



THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES BUILDING AT OTTAWA

—NFB

Loss or extensive damage to the collections in his charge are the nightmares that haunt an archivist, and it is important to note that microphotography offers the best possible insurance against these catastrophes. Even hand-written transcripts can be of great importance in this respect. Many years ago the Public Archives secured transcripts of the Selkirk Papers, which consisted of the papers of the Fifth Earl of Selkirk, of Red River Colony fame. A few years ago his old home was destroyed by fire, and the loss included all the original papers, with the exception of a few volumes that happened to have been lent to a scholar in London. Thanks to the transcripts in the Archives the text of these lost originals will remain available to historians; but one cannot but regret that facsimiles had not been secured instead of copies.

At present, key files in the Public Archives itself in Ottawa are being micro-filmed, with a dual purpose; First, the films will provide some protection against the risks of damage and destruction which every archivist must take into account in these troubled times. In the second place, copies can be made at a later date and lent to institutions at a distance. To some extent the photographing of documents in London and Paris may be regarded in much the same light. Every click of the micro-film camera in the Public Record Office or the Archives Nationales not only makes the facsimile of a document available for use in Canada, but provides against the total loss of the contents of the paper in question, should the original be destroyed. That this is not a minor consideration is witnessed by the fact that the great collections in London and Paris have twice been placed in extreme peril by war in the relatively brief period of 38 years.

The Paris office of the Public Archives, which is housed in the Canadian Embassy, is in the keeping of Robert LaRoque de Roquebrune, who has spent thirty years among the archive collections of the French capital. He and one assistant select material for microfilming and attend to the numerous other copying and research