

Ottawa, May 25, 1907

Joseph Pope
(sous-secrétaire d'État),
note aux commissaires
de la fonction publique

SOURCE : VOLUME 1, DOCUMENT 1

Joseph Pope
(Under-Secretary of
State), Memorandum to
Civil Service
Commissioners

SOURCE: VOLUME 1, DOCUMENT 1

... The preparation of dispatches is a technical acquirement, attained only after special study of the questions involved, and by assiduous practice in drafting. It may happen, it must sometimes happen, that the official to whom ... Imperial dispatches are referred (for it cannot be expected that a busy minister has time to attend to such matters personally, calling for much study and a large acquaintance with intricate details), while fully competent to deal with the merits of the question in its present aspect, is not familiar with the past history of the controversy or skilled in the framing of state papers. There are, moreover, certain questions which relate partly to one department and partly to another, so that it may not be easy to tell at first sight to whom a new dispatch should be referred. The earlier communication may have related to one department, and a later dispatch on the same subject to another. Neither department having any knowledge of what has been referred to the other, the consequence is that both departments, *quoad* this particular subject, are working more or less in the dark.

In the early years of Confederation, when these questions were few, the inconvenience of which I speak was not so greatly felt, as the Prime Minister of the day kept them pretty much in his own hands; but, with the growth and development of the Dominion, this is no longer possible.

The practical result of the system in vogue is that there does not exist today in any department a complete record of any of the correspondence to which I have alluded. It has been so scattered, and passed through so many hands, that there is no approach to continuity in any of the departmental files. Such knowledge concerning them as is available, is, for the most part, lodged in the memories of a few officials. I fear too that, in Downing Street, Canadian dispatches are noted for diversity rather than for elegance of style. As the Dominion grows, this state of things must always be getting worse. If some reform is not soon effected, it will be too late. Even now, I am of opinion that it would be an extremely difficult task to construct from our official files anything approaching to a complete record of any of the international questions in which Canada has been concerned during the past 50 years....

My suggestion is that all dispatches relating to external affairs should be referred by the Privy Council to one department, whose staff should contain men trained in the study of these questions and in the conduct of diplomatic correspondence. These officials should be in close touch with the other departments, from which they could draw all necessary information, the raw material, as it were, of their work; but the digesting of this information and its presentation in diplomatic form should rest with them, through, of course, the same channels as at present, for in this suggestion there is no thought of change in that regard. Every effort should be made to collect from the beginning all papers bearing on the questions I have indicated, from the office of the Governor General, the Privy Council office, the various departments and the Foreign and Colonial Offices. I wish most earnestly to impress upon all concerned that, if this work is not soon systematically begun, it will be too late. The few men throughout the service conversant with these questions are growing old, and must soon disappear. So far as I know, they will leave no successors. Much of the early history of these subjects, so far as Canadian records are concerned, will thus be lost.