

Museum. In addition, the Archives has frequently obtained permission to transcribe material still in the possession of private individuals. To cite two recent examples: the Earl of Minto permitted the Archives to copy the papers of his father, the fourth Earl, who was Governor General of Canada in 1898-1904; in France, a descendant of the celebrated Nicolas Denys made surviving family papers available for photographing.

Mention of photography calls to mind the revolution in copying techniques that has taken place recently. In the old days all documents were copied by hand. Such copying was a highly skilled trade, and required the utmost care. Inevitably this made the work slow and expensive. Moreover, there was always the possibility that mistakes might occur. In particular, if handwriting were difficult to read, all a copyist could do was to interpret it to the best of his ability. The writer remembers an instance that illustrates this point. The transcript of a diary of a certain fur trader, whose handwriting was almost indecipherable, credited him with having made a journey in so many *hours*, a feat which had excited much astonishment and admiration. Careful examination of the original manuscript later revealed that the copyist had misread it and that the journey had been made with so many *horses* — a very different thing!

For these reasons, amongst others, the development of the modern microfilm camera, which copies documents on film 35 mm. wide, has been a step forward of immense importance. True, a beautifully written transcript is much more convenient and attractive to use than a film, which must be read on a mechanical contraption of some sort; but recent improvements in film readers have done much to redress the balance. And the microfilm camera has three practical advantages that make it vastly superior to transcription by hand. The first of these is speed; a single operator can photograph as much material in a day as an expert copyist can transcribe in months. The second advantage is accuracy; every photograph, if carefully taken, is an exact and complete facsimile of the original document, doubtful words and all. The third point in favour of the camera is cost; the reproduction of an individual page costs so little that it is practicable to copy complete files, whereas if the work is being done by hand, the temptation is to pick and choose and to copy only what seems to be important.

#### Microfilming Started in 1950

The Public Archives turned to microfilm cameras in 1950, and hand copying is now used only when material is not suitable for photographing, or when for some other reason filming is not practicable. To the surprise of some people, certain series of documents which were copied by hand many years ago are now being photographed; but there are sound reasons for this apparent duplication. For example, one important series in London — perhaps the most important single collection of official papers in Great Britain relating to Canada — was transcribed at a time when copyists were not permitted to copy notes and comments added to the documents by Colonial Office officials after the various despatches, etc. had been received from Canada in London. Needless to say, these comments are of great interest and importance to historians, who will soon be able to examine facsimiles of the papers in Ottawa.

Microfilming has not been confined to official documents. In October 1950, the Public Archives of Canada and the Hudson's Bay Company came to an agreement under the terms of which the microfilming of the Company's archives is being undertaken as a joint enterprise. Two cameras are at work full-time on this project, and hundreds of reels of film are flowing across the Atlantic to Ottawa. It is unnecessary to emphasize the importance of this collection or to point out how much it will mean to scholars in Canada to have facsimiles of the material available in their own country.