

*Archives of Canada*

their hand-written ledgers, carefully recorded in a writing style that reminds me of the beautiful calligraphy that we study and try so hard to achieve in today's society. It was a moving experience and I suggest that if you have already not done so, Mr. Speaker, you should look at those musty files and take joy in the kind of precise nature and care with which our information was documented.

Through the Archives we are still uncovering vital pieces of our cultural and historical past. For example, everyone thought that our first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, was born in Glasgow on January 11, 1815. This is what is stated at page 10 of *The Young Politician* by Donald Creighton. But that has been proven wrong. He was actually born on January 10. How do we know? Because a few years ago the Archives discovered Sir John A. Macdonald's birth certificate and it gave the date of birth as January 10. What difference does one day make? Absolutely none in reality. It is just the principle of the accuracy of the historical record. It is a footnote to history.

Many are aware of Sir John A.'s reputation as a drinking man. Many think that his favourite refreshment was brandy. That is not so. Particularly in his darkest hours, Macdonald preferred rum. How do the Archives know? It is simple. It has his old hotel bills which show that he ordered more rum than brandy. That is not world-shaking information, but it is an interesting detail that can be found in the documents when we produce the file on our heroes, not those of other countries.

Back in the colonial days, when the Bank of Canada was investigating French currency, it found that when the French could not print money quickly enough to keep up with demand, they cut the corners of playing cards and used them instead. I wonder if there will be a new Bill in the next Budget by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson)—aces high or aces low?

An enormous amount of space is required to store more than a billion items, including 11 million photographs, maps and plans, and 365 million pages of federal Government documents that the Archives owns.

At present, the Public Archives' holdings are scattered among seven different buildings throughout the national capital region, in addition to the main building which it shares with the National Library on Wellington Street. Not only are these spaces insufficient, but the conditions within them, which I am sure the Minister knows, pose serious threats for the long-term preservation of the collections of historical record, information and knowledge about our cultural heritage. They are the background documents which define us as a distinct and proud nation. The stacks are overflowing in buildings which are not protected against humidity, theft, vandalism or water damage. As each day goes by, a lot of data, part of which is significant to our history, is being erased and is disappearing. It is not because the archivists do not care, it is because they do not have the resources to do their job properly. I hope the Minister provides the needed funds along with the needed change in law for the Archives.

Added to this is the fact that storage space is being shared with other organizations, which also poses control and security

problems. Because holdings are spread among several locations, the records frequently have to be moved about. This repeated handling is another cause of damage, as are the changes in atmospheric conditions and contamination by insects. I sincerely hope that we can do something about this because the consequences of such a situation are disastrous.

During the last four years there have been no less than 45 emergencies. In some cases these were major floods causing irreparable damage and loss. In other cases it was a simple leak or recurring leaks that damaged the collections. Over the long term, the documents in the Archives are attacked by mildew, oxidization, dust, and unnecessary wear and tear.

Another threat is that of a major disaster like the fire that devastated the Archives of Concordia University a few years ago. The archival holdings were stored in a building that was also inadequately monitored and protected and which was shared with other services. Several years and millions of dollars were needed to restore those documents which were not lost. What happened so dramatically at Concordia University is happening here too at the Public Archives, but over a longer period of time. If it cannot be prevented, the result will be the same—the loss of our heritage about which we are so concerned. Therefore, it is not only important to have a new Bill, it is also vital to provide the kind of safe, humidity controlled environment, with a proper fire suppression system facility for the Public Archives.

Added to this is the fact that the job is continually changing. It is no longer a question of just simply saving and storing documents. The Public Archives has moved into the computer age. Incredibly, the computer records of the Government contain more than 10 times the data that is on paper. At present, there are no ways, except for pilot projects, to control and protect these records. They are continually being changed, destroyed and erased, and we do not know what is happening to the 2.5 million tapes and discs that exist in Government which could therefore result in the Government and public losing these electronic records, even though they have current as well as historic value.

In 50 years from now, if nothing is changed, we risk the possibility of the development of a big hole in Canadian history through loss and destruction. Canadians simply will not have the data to know how we lived in our present world. That is important, for that is what defines us.

The Public Archives stated its case very clearly to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. It stated:

In democratic societies, the accepted practice has long been that the records of government be properly cared for, that the most important of these be permanently preserved as the Archives of the State and, with time, the public should have access to the Government archives.

Our Party is pleased that the Government is moving to update the legislation governing our Public Archives. Much of the Bill is acceptable and will enhance the role of this federal agency as the guardian of our heritage, ensuring that it continues to acquire and preserve public and private archival records of national significance.