

**“EVERY REQUISITE INFORMATION”:
CONTEXTUAL PROVENANCE IN THE RECORDS OF THE
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, 1884-1910**

by

LISA FRIESEN

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History
University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba

© Lisa Friesen, July 2005



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

0-494-08851-6

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

ISBN:

Our file *Notre référence*

ISBN:

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
• ****

MASTER'S THESIS/PRACTICUM FINAL REPORT

Master's Thesis entitled:

**“Every Requisite Information”: Contextual Provenance in the Records of the
Commissioner's Office of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1884-1910**

Submitted by

Lisa Friesen

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

The Thesis Examining Committee certifies that the thesis and oral examination is:

Approved

Advisor: Tom Nesmith, History Dept., U of Manitoba
Adele Perry, History Dept., U of Manitoba
Jarvis Brownlie, History Dept., U of Manitoba
Judith Hudson Beattie, HBC Archives
Tina Chen, Chair, History Dept, U of Manitoba

Date: 14 July 2005

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION**

**“Every Requisite Information”: Contextual Provenance in the Records of the Commissioner’s
Office of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1884-1910**

BY

Lisa Friesen

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

Of

Master of Arts

Lisa Friesen © 2005

Permission has been granted to the Library of the University of Manitoba to lend or sell copies of this thesis/practicum, to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to University Microfilms Inc. to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.

This reproduction or copy of this thesis has been made available by authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research, and may only be reproduced and copied as permitted by copyright laws or with express written authorization from the copyright owner.

Abstract

This thesis explores the societal, administrative and recordkeeping contexts which influenced the creation of the records of the Commissioner's Office of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1884-1910. The primary archival methodology in this study relates to the exploration of a record's context of creation, an approach which seeks to determine all facets of the provenance of the record.

Chapter one details the history of the principle of provenance and contextual theory in archival thought, tracing its formative origins in the nineteenth century down to the postmodern approaches of the 1990s. The chapter outlines the different aspects of contextual exploration, including societal, administrative, recordkeeping and custodial histories. Chapter two explores some aspects of the societal and administrative histories of the Commissioner's Office. The chapter sets the office within the context of Canadian business history of the late nineteenth century, as well as pointing to the HBC's roots in British colonialism. Chapter three looks at another aspect of contextual analysis, recordkeeping practices within the Commissioner's Office. Through the examination of various Commissioner's Office records, the study attempts to show how the societal and administrative contextualities have influenced the creation of the office's records. Finally, the conclusion demonstrates how contextual analysis can be applied to archival practice, in particular through the Archives of Manitoba redescription project (known as Keystone) for the holdings of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Contextual analysis of records has proven to be a crucial tool in this project. Thus, archival theory asserts its practical place in the archives.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people: my advisor, Dr. Tom Nesmith, for his advice and direction; my colleagues at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, for their wisdom; my mother, Hilde Friesen, for her encouragement over these many years; and especially to my husband, Glenn Bergen, whose talents as an editor were only surpassed by his patience, good humour and supportiveness.

Because her stories made me love history, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my oma, Ida Friesen.

Table of Contents

Abstract		i
Acknowledgements		ii
Chapter 1	The Emergence of the Contextual Approach in Archival Work	1
Chapter 2	Societal and Administrative Context and the Records of the Commissioner's Office, Hudson's Bay Company, 1884-1910	28
Chapter 3	Records and Recordkeeping in the Commissioner's Office, 1884-1910	59
Conclusion	Contextual Analysis in Practice: The Keystone Project at the Archives of Manitoba	88
Bibliography		97

Chapter One

The Emergence of the Contextual Approach in Archival Work

The contextual approach to archival work is, at its heart, a project of history. It asks the archivist to provide as much as possible of the context of the creation of a record and to apply this knowledge to all the functions an archivist performs. This knowledge of records drives archival appraisal, arrangement, description and reference service – to name but a few aspects of archival work. Tom Nesmith sums up the contextual approach as “the idea that archival documents can only be understood in context, or in relation to their origins and to other documents, not as self-contained, independent items, to be reorganized in archives along new subject, chronological, or geographical lines.”¹ This idea has its roots in the principle of provenance, which became archival dogma with the 1898 publication of the Dutch *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, and has remained the central tenet in archival work. The principle of provenance asserts that records can only be described and arranged as parts of a body of records emanating from the same record creator; furthermore, the principle states that the origin of records must be acknowledged.

While the basic idea of provenance has not changed significantly, current archival theory and practice encourages a greater level of self-consciousness by the archivist when working with records, in her awareness of the fluidity of meaning embedded in the records, in her awareness of the subjectivity she brings to the work, and thus in her awareness of her role in creating these meanings. As such, the exploration of the context

¹ Tom Nesmith, “Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance,” in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993): 2.

of creation of records is an act of historical research, done not solely for the purpose of historical scholarship, but rather to place documents in context for the purpose of performing the various archival functions for all users of archives.

This chapter will introduce the emergence of the contextual approach in archival work through the principle of provenance, developed in nineteenth-century Europe, and discuss its later adoption in Canadian archives. From there, the chapter will examine how archival theory regarding the context of creation is changing due to the influence of postmodernism in the 1990s. This overview of the history of the contextual approach to archival work will lay a foundation for examining the records of the Commissioner's Office of the Hudson's Bay Company at the turn of the twentieth century. It will explain how changes in archival theory have challenged archivists to view these and other records anew. It will explain how knowledge of the content of these records is not enough. To fully understand the records of the Commissioner's Office, the archivist must root them in the contexts in which they were created.

The records of the Commissioner's Office have been chosen for examination because of their significant position within the HBC's history. The Commissioner's Office records make up most of what is currently known as Section D in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives – a general heading for records created by the chief company administrative office in North America.² The records occupy approximately 80 feet of shelf space in 29 series. The records examined cover the period between 1884 and 1910, the years in which Commissioners Joseph Wrigley and C.C. Chipman were in office, although some records during Commissioner James A. Grahame's tenure from 1874 to

² Section D encompasses records kept prior to 1870 by the Governor of Rupert's Land as well as records kept after the dissolution of the Commissioner's Office in 1910.

1884 will also be looked at. In 1871, the Commissioner's Office was created as the London-based HBC's Canadian headquarters in Winnipeg, as a response to economic challenges posed by the company's loss of its long monopoly in the Canadian fur trade, and as a way to modernize the company's managerial system in the face of new technology and business systems. The creation of the Commissioner's Office reflects the HBC's adoption of new management systems which placed great emphasis on efficient record keeping and centralization of Canadian operations in Winnipeg. In 1910, the functions of the Commissioner's Office were decentralized into three distinct operational branches. The Commissioner's Office as it once was ceased to be and a new era of management began.

The aspects of context of the creation of the records of the Commissioner's Office that will be examined in this thesis will be the societal, administrative and recordkeeping contexts. Societal context is important as the broadest context in which records creation and archival work can be understood. It affects all other aspects of context. The conditions, values, ideas and aspirations of a society shape what people deem important to communicate, document and archive and how they do so. Societal conditions favour or support certain record makers, such as powerful institutions like the Hudson's Bay Company in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus the characteristics of such institutions – their administrative structure and related functions, for example – also ought to be presented and examined, as they too will shape what and how records are created, used and archived. This knowledge of institutions also helps archivists to assist researchers to locate records. Records of institutions also need to be examined. The ways in which records are managed by institutions, particularly in the recordkeeping systems

through which they are controlled, add a further layer of important context wherein records are labelled and connected to one another by the institution in order to foster certain ways of viewing and managing the objects of their makers' attention.

Although this chapter will outline additional aspects of context in order to explain more fully the contextual approach, it is not possible in a master's thesis on the voluminous Commissioner's Office records to explore all of these dimensions in depth, or even to discuss exhaustively the three aspects (the societal, administrative and recordkeeping contexts) it highlights. This thesis simply attempts to make a contribution to this task and to archival work with these records.

The contextual analysis provided here is influenced by postmodern insights. These insights suggest that acts of communication, such as contextualizing a body of records, shape rather than just reflect what we understand about the records and that human communication cannot provide a single definitive reality or truth. Thus the interpretation of context provided here is just that, an archivist's interpretation, which may shape how readers will view the records of the Commissioner's Office. Other interpretations will no doubt follow by other archivists and researchers. In this long-term process of contextualizing these records, they will likely be 'created' or understood in many ways. This thesis attempts to begin that process by examining some key aspects of the context in which these records were created.

The Dutch Manual

The birth of contextual archival theory occurred across the nineteenth century, and received a pivotal endorsement at about the same time that the Commissioner's

Office was overseeing Canadian operations for the Hudson's Bay Company. An early view of the contextual approach to archival work was given in the influential *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* published in 1898. The Dutch *Manual*, as it is popularly known, was written by Samuel Muller, Johan Feith and Robert Fruin, for the Dutch Association of Archivists and published with the support of the Dutch government and State Archives. It articulated two basic interrelated archival principles: provenance and respect for original order. These principles became the cornerstone for archival work and are still essential guideposts in archival administration.

The Dutch *Manual* arrived when the relationship between archives and the budding field of professional academic history was being cemented. The new professional historians were guided by the Enlightenment's redefinition of time. Time was no longer seen as running along a divine, predetermined path, explained and marked by biblical events running from Creation to Apocalypse. Instead, time was secular, epochs in history were devised by human authors, "and historians became those who could measure development by progress toward modern, Western time."³

The nineteenth-century archival perspective in Europe reflected the historical agenda of this new profession. Most professional historians of the time believed that absolute historical truth was accessible in primary texts; the way to reveal this objective truth was through rigorous archival research and seminar training. Explanatory history, as this method was known, was born in this milieu and "bequeathed a powerful analytical tool useful to all peoples trying to make sense of where they had been and what they were

³ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: Norton, 1994), 53.

becoming.”⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century, the methodology and style of historical research and scholarship had been standardized through the seminar, inspired by German scholar Leopold von Ranke in the 1830s. Through the careful study of the physical evidence (archival documents), the seminar provided the laboratory-like setting that was needed to write scientific history.⁵ The seminar and archival research became the standard for historical methodology and writing. Historians were trained in textual analysis, and formed an elitist club bound together by the arduous pursuit of the authentic past.⁶

The professionalization of history and historians’ devotion to the written text as bearer of truth gave archivists a more scholarly role in the nineteenth century as they helped historians uncover the facts. Archivists now had a mandate to participate in scholarly pursuits. Special schools were created in order to train archivists. Archivists learned how to read and interpret old manuscripts and other sources through the application of paleography, philology, diplomatics, sigillography and heraldry. They also were taught the histories of the legal and administrative structures of the old regimes in order to properly interpret medieval documents.⁷ Thus archivists ceased to be mere bureaucrats and joined in historical scholarship themselves.

⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁶ Bonnie G. Smith, “Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* (October 1995): 1156. Smith sees the seminar and historical science as enmeshed with the development of nineteenth century masculinity. The language surrounding seminar study emphasized it as “manly work,” and republican and middle class in nature, meaning that, through hard work, the truth could be uncovered. To carry the metaphor further, and underscore the gendered nature of the new scientific history, and the place of archives within it, archives and documents were even feminized by some of these male historians as “princesses in need to be saved.”

⁷ Michel Duchein, “The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe,” *American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992): 17. Duchein considers the 1681 publication of the *De Re Diplomatica* as the birth of historical science as well as a breakthrough in archival theory. Written by the French Benedictine monk Dom Mabillon, the *De Re Diplomatica* outlined diplomatics as a methodical way to search for the characteristics a given individual record should have in order to be considered authentic. It

The increased access to public records combined with archivists' new-found prominence in historical study profoundly affected archival administration. The new archivist-historians began to debate the application of historical methods to their archival work. Their more clerical and bureaucratic predecessors had, especially in the eighteenth century, arranged and described records by subject. Classification systems were used, which "appealed to the mind of the Enlightenment era when everything had to be clearly defined and ordered in logical schedules."⁸ Thus the manner in which records had been created and filed in their offices of origin was lost. The evidential quality of the records for historical research or other purposes was thereby undermined. In a key step away from this approach, the French government proclaimed its commitment to the principle of provenance, or *respect des fonds*, in 1841. Through this new view, "all documents which come from a body, an establishment, a family, or an individual form a fonds, and must be kept together...."⁹ Although archivists since then have argued about how to define a fonds more precisely, the idea that the records of a given creator (or provenance) should always be identified as its records remained a guiding feature of their work. A corollary of this provenance idea, that the records of a given creator should be left in the original physical order in which they were filed by their creator (an idea that was not part of the 1841 French view of provenance) gained support in the mid-nineteenth century. This notion of "respect for original order," was espoused most prominently at the Royal Archives of Prussia in the 1880s. These developments paved the way for a significant shift in archival thought and work: the codification of the principle of provenance in the ideas of *respect*

proved to be particularly useful when analysing medieval documents. Through the application of diplomatics, archivists began to take a more active and scholarly role in records.

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*

des fonds and original order in the 1898 *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*.

The first and foundational rule of the *Manual* defines archives as “the whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials....”¹⁰ Rules eight and sixteen lay out the concept of provenance and original order respectively. Rule eight states that archives created by one creator must not be mixed with the archives of another creator, nor categorized into artificial arrangements such as chronology, geography or subject. Rule sixteen states that original order must be kept – that arrangement “must be based on the original organization of the archival collection, which in the main corresponds to the organization of the administrative body that produced it.”¹¹

The Dutch *Manual* soon became the bible of European archival method. As a measure of its influence, it was translated in short order into many different languages. However, as Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar points out today, “what had begun as one hundred principles with explanations, guiding a starting profession, hardened into unquestionable dogmas.”¹² The tendency in modern archives has been to depend heavily on such comprehensive, authoritative texts, as if they sum up all the rules and answers. This discourages the development of archival theory. Ketelaar questions this stodginess in drawing attention to the ideas of Theodoor Van Riemsdijk, a contemporary of Muller, Feith and Fruin. Like them, as early as the 1870s Van Riemsdijk concluded that documents should be placed in their natural and original context. Unlike Muller, Feith

¹⁰ Quoted in Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 21.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 21.

¹² Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual,” *Archivaria* 41 (Spring 1996): 35.

and Fruin, however, he states that this complex context must be explored in historical research into the functions and record making processes of the records' creators. This departed from the *Manual*, which assumes that the fonds relates straightforwardly to the organization chart or administrative structure of the creating body. The *Manual* thus offers a practical standard to be readily applied, leaving little room for analysis of the variety and complexities of particular contexts of records creation. Van Riemsdijk's ideas were not widely adopted.¹³ Thus Dutch archivists, and indeed the international archival community, were diverted for some time from pursuing this broader approach to archival theory, one that would not resurface until the latter half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the Dutch *Manual* marked the beginning of an archival science which effectively governed archival administration until the mid-twentieth century.

Sir Hilary Jenkinson

British archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson wrote the first major treatise in English on archival theory and practice, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, in 1922.¹⁴ He was prompted to do so by the vast amount of documents produced during World War I and the challenge this posed to archives. Jenkinson's approach to archival work was in part a reaction against the historian-archivist model. He also espoused positivist notions regarding the place of archives in historiography. Jenkinson argued that as long as archivists do not intervene to select records for inclusion in archives or promote or do historical research with them into favoured topics, then archives are impartial evidence, the natural and untainted result of administrative acts. They are not created with posterity

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ There were also a number of influential Italian treatises written around the same time by archivists such as Eugenio Casanova and Elio Lodolini. Duchein 20; Cook 25-26.

in mind. Therefore, the role of the archivist is simply that of custodian who acts as “an unbiased ‘keeper’ of records and a ‘selfless devotee of Truth.’”¹⁵ There should be no involvement with the records on the part of the archivist that would taint the records’ impartiality. The historian has the responsibility to glean meaning and relevance from the archives, while the archivist has no role in such interpretive research.¹⁶

In regard to the selection of records for archives, Jenkinson thought it was the duty of the creator to do so. Terry Cook points out that this reflects the then common view, as laid out in the Dutch *Manual*, that archives have important organic qualities:

If archives were the organic emanation of documents from a record creator, then severing any record from that organic whole seemed to violate fundamental archival principles as established by the Dutch. If records were to maintain their innocence in an archival setting, then any appraisal by the archivist was utterly inappropriate.¹⁷

Like his Dutch and other European colleagues, Jenkinson supported *respect des fonds*. In applying it in the arrangement and description of records, he proposed the “archive group,” which encompassed all the records “from the work of an Administration which was an organic whole, complete in itself...”¹⁸ Thus Jenkinson advocated the creation of very large groups or fonds (as only the largest agencies of government could even come close to having such autonomy). But many constituent individual creators of records in these groups were swallowed up and their particular provenance obscured. Furthermore, Terry Cook points out that, in creating the archive group concept, Jenkinson had closed series and dead creators in mind – quite appropriate for European archives facing mountains of medieval and early modern records. What the archives group

¹⁵ Cook, “Past is Prologue,” 25.

¹⁶ Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co. Ltd., 1922; revised ed., 1937).

¹⁷ Cook, “Past is Prologue,” 23.

¹⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 24.

concept does not address is what to do with the open-ended or ongoing series of records often created by modern organizations and how their administration might challenge the archive group concept.¹⁹

Like the Dutch, Hilary Jenkinson envisioned a conservative employment of provenance in archival work. His conservatism is perhaps most evident in his view that one key way to protect the integrity of records is to allow records creators rather than archivists to select records deemed archival. Jenkinson failed to acknowledge the serious limitations of this approach. For one thing, allowing records creators to select records means they may destroy important records. Cook provides an apt example:

Jenkinson's approach to appraisal and, indeed, to the very definition of archives would (no doubt to his horror) give sanction to record creators such as U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon or George Bush to destroy or remove from public scrutiny any records containing unfavourable evidence of their actions while in office, thus undermining both democratic accountability and historical knowledge. At its most extreme, Jenkinson's approach would allow the archival legacy to be perverted by administrative whim or state ideology, as in the former Soviet Union, where provenance was undermined by the establishment of one state fonds and archival records attained value solely by the degree to which they reflected the "official" view of history.²⁰

Jenkinson had a vision for archival administration that, from today's perspective, conceives the archivist's role narrowly and places too much trust in records creators. However, with the Dutch and other Europeans, he was successful in strengthening the place of provenance at the forefront of archival work.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁰ Ibid., 24.

Early Canadian Archives

While the concept of provenance became important in European archives at the turn of the twentieth century, Canadian archives were slow to put it into practice. Until the mid-twentieth century, arrangement and description were done primarily by subject, chronology and geography. As Nesmith states, “the Canadian archival tradition took shape around the idea that archivists acquired and organized archives largely in accordance with the subject interests of academic historians.”²¹

From the 1870s to the 1930s, Canada’s first two national archivists – Douglas Brymner and Sir Arthur Doughty – made the Canadian government’s Archives indispensable to the emerging Canadian historical profession and thus played a vital role in the development of Canadian historiography. Doughty, in particular, thought that history based on actual archival records could help subdue the old tensions between English- and French-speaking Canadians in a new unifying nationalism for the young Dominion. In 1872, the Archives Branch, a forerunner of the current Library and Archives Canada, was created within the Department of Agriculture. Douglas Brymner was appointed “Senior Second Class Clerk” in charge of the archives.²² The main task of the archives became the promotion of nationalism and cultural unity. This was accomplished by focussing on acquisition of colonial era personal and government records, many still in private hands, rather than on post-Confederation federal

²¹ Nesmith, “Rediscovery of Provenance,” 4.

²² Ian Wilson, “‘A Noble Dream’: The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada,” *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-1983): 18.

governmental records. In fact, the archives did not have jurisdiction over federal records, since they were the responsibility of the Department of the Secretary of State.²³

The archival principles taking shape in Europe at the time appear to have had little affect on the Canadian scene. Arthur Doughty resisted the use of provenance in arrangement until 1926.²⁴ Doughty, like his contemporary Jenkinson, also led the archives down a decidedly positivist path. Doughty saw the archives as a place where objective and definitive knowledge of the facts would create a unified Canadian historiography, and thus solve the problem of multiple interpretations of Canadian history.²⁵ The value of archival records, therefore, lay purely in their informational value. This view was evident in Brymner's and Doughty's arrangement and acquisition practices. Arrangement by subject, chronology and geography meant original order was lost, along with any contextual information that could be gleaned from it. Moreover, the overseas collection and copying programs, based on Brymner's or Doughty's vision for Canadian historiography, meant that isolated records were acquired rather than whole sets of records from one creator.²⁶

Theodore R. Schellenberg and the Contextual Approach in American Archives

American archivists, like their Canadian counterparts, paid little heed to European contextual archival thinking until the mid-twentieth century. Except for a small group of

²³ Danielle Lacasse and Antonio LeChasseur, *The National Archives of Canada, 1872-1997*, Historical Booklet No. 58 (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1997), 4.

²⁴ Doughty was likely introduced to European archival principles by David W. Parker, chief of the Manuscript Division of the Public Archives of Canada from 1912 to 1923. But Parker's endorsement of provenance and *respect des fonds* was largely ignored throughout his tenure at the archives. See Carman V. Carroll, "David W. Parker: the 'Father' of Archival Arrangement at the Public Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 150-154.

²⁵ Lacasse and LeChasseur, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

archivists in the few government records archives at the state level, most managed their records without regard to provenance. They focussed more on understanding the information content of the records and arranging and describing them in light of that knowledge. After the establishment of the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in 1934, archivists there began to explore and espouse European approaches in a series of influential articles and books. The most notable statements arising from this broad effort were by Theodore R. Schellenberg in his *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* and *The Management of Archives*. They became the new manuals for mid-twentieth century archival concerns in the United States and many other countries.²⁷

Although Schellenberg endorsed provenance, he questioned how it had been applied by Jenkinson and other Europeans. Schellenberg thought that the immense volume of modern archives created by the expanding interventionist state meant that European notions required revision. Jenkinson's archives group concept was unworkable because few modern administrative units are so completely independent of other departments. And even if they were, the amount of records in such an agency's group would be so enormous as to be beyond practical management, which would mean its provenance could not be adequately understood. Schellenberg argued that the archives group concept "is applicable only to dead records – past accumulations to which no more records will be added or records of dead agencies."²⁸ He and his NARA colleagues proposed the record group instead, which, while maintaining the identity of the provenance of records, grouped them in a great many more smaller bodies, in part in

²⁷ T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), and *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

²⁸ Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 181.

order to apportion archival work more manageably among NARA staff. Schellenberg and NARA also departed from Jenkinson in maintaining that the archivist, not the administrative creator of the records, should select them for archival retention. Only the archivist understood their long-term historical research value.

Although Schellenberg's work represents a stronger American commitment to the contextual approach, that commitment remained limited in key areas. It was mainly applied to arrangement and description of records in record groups, but not to all media of record. Photographs and maps were left out. It did not have much of a role in appraisal, where subject specialist knowledge was stressed as the basis for determining whether records were archival. Some, such as Australian Peter Scott, criticized the limitations of the application of provenance in the record group. He thought that individual recordkeeping systems (or series), not a 'grouping' of such systems, even if the members of the record group are related by provenance, was a better focus of the application of provenance. And while the NARA/Schellenberg approach was influential in Canada, and led to the first significant Canadian commitment to provenance in the 1950s, Canadians did not apply it critically or even systematically. Knowledge of the information content of records remained the major component of archival expertise in Canada.²⁹

The Rebirth of the Contextual Approach

The limitations of the conception and application of the contextual approach in Europe and North America became increasingly obvious by the late twentieth century due to the growing volume, variety, and complexity of records and types of archival

²⁹ Nesmith, "Rediscovery of Provenance," Cook, "Past is Prologue," 26-27, 38-39; Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Toward Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards* (Altona, Man.: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1986), 53.