prime minister); Pope

was appointed the first Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs.

In its early years, the mission to rescue Canada's official documentation from

oblivion became a chief focus of the department's work. At the same time, efforts were

made to acquire confidential prints from London and elsewhere, to be compiled,

arranged, and ultimately made available for use by Canadian ministers.[10] What the

department was *not* to be—and Pope made clear these intentions—was anything akin to

an independent foreign policy-maker.[11] As a staunch imperialist, Pope had "no use for

'equality of status and suchlike nonsense'" nor did he envision the creation of a separate

Canadian foreign office.[12]

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[8] Don Page, "Unlocking Canada's Diplomatic Record", *International Journal*, Vol. 34, No.2, (Spring 1979): 251.

[9] Joseph Pope as quoted in Eayrs, "The Origins of Canada's Department of External Affairs," 15.

[10] John Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs: The Early Years, 1909-1946,* Vol. 1 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 52.

[11] C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies.* Vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 6.

[12] Pope quoted in Ibid.

Pope was to remain as Under-Secretary of State following the election of Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1911. During the early years of Borden's tenure, the department continued to play a responsive role in governmental affairs. Far from a sophisticated foreign office, its chief purpose was to prepare information at the behest of officers and ministers.[13] At the same time, there were minimal changes in departmental staff, with the most notable exception being the recruitment of a second officer, Loring Christie, as the first Legal Advisor for External Affairs.

Christie held a key position under Borden and undertook some of the department's major responsibilities. Although Christie's role was mainly to provide legal advice to Canadian departments, he unofficially moved in to fill another position, that of personal advisor to the prime minister. Christie's conviction that Canada was a distinct national "individuality" within the Commonwealth complemented Borden's own belief that Canada should contribute to the affairs of the empire.[14] Thus, Borden was to look to Christie for insight on foreign policy, and the latter's responsibilities came to include analyzing foreign despatches, compiling memoranda, and attending overseas meetings in an advisory capacity.[15]

The most noteworthy changes under Borden occurred after the commencement of the First World War. Canada's participation in the Great War, in particular, and concerns relating to the nation's industry, commerce and military forces, altered the nature of Canadian foreign affairs, leading to the creation of "new procedures and institutions."[16]

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[13] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 63.
[14] Ibid., 66.
[15] Gaddis Smith, "Canadian External Affairs During World War I," in Keenleyside and Eayrs et al., *The Growth of Canadian Policies in External Affairs*, 47-48.
[16] Ibid., 47.

In 1917, Canada participated in the first Imperial War Cabinet, a "well-organized consultation of Prime Ministers and heads of departments" initiated by British Prime Minister Lloyd George. During these meetings, Canada, for the first time, was offered information "with which to build an over-all view of the war." Along with access to the policy information of the British Foreign Office came proposed changes in the nature of the empire itself. Perhaps most significant was the 1917 Imperial Conference resolution seeking to redefine the Dominions as "autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth," entitled to consultation on matters of international importance.[17] The resolution was in line with Borden's aim to promote Canadian interests, and Christie was relied upon to prepare and advance this position at Imperial gatherings.[18]

This pronouncement, in part, enabled an expansion of diplomatic activities following the war's end. During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Borden insisted that Canada be granted separate representation at the Conference. Canada was also to act as a separate signatory in the treaties which followed, along with the other Dominions. In 1920 Canada was given full membership in the newly established League of Nations, a move which added an additional dimension to Canada's growing diplomatic status.[19]

The new responsibilities assumed during and after the First World War proved a strain on the department headquarters in Ottawa, necessitating a significant increase in temporary clerks, particularly in the passport section of External Affairs. At the same time, a discernible change in attitude had occurred. By the end of the war Canada had rather inadvertently drawn a "rough outline of objectives for external policy" and had

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[17] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 70.
[18] Ibid., 70.
[19] Philip G. Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth: British-Canadian Relations 1917-1926* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 236.

grown to perceive itself as an "international entity capable of pursuing responsible policies" based on informed decisions.[20]

Yet despite changes in attitude and responsibility, External Affairs had *not* developed into a separate, autonomous, foreign office capable of charting its own course in the diplomatic sphere, nor was it intended to. Borden had remained committed to both "imperial unity" as well as increased dominion responsibility."[21] This entailed more consultation between the Dominions and the Foreign Office in London but it stopped short of full diplomatic independence. Although a presence at the Paris Peace Conference and membership in the League of Nations marked a venture into new territory, in both instances, Canada remained a mere spectator rather than a direct participant in negotiations and proceedings. And throughout, External Affairs continued to play a supportive role in diplomatic activities while foreign issues remained the prerogative of ministers of other Canadian departments.[22]

Although diplomatic affairs had gained visibility since the department was established in 1909, its activities and responsibilities were largely unchanged by the time Borden left office in 1920.[23] This began to change soon after. Following a brief and largely uneventful stint with Arthur Meighen at its head, the Department of External Affairs began a new era under the leadership of Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who assumed office in 1921. King brought with him an understanding of Canada's current diplomatic situation and a vision for where the nation should head in the future. This outlook was "well established on the side of change" and rooted in the belief that

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[20] Smith, "Canadian External Affairs During World War I," 57.
[21] Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, 106.
[22] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 79.
[23] Ibid.

Canadian foreign affairs should be based on domestic policy, rather than on the policies of an empire steered by the Foreign Office in London.[24]

This resolve was strengthened early in King's term. In 1921, the Colonial Office denied a request for correspondence relating to Canada's participation in the Washington Conference. In his reply to King, Prime Minister Lloyd George justified the decision, arguing that a release of the documents would alter the character of imperial relations. In effect, George was conceding (and King recognized this) that such a request undermined what he believed to be the "British Government and Foreign Office responsibility of conducting foreign policy of the Empire".[25]

A more blatant incident occurred during the Chanak crisis of 1922. The defeat of Greek forces by Turkish troops in the Dardanelles left a British outpost at Chanak isolated and endangered. The urgent situation called for any available regiments and, in a remarkable turn of events, Britain's request for a Canadian contingent found its way to the press before it could be sent to the prime minister directly.[26] Unimpressed, King avoided commitment by deferring the matter to Parliament, which was not in session. Canada remained consigned to the sidelines after the crisis subsided and Turkish forces signed an armistice. Great Britain occupied itself with negotiating the Lausanne Treaty that ended hostilities, a process from which the Dominions were excluded.[27]

King was in some ways relieved by the exclusion, for it gave him an "escape" from participation in a process he had already determined to avoid. Importantly, the

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[24] Ibid., 88.
[25] Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, 157.
[26] Ibid., 162, 163; C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict,* 18.
[27] Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, 168.

Chanak incident served King with a "moral justification for working out his own conception of Canada's imperial relations".[28] He was to test this perceived freedom the following year, when negotiations to regulate halibut fishing in the north Pacific Ocean led to a treaty with the United States. The occasion provided King with an opportunity to "make good on a Canadian claim to independent treaty-making power" and he resolved that Canada should be the sole signatory. Not surprisingly the Foreign Office initially opposed the decision, relenting only after King threatened to open a separate legation in Washington.[29] Thus, for the first time, a treaty signed by a Canadian minister lacked what had been a prerequisite British counter-signature.[30]

At the Imperial Conference of the same year, King and the Canadian delegation came armed with a carefully planned appeal for more autonomy in foreign affairs and seeking "an independent policy for each empire country."[31] Although they fell short of this ultimate goal, the final report did relinquish greater control to the Dominions. Its concluding paragraph affirmed that Conference decisions were "subject to the action of the Governments and Parliaments of the various portions of the Empire" and stated that bilateral treaties "should be signed by a representative of the government of that part"—a clear validation of King's recent Halibut decision.[32]

The most decisive phase in the Canadian pursuit for diplomatic autonomy came with the Locarno Treaties of 1925. The seven treaties were intended to help sustain stability and security in Europe following the conclusion of the First World War; in

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[28] Ibid., 169.
[29] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 92.
[30] Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, 173.
[31] Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict,* 68.
[32] Ibid., 69.

particular, they addressed the need to formalize the western borderlands of the former belligerent, Germany. Under the guidance of Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, Great Britain had played a leading role in the initiation and negotiation of the Treaties and had celebrated its success, fully anticipating Imperial-wide acceptance. Full support was not forthcoming. Throughout the negotiations, Chamberlain had proceeded "without recourse to any machinery for collective imperial policymaking" and the Foreign Office had failed to keep the Dominions fully informed. In short, the process had been fully an "independent British undertaking".[33]

On the Canadian front, the new Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, O.D. Skelton, saw the Treaties as a clear point of departure. Appointed earlier that year, Skelton would eventually be considered "the most powerful civil servant in Canadian history."[34] His predecessor, Joseph Pope, had quietly faded into the background during the early years of Mackenzie King's tenure, due, in large part, to Pope's imperial-centered outlook that the prime minister largely considered an outdated relic of an earlier era.[35] In contrast, Skelton was a staunch proponent of total autonomy. As Dean of Arts at Queen's University, he had first made a strong impression on King during a lecture he gave advocating the need for independence in foreign affairs.[36] The diplomatic system at the time was, in Skelton's eyes, "a slur upon the dominions' post-war status." Skelton's lecture impressed the prime minister, and the ideas espoused were those "that King recognized as his own".[37] Thus, in the few years following, King sought out Skelton as an advisor in diplomatic affairs. In 1923, he invited Skelton to accompany the Canadian

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[33] Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, 243, 244.
[34] Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict,* 10.
[35] Smith, "Canadian External Affairs During World War I," 47.
[36] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 133.
[37] Ibid., 94; Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth,* 153.

delegation to the Imperial Conference and by April of 1925, Skelton was persuaded to leave his post at Queen's and pursue a career in the civil service as deputy head of External Affairs.

Together, King and Skelton were to work to build a foundation for policy on External Affairs that was distinctly Canadian. The Locarno Treaties afforded such an opportunity. In the aftermath of the Treaties' signing, it had become clear that there was a growing disparity between the strategic security of Great Britain and the rest of the Dominions. The occasion served to underscore "the fragmenting multiplicity of views about the empire's foreign policy" and caused the Dominions to reassess the current imperial system.[38]

The Imperial Conference of 1926 provided a forum in which these differing views could be expressed. The Canadian position was clearly on the side of change—in a private letter, Skelton expressed his disdain for handing Britain what he considered a 'blank cheque' in foreign affairs, concluding that "Canada must decide on her course in the full light of the facts and situation of the time". These views were conveyed by King at the Conference itself; the prime minister emphasized that Canada would not be bound by treaty obligations in a European field and maintained that future foreign affairs should be based on the concept of equality.[39]

This position was affirmed by the ruling of the Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations, which substituted the term 'empire' with the phrase 'Commonwealth of Nations.' In its famous Balfour Declaration, the Committee recognized the Dominions as

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[38] Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth,* 244.
[39] Skelton in Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict,* 79, 81.

autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.[40]

In this declaration, equality of status was finally realized. The events of 1925 and 1926 served to accelerate the fulfilment of a goal that King had envisioned upon taking office and later served to hasten the signing of the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which formally gave the Dominions full legislative independence in foreign policy.[41]

By mid-decade, External Affairs had matured into an independent office of foreign affairs within the newly designated Commonwealth of Nations. In the years following, the department would adjust to an enlarged mandate and increased responsibilities. During this time, it became clear that it could no longer function as it had in the past, as a 'one-man' office playing a minor role in the conduct of Canadian foreign affairs.[42] Additional resources, including personnel, would now be relied upon to work out the logistics of autonomy. But as the department grew in size and responsibility it also 'outgrew' its record practices. Indeed, its earlier system was no longer suitable for an evolving, sophisticated foreign office. Thus, in the time following the 1926 Imperial Conference, the Department of External Affairs underwent significant administrative and recordkeeping changes. These changes include: the addition of new 'record creators'; the institution of different channels and modes of communication; increases to the numbers of staff responsible for recordkeeping duties; and alterations to the department's recordkeeping processes. Overall, these transformations reflected a dramatic shift in

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[40] Quoted in Ibid., 86.
[41] Ibid., 113.
[42] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 102.

information management, as the administration and logistics of External Affairs were tuned to harmonize with a new diplomatic mandate.

2) Foreign Legations and Record Creation

With equality of status secured following the Imperial Conference of 1926, the Canadian government first turned to the expansion of its diplomatic corps. A clear priority became the posting of Canada's first legations abroad. The government's ability to make informed diplomatic decisions had proven increasingly arduous in recent times. A year earlier, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, O.D. Skelton, had made known in a memo to Prime Minister Mackenzie King that "it is absolutely impossible" -- "even with 7-day weeks and 16 hour days to secure the independent and exact knowledge of external affairs which now become desirable".[43] The Under-Secretary recognized that a key part of operating an independent foreign office was the ability to make informed decisions based on well-researched facts and information. As the decision-making power of the department increased, so did its reliance on accurate information. In this way, the establishment of legations promised to remove some limitations by greatly expediting the information-gathering process.

Not surprisingly, a legation in Washington was considered a first priority. King was able to gain British acceptance of this at the Imperial Conference, although the Foreign Secretary asked that the British ambassador in Washington remain in charge of strictly imperial matters. The Canadian government agreed and on 18 February 1927 Vincent Massey presented his credentials to the President in Washington. The

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[43] Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict,* 89.

Americans soon reciprocated and several months later Canada welcomed the opening of the first foreign legation in Ottawa.

Paris was next to receive a Canadian diplomatic office, which opened in the fall of 1928. Like the Americans, the French countered with their own version in the Canadian capital. A third legation, this time in Tokyo, was opened the following spring. The Japanese posting was largely a response to immigration issues emanating from British Columbia but also reflected a desire to increase trade between the two countries. Japanese acceptance of the arrangement was formalized a month later, with reciprocation in Ottawa.[44]

The significance of Canada's extended reach abroad was fully comprehended by the Canadian media at the time, which hailed the posting of legations as an "historically important development in Canadian and international affairs" and as a key step in promoting Canada as "a nation, independent and free from any other nation, ranking in the world."[45] For the first time, Canada had a corps of officers who could serve as the eyes and ears of the government abroad. In this new system, the gathering and transmission of information became a key aspect of legation responsibility. At the same time, legations acted as major record 'creators' for headquarters, as they fulfilled their duty as reporters of international affairs. The department in Ottawa would rely heavily

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[44] Legations came under the direct administration of the Department of External Affairs. The selection of ministers and the high commissioner was made by the prime minister; however, a competitive recruitment system was instituted in 1927, and career officers were thereafter "admitted by examination and promoted on the basis of achievement." Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs,* 118. Each legation had a minister, up to three officers, and various clerks and secretaries, to carry out its functions. The first ministers included Vincent Massey (US), Herbert Marler (Japan), and Philippe Roy (Paris). Notable officers included Thomas Stone, Laurent Beaudry and Hume Wrong (US), and Hugh Keenleyside (Japan).
[45] John Roberts, "Canada's Expanding Diplomatic Service," *Toronto Star Weekly* (29 Sept. 1928) in Records of the Department of External Affairs (RDEA), RG25 D1, Vol. 790, File 416.

on the feedback provided through the diligence of overseas staff and this knowledge would allow for informed decision-making on critical bilateral issues.

Recognizing this, attention was paid to implementing a sound system of information management. Early departmental guidelines and regulations proposed that "official correspondence…books and records [be] kept, with care and accuracy" and stipulated that registers be established at each legation to record letters and telegrams received and despatched as well as Canadian passports and visas of foreign passports. The legations were also charged with the task of sending reports on "matters regarding the more important political events in the country concerned." To be informed, staff and officers were to observe and research important contemporary events and issues relating to such things as trade, legislation and social matters. Information was to be acquired from newspapers, reports on public opinion, government policies and orders, regulations and court decisions. Data was then to be transmitted to Ottawa in the form of condensed reviews and briefs. At the end of each year, the head of mission was also to submit a 'General report' containing a "brief overview of development of country during the year passed." The report was to highlight key "conditions and events" as well as summarize office operations.[46]

The legations, as anticipated, were full participants in the vast flow of diplomatic information and record creation and distribution proved central to the execution of their mandate. Vincent Massey's 1931 "review of the legation's operations over the last four years," which provided headquarters in Ottawa with a detailed analysis of the workings

[46] "Rough Draft of suggestions as to what might be covered by proposed Regulations for the Diplomatic Service of Canada" ca. 1930, RDEA RG25, Vol. 790, File 430.

of the Washington office, reveals the extent of this reality. The legation, Massey wrote, had come far in actively taking over "all the distinctly Canadian work." This was evidenced above all, he noted, in its "statistics of correspondence;" deemed as sufficient "proof" of the office's constant diligence and progress.[47]

At the centre of legation operations was the continuous sending and receiving of diplomatic correspondence.   This involved, foremost, official communications sent between the Governments of Canada and the U.S., the work of which was clearly defined and based on instructions conveyed directly by External Affairs. The legation was also tasked with transmitting other more informal correspondence concerning subjects and matters "not a proper subject to a formal approach."[48] In addition, the office served to enforce the protection of Canadian individuals in the United States by communicating routinely with various consular offices.

Another key function of the legation was as gatherer of information for the Canadian government. To this end, officers and staff spent considerable time "consumed in the collection and study of documents" deemed to be of relevance and concern to Canadian affairs. According to its head, this particular work accounted for "considerably over half the correspondence between the Legation and Ottawa", ranging from the "simple transmission of documents" to the creation of "elaborate reports" and studies. In more tangible terms, this amounted to "several thousand documents—reports, bills, and

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[47] "Review of the legation's operations over the last four years" Massey to Skelton, (29 May 1931) RDEA RG25, Vol. 793, File 454.
[48] Ibid.

other official publications," and including 24,500 congressional bills for the previous

year alone, to be examined and briefed and sent to appropriate departments in Ottawa.[49]

The legation also served as provider of information about Canada's government

and society to people in other countries. To this effect, the Washington office worked as

a "repository of accurate information" on Canadian laws, individuals, values and

institutions and to make available this information to members of U.S. media, politicians,

diplomats and the American public.[50] A large part of this responsibility involved

responding to enquiries sent in through these various channels, but the legation also

circulated such things as Canadian statutes, yearbooks and departmental reports to

interested parties.

Like their counterpart in Washington, attention to records creation and

information management was central to Canada's other legations in Paris and Tokyo.

One particular head of the latter, Hugh Keenleyside, was especially devoted to keeping

Ottawa well-supplied with information relating to such things as Japan's civil service,

army reforms, labour and communism, fisheries, foreign markets suitable for Canadian

goods and other issues. This included the issuance of "monthly summaries of current

developments" in Japan based on the travel reports of the Minister, as well as official and

unofficial correspondence. In all, "over three thousand three hundred and seventy letters"

were despatched during the first year alone, work which required "a considerable period

of study and preparation."[51]

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] "The Canadian Legation in Japan Memorandum", (23 Dec. 1929), p. 4, RDEA RG25, Vol. 794, File 469.

In addition to serving as a "bureau of information," the Tokyo legation also spent much time focused on immigration issues. In its first eight months of existence, the post issued eighty-seven visas, fifty-three passports, and affixed visas to 119 passports. The office also had established an impressive reference library, from which insight "on various aspects of Japanese life and politics" could be gleaned by government departments in the capital. The legation's aptitude for recordkeeping—particularly its well-ordered and efficient system of documentation and filing—earned the highest praise of External Affairs in Ottawa. Both Agnes McCloskey, the department's chief accountant, and O.D. Skelton, cited the legation as "a model for other Canadian offices" to emulate.[52]

For its part, Ottawa sought to reciprocate and provide adequate information to its offices abroad, although at times, it failed to provide this to a level deemed sufficient by the legations' standards. Information provided by the department was largely of an official nature—in one instance, a request from Washington produced fifty copies of the Immigration Act and corresponding regulations. Another time, External Affairs transmitted joint reports from the Department of the Interior, together with maps and atlases. Through these exchanges, a constant stream of records flowed between the offices abroad and the main port in Ottawa.

Canada's delegation to Geneva was on a level different from the overseas legations. Since the establishment of the League of Nations, Canada had participated as a regular member in conferences and proceedings. In 1927, Canada adopted a more active role in League affairs, having been successful in its bid for a non-permanent seat on the

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[52] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 122.

Council. With this expanded role came the opportunity for the government "to take part in the work of more Conferences and Committee meetings than would otherwise have been possible."[53] Along with increased representation at sessions of the Assembly as well as at numerous international conferences, there was a need for greater attention to information gathering and recordkeeping. According to W.A. Riddell, Canada's Advisory Officer to Geneva, upwards of "200 days" had been dedicated to conference work in 1929 alone, and out of this activity, 20 reports had been made and submitted to External Affairs. In addition, Riddell noted that "preparatory work is also done for these meetings and the Government is informed of developments taking place in the intervals between meetings." To this end, Riddell and his staff had designed and submitted questionnaires to the department in Ottawa in order to procure insight into Canada's diplomatic stance. This information was then "included in the documents submitted" to League of Nations boards and committees.[54]

Canada's approach to conducting business with other countries was evolving, particularly with the opening of legations in the U.S., Paris, and Japan and with an expanded role in Geneva. These legations were to serve as key records creators and transmitters for the Department of External Affairs. At the same time, along with this extended overseas reach, came a series of key adjustments to Canada's diplomatic channels of communications.

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[53] "Memorandum on the Permanent Delegations to the League of Nations" (1930), RDEA RG25, Vol. 795, File 474.
[54] Ibid.; "Memorandum on Departmental Work" LP/S (17 Nov 1930), RDEA RG25, Vol. 795, File 474.

3) The Sending and Receiving of Diplomatic Records and Information

As Canada adjusted to a new role in foreign affairs following the Imperial Conference of 1926, its approach to conducting business with other countries was also evolving. At the same time, with this extended overseas reach, came a series of key adjustments to Canada's diplomatic channels of communications. This included new procedures for despatching diplomatic communications to governments in both Commonwealth nations and in other foreign states. For the former, the channels for communications now travelled through the respective Ministers for external affairs in each member state. Communications with the US, France and Japan would travel through the three legations, established since 1926, and communications with all other foreign states would pass through consular representatives or the British Foreign Office.

In addition, External Affairs was quick to arrange special accommodations for the *transport* of departmental correspondence and records. By 1929, a "system of special bags" had been instituted to "carry all Governmental communications and documents" between Canada and each of its three legations.[55] This system of diplomatic bag service—designed to meet the standards set by other diplomatic powers—was established to protect records from deterioration and damage; at the same time, it served to safeguard the confidentiality of material by ensuring that documents would not be opened or tampered with.

Perhaps the most significant changes related to the transmission of records took place between Canada and Great Britain. At the Imperial Conference, the long-held role

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[55] W.A. Riddell to O.D. Skelton (15 March 1929) RDEA RG25, Vol. 1532. File 1929-77-B.

of the Governor General, as "agent" of His Majesty's Government in Great Britain, was deemed "no longer wholly in accordance with the constitutional position of the Governor General."[56] In its place, the 1926 Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations instead recommended that future communications be directed between "Government and Government direct"; while the Governor General would act solely as a representative of the Crown, to be kept fully informed "as is his Majesty the King of Cabinet business and public affairs".[57]

Prime Minister Mackenzie King was quick to act on the Committee's advice. In a memorandum sent to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs O.D. Skelton in December of that year, the prime minister discussed the need for a new "system of communications" to reflect Canada's changing role in international affairs. Legations abroad were to be advised to "communicate with the Secretary of State for External Affairs instead of the Governor General" and the Canadian High Commissioner was to be considered as a new "channel of communications" in Great Britain. Just how far these new procedures would go was unclear to the prime minister; however, he did speculate that relations between the two countries would continue to evolve, eventually approximating those of "distance countries."[58]

The Canadian Governor General at the time, Lord Willingdon, concurred with the new arrangements. Shortly after the Imperial Conference, he made clear he was committed to representing "the King alone" while leaving all administrative concerns to

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[56] Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict,* 87; "1926 Imperial Conference," 14, RDEA RG25, Vol 753, File 214.
[57] "1926 Imperial Conference," 14.
[58] Prime Minister King to O.D. Skelton (28 Dec. 1926), "System of Communications", RDEA RG25, Vol. 753, File 214.

the governments of Canada and Great Britain. As such, he was fully prepared to yield to this new role and cautioned the Dominions Office that "letters home to anyone but His Majesty must be of a very uninforming character."[59]

For communications travelling to the UK, the High Commissioner's office was to play a central role. The office was now charged with collecting information in London pertaining to departmental matters that could then be forwarded to Ottawa. In addition, High Commission staff was responsible for supplying information in response to British enquiries.

Plans to implement the new system were in full effect by the following spring. The Dominions Office acknowledged its acceptance of the government's new procedures, slated to begin on 1 July, and noted it would comply with directions to address despatches to Canada to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Included among these despatches would be "weekly sets of secret Foreign Office prints" transmitted regularly to the Canadian government as a means to meet "the new situation very appropriately."[60] On a logistical level, the communications in general would no longer bear the phrase "for the information of your Ministers"—a reference to the long established position of the Governor General. Rather, official correspondence would now be employed "for the information of His Majesty's Government in Canada" and addressed to "External, Ottawa."[61] These changes in record processes, although seemingly minute, reflected a major turning point for Canada's Department of External Affairs. In 1926, the Committee of the Imperial Conference had established *formal*

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[59] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 114.
[60] Prime Minister King to Amery (14 Oct. 1927), RDEA RG25, Vol. 1500, File 767.
[61] Dominions Office to Skelton (31 May 1927), RDEA RG25, Vol. 753, File 214.

declaration of Canadian diplomatic sovereignty; the emerging system of communications

and record gathering signalled the *practical* consequence of the Committee's ruling and

reflected growing, international, acceptance of an equal, autonomous Canada.

4) Recordkeeping Staff

As Canada's Department of External Affairs continued to expand in the 1920s,

new members of staff were required to handle the increased responsibilities and duties.

At the time of the Imperial Conference, personnel in the department had numbered

upwards of one hundred; however, with only three officers, the department was

essentially still a "one-man show."[62] This was considered less than ideal to Skelton, who

noted that personnel was an area in which the department had remained static since 1913,

and that this was insufficient in light of its growing influence and operations. "The work

is growing steadily," Skelton wrote, "and there is need for an increase in staff to permit

more thorough and specialized work."[63] The following year, in a report on "Foreign

Relations: Consular, Extradition and Immigration" a proposal was made "to amend the

establishment to provide for additional work in connection with foreign affairs" as was

dictated by departmental needs. Although an additional secretary was deemed sufficient

for the interim, it was expected that first, second and third secretaries would ultimately be

required.[64]

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[62] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 102.
[63] Skelton, re: "Appointment of assistant counsellor, Department of External Affairs" (ca. 1926) RDEA RG25, Vol. 787, File 408.
[64] Ibid.

The *Manitoba Free Press* was quick to herald the new appointments at External Affairs and the remarkable emergence of a "Canadian Diplomatic service."[65] But in addition to the recruitment of diplomats and officers came a host of other personnel—translators, accountants, stenographers, secretaries and various numbers of clerks. These individuals were to be engaged with the administrative aspects of External Affairs and, in large part, were the hub of the department's recordkeeping operations.

Most prominent among those involved in information management was Agnes McCloskey, the department's head accountant and overseer of the "routine of daily operations." There was also Marjorie McKenzie, a grade three stenographer and O.D. Skelton's personal secretary who controlled the paper flow directed through the office of the Under-Secretary of State. McKenzie was to become an influential member of the core staff at External Affairs; she was ultimately made keeper of the confidential records and was often called upon to author diplomatic correspondence for Skelton's signature.[66] Another member of the administrative team, Jocelyn Boyce, was elevated to the position of Chief Clerk in 1926. As head overseer of the departmental records, Boyce was regarded as "one of the highest officials" of the department as a whole and his office was considered the basis upon which "the machinery of the entire Diplomatic Service is kept oiled."[67]

Increasingly, members of the department found its resources inadequate to "secure the same degree of specialization" of other more established foreign offices. One solution was to build up a respectable library of research material, to be made accessible

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[65] "Canada's Diplomatic service", *Manitoba Free Press* (27 March 1928) RDEA RG25, Vol. 787, File 408.
[66] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 103, 104.
[67] "The British Foreign Office", *Foreign Policy Association, Inc. Information Service*, Vol. IV, No. 24, (6 Feb. 1929) p. 465 RDEA RG25, Vol. 1542, File 312.

to policy makers and diplomatic officers.[68] In 1928 this task was assigned first to Grace

Hart, who became the department's first professional librarian. Hart worked to establish

a working reference facility for departmental staff and for other government officers. She

took great pains to acquire an extensive collection of diplomatic material, adequate for a

Canadian foreign office, and introduced to this collection the Library of Congress

cataloguing system. The appointments of Hart, Boyce, McKenzie and McCloskey, as

well as other administrative appointments, reflected the growing need of the department

to establish a secretariat "proportional to the direct participation of Canada as a nation in

foreign affairs" and reflected the central position of information management in the

burgeoning scheme.[69]

5) Recordkeeping Procedures at Headquarters

While External Affairs continued to expand and manoeuvre within the

international diplomatic sphere, it also turned inward to reassess and reconfigure its

operations in Ottawa. Among things considered were changes to the established record

processes. This included, for one, consideration of the revision of passport forms and

procedures. The established method of issuing passports in the name of the Governor

General now appeared to many to be at odds with Canada's new role, subsequent to the

Inter-Relations Committee's ruling at the Imperial Conference. Although it was deemed

necessary to postpone such a revision until the end of the term of the serving Governor

General, Skelton noted his acceptance of the idea and suggested that "it would be more

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[68] "Memorandum on the Work of the Department of External Affairs" (1930) RDEA RG25, Vol. 787, File 408.
[69] "Foreign Relations: Consular, extradition and immigration" (ca. 1927) RDEA RG25, Vol. 787, File 408.

consistent to have the passports issued by the Secretary of State for External Affairs in the name of the King" rather than by the Governor General, on behalf of Great Britain.[70]

As External Affairs implemented new modes for communicating with Dominion governments, it also faced the task of managing the flow of records sent and received. In 1928, Skelton advised each of the Commonwealth states that telegrams and despatches would now be numbered "in a continuous series to the end of each year." It was anticipated that the approach would "facilitate reference to previous communications" and provide headquarters with a "more convenient and rapid method of checking receipt of telegrams."[71]

Along with this numbered system, came protocols which reflected an evolution of the Canadian/British relationship. Soon after the Imperial Conference, the department began to take over administrative responsibilities previously held by the Governor General. This included the assumption of new responsibilities and duties, including cipher and code work. Cryptography had previously remained the exclusive domain of the British Foreign Office; the only cipher facilities in Canada having been located in the Governor General's Office. Now, in the few months following the Imperial Conference, the Governor General requested "provisions as to the transfer of ciphers and codes" for the Canadian government. The Dominions Office, soon after, sent its approval of the

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[70] W. Henderson to Jean Desy (5 Sept. 1928); Skelton to Desy (29 Oct. 1928) RDEA RG25, Vol. 1481, File 10-y.
[71] Skelton to Larkin (15 Dec. 1928) RDEA RG25, Vol. 1513, File 249.

request, along with an offer to set up new procedures for the Dominions, relating to ciphers and to communications in general.[72]

The Dominions Office was to make good on this offer the following summer; enclosed along with a 9 June 1927 despatch were copies of the existing cipher "C.O.3.", the new cipher "Dominions, 1927," a cipher "C.O.2" to be used in times of crisis, and an "interdepartmental" cipher, official Distribution List, and instructions to implement the system on 1 August for "all our cypher (sic) communications with the Dominions." The Governor General was asked to transfer his copies of the Government Telegraph Code to External Affairs by 1 July, along with the noted cipher codes.[73]

With this transfer, the Department of External Affairs assumed a fairly substantial increase in its daily workload. At the time, cryptography had to be accomplished manually, using dictionaries and "one-time (numbered) pads". As such, the process of creating and deciphering coded communications proved an "extremely laborious and time-consuming" endeavour, one based on precision and meticulous organization.[74] Thus, the adoption of ciphering capabilities necessitated the need for new, trained clerical staff.

At the same time, External Affairs faced the need to devise a system to facilitate the sending and receiving of coded communications. This entailed the creation of a number of schedules for the transmission of "confidential and secret" despatches. It also involved putting into place procedures for duplicating and filing messages. In its first

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[72] Governor General to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (29 Dec. 1926) RDEA RG25, Vol. 1488, File 142.
[73] C.W. Driscon to Skelton (9 June 1927) RDEA RG25, Vol. 1488, File 142.
[74] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 125.

phase of implementation, the department kept a number of copies of telegrams in office—a "top heavy" copy for file, one copy each for Government House, the Prime Minister's office and External Affairs, and one copy to be filed and made available for reference purposes.[75]

Another area of change concerned the department's filing methods. From its beginning, the department had maintained two central registry systems. The first was the main '39 series,' itself divided into two parts: the 'File List' and the 'Indexes and Registers.' The former part included files "numbered consecutively as they were created" and stored in the permanent departmental filing room.[76] In other words, files were arranged by the year they were created, with each subject being assigned a distinct file number based on the order that it was dealt with by the department for that particular year. For example, the file relating to 'subject one' for the year 1912 would be labelled "1-1912," the second would be "2-1912," and this continued until the last file for the year had been created. The file list would then revert back to "1" for the first file of the next year (i.e. "1-1913"). The second part of the '39 series,' the 'Registers and Indexes,' was used to keep track of the documents in the file list and essentially served as a finding aid for future reference.[77]

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[75] RDEA RG25, Vol. 1488, File 1927-142, Dominions Office to Governor General (4 July 1927).

[76] Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 362, 46.

[77] Many of the details relating to the arrangement and operation of the '39 series' registry system were provided for by Paulette Dozois (Senior International Affairs Portfolio Archivist, LAC). The '39 series' registry system was so called due to the fact that it existed as the department's main registry until 1939, when significant increases in record creation during the Second World War led to the institution of a new '40 series' system. The 39 series was directly transferred from the Department of External Affairs to Library and Archives Canada during the 1970s; all surviving files in the original registry were acquired at this time.

The second registry system pertained to the prime minister's filing room, which contained both the personal and political records of the prime minister, as well as one set of official despatches. The latter was considered part of the prime minister's papers and, as such, was routinely removed by the outgoing leader at the end of his tenure. Skelton perceived a serious shortfall in this customary practice. In a memorandum sent to King in 1926, the Under-Secretary noted that although mailed despatches from the Dominions Office were regularly forwarded to the department, copies of telegraphic despatches were not. Only the prime minister received a complete copy of all telegraphic despatches and, as he removed these upon leaving office, the department had been left with an incomplete collection of files. In addition, as a comparison of lists from External Affairs and the prime minister's office revealed, it was apparent that "no logical division or continuity" existed in the selection and acquisition of files.[78]

As a solution to the problem, and in order to capture a "continuous record of all transactions" relating to Canadian foreign affairs, Skelton recommended that carbon copies of telegraphic despatches be regularly made and forwarded to External Affairs.[79] This practice was subsequently adopted by the department in the years following. In its first phase of implementation, External Affairs made a practice of retaining original despatches, while forwarding duplicate copies to the prime minister's office. As the latter proved rather untenable to implement, the duplication of despatches was eventually

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[78] RDEA RG25, Vol. 828, File 737, Skelton to Prime Minister King (17 July 1926).
[79] Skelton to Prime Minister King (6 July 1926) RDEA RG25, Vol. 828, File 737.

discontinued, and the department of External Affairs continued to acquire official correspondence, organized into 'secret', 'confidential', and other categories.[80]

Major new procedures were instituted in the department following Canada's assertion of diplomatic independence and External Affairs was fast becoming the 'central agency' that Skelton and King had envisioned. At times, however, this centrality was apt to be questioned by those within government, including within the department itself. One such instance occurred soon after the opening of the U.S. legation, when Hume Wrong, a high-level officer, forwarded to Skelton an enquiry relating to the proper channel of correspondence.[81] "A certain amount of correspondence," wrote Wrong, "dealing almost exclusively with individual cases of deportation from the United States to Canada, has been exchanged between the Legation and the Commissioner of Immigration in Ottawa direct." The question directed to Skelton was whether there was any objection to continuing the practice of direct correspondence with another Canadian department, despite the fact that "technically…all such matters should pass through the Department of External Affairs."[82] Wrong went on to defend the action as a "considerable saving both in time and in letter writing" and assured the Under-Secretary that "questions of general principle relating to immigration and deportation" would still be directed to External Affairs.

In his reply, Skelton acknowledged the convenience of Wrong's approach, and the reality that "all Embassies and Legations" in the U.S. followed the practice of

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[80] Memorandum for the Prime Minister (6 Feb. 1939) RDEA RG25, Vol. 828, File 737.
[81] Humphrey Hume Wrong was recruited in 1928 to serve as Vincent Massey's first secretary at the legation in Washington. He was later to serve as representative at the League of Nations before returning to the United States as ambassador in 1946.
[82] Wrong to Skelton (8 July 1927) RDEA RG25, Vol. 1498, File 1927-686.

corresponding directly with the Bureau of Immigration. At the same time, he made clear

that "direct communications" with any department other than External Affairs "should be

discouraged" to avoid both confusion and error.[83] In his assertion that all correspondence

be returned to External Affairs first, Skelton was, in effect, affirming the new phase that

had begun in Canada's foreign affairs. No longer would the department be cast in a

supportive role within government. With full autonomy now secured, External Affairs

was increasingly to serve as the 'brain' of all Canadian diplomatic operations.

The essays presented here offer only a glimpse of what can be achieved through

an essay approach to description. They are intended to provide users with a window into

the wider context of Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s. Indeed, they

place the department in a specific organizational, historical, and political context and

show that the records created by the department were part of a wider system of

information management, set in place during a time of widespread institutional change.

As the essays demonstrate, in its formative years, External Affairs had served as an

"agency of transmittal" and acted in an "advisory capacity" to the prime minister and

federal government departments.[84] In the 1920s, this role was revolutionized following

the Locarno negotiations and the Imperial Conference of 1926, during which time

Canadian diplomatic sovereignty was asserted. In the time following, the department

began to loosen itself from its earlier role and branch out into more sophisticated

diplomatic functions. Increasingly, this included acceptance of a role as "analytical and

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[83] Ibid.
[84] (ca 1927) p. 5, RDEA RG25, Vol. 787, File 408.

advisory body on international law" and as a "fact-finding body" with staff trained to research, report, advise and inform.[85]

As its mandate broadened, External Affairs outgrew its earlier administrative system. The establishment of posts abroad brought with them important new records 'creators' and transmitters of information within External Affairs. Changes to the Canadian/British relationship resulted in the institution of new channels and modes of communication. At the same time, the era necessitated the expansion of the department's recordkeeping secretariat and influenced the adoption of new procedures in recordkeeping. These changes reflect an evolving administrative and recordkeeping context and are captured in the records created during this era.

The five essays presented here are intended as a model and therefore should be viewed as a guideline for how the proposed system could be developed in an actual archival institution. In this case, the essays relate directly to records found in the holdings of LAC, particularly those in RG 25. An actual implementation of a series of essays would require extensive preparation and research, both for the writing aspect, but also for the logistical issues that would arise were this approach to be effectively achieved. In addition, an archives may look for ways to enhance the basic model presented here, with some of the ideas presented in the previous chapter. This may entail the inclusion of other media. It may also involve linking records to collections available in other institutions, or to other collections available *within* the institution itself. For example, in this case, essays may signal the existence of manuscript collections containing the personal papers of key players, including Robert Borden (MG 26, H),

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[85] "Memorandum on Departmental Work" (17 Nov. 1930) RDEA RG25, Vol. 790, File 416.

Mackenzie King (MG 26, J), O.D. Skelton (MG 30, D33) and Vincent Massey (MG 31, A1). In this way, archives would develop strategies for implementation based on their own distinct holdings and mandates.

What must remain at the forefront is the underlying purpose of the proposed system. The essay approach is based on the belief that archivists are responsible to prioritize their role as 'historians of the record' and must work to uncover the "multiple provenances" of records in order to show how they play into wider systems and processes.[86] At the same time, archivists should look for ways to welcome contributions to the description of records by other interested parties, including general users and scholars, who may have a wider contextual understanding of diplomatic records. These individuals should be clearly acknowledged as participants in the description process. An understanding of a wider context of diplomatic records will in turn provide users and archivists with additional information from which to research records and information. Essays can be seen as tools with which to accomplish this.

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[86] Nesmith, "What's History," 27.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the archival profession is characterised by a dynamic and constantly evolving interplay of ideas and practices. Since the early twentieth century, the approaches taken to archival thinking by archivists have changed significantly. As a result, many archivists have come to embrace a role as historian of the record with a goal of explaining the many layers of a record's context of creation.

The arguments presented in the thesis draw upon the contextual approach, yet at the same time, they also reworked some of the ways in which this approach could be implemented in archival practice. The study as a whole centred on an analysis of the diplomatic genre of record. Although various record genres have been the focus of detailed attention in recent years, the records produced through the conduct of foreign affairs have not been the recipients of a similar degree of attention. The study began with the contention that the diplomatic genre is distinct in society. Chapter One detailed aspects of the history and evolution of the genre, noting records created through ancient diplomatic activities and then tracing how record creation processes evolved as diplomatic processes also changed. The analysis then considered how archivists can encourage access to more meaningful diplomatic records by showcasing their myriad layers of context, focussing specifically on societal provenance, organizational history, custodial and archiving history, material literacy and symbolic significance.

In continuing with the contextual theme, Chapter Two explored the practical implications of this approach by focussing specifically on using description as a means to relay contextual knowledge to archival users. The chapter first considered common

descriptive schemes currently in use in most archival institutions. It then proposed a revised descriptive system that more fully capitalises on web-based technology. Here it was suggested that online catalogues serve as access points to added context. More specifically, it was proposed that descriptions and finding aids could provide links to essays that explore the layers of record context, such as those described in Chapter One. The collection of essays – created by archivists as well as scholars and other users – could offer knowledge currently lacking in traditional record descriptions. They could add valuable insight into such things as record creators, processes of creation, and societal structures. This would, in turn, encourage users to adopt a more holistic understanding of records and thereby increase user self-sufficiency.

Drawing upon the essay proposal, Chapter Three offered a working example of a series of essays that could be incorporated into diplomatic record descriptions. The essays centered on Canada's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s, and explored five distinct political-legal-constitutional aspects of its recordkeeping and record creating processes during this era. The five example essays do not deal with all the possible aspects of contextual knowledge listed above that a more fully developed essay system could convey. These essays focus on the broad legal-political-constitutional context and provide a general introduction to key organizational changes that were designed to support the expanded diplomatic role of Canada obtained in the 1920s through wider information gathering and improved recordkeeping. The essays demonstrate a basic model that could be modified to suit various other *fonds* at both Library and Archives Canada and other institutions.

Taken as a whole, the study can be seen as a contribution to an ongoing process of reconceptualising the ways in which key archival *ideas* can become effective archival *practice*. This is because archival thinking and practice has continued to evolve considerably over the last several decades, influenced by changing philosophies and values but also by tangible changes, such as increases in record quantity and by implications stemming from the development of new media and technology. In short, the archival profession is in many ways still at a 'pioneering' stage, in which it is exploring expanding roles. Working from what is known about the nature of records and role of an archivist, those in the field should continue to be engaged with both sides of the proverbial archival coin; embracing change in even small quantities and stepping up as leaders in an information and knowledge-based world.

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