

But there is another and even more important end to be served. The possession of records in duplicate is a guarantee, to a large extent, of their preservation from destruction by fire. Experience, and not the least that of Canada, shows the risk from this cause, by which documents have been lost that can never be replaced, and it seems almost impossible to collect again even the printed records of the past history of the Provinces which have thus been destroyed. By the burning of the House of Assembly at Montreal, in 1849, the whole collection of printed and manuscript records contained in the library and departments in the building were swept away. It was only by the greatest exertions and by appeals to the liberality of those who possessed collections of the printed papers that single copies of many of them could be secured for the Parliamentary Library. The destruction of the public buildings at Fredericton, New Brunswick, of the Custom House and of the Court House at Quebec, are other instances of the danger to which attention is called. In respect to printed documents the loss is very serious, but it need scarcely be pointed out that it is much more so when original manuscripts are destroyed of which no copy exists. A case to which my attention has recently been called, in connection with the burning of the Custom House at Quebec, will serve to show that safety is not always secured even when there are duplicates.

On the 22nd of June last, Mr. J. W. Dunscomb, Collector of Customs at Quebec, wrote me about certain papers, of which he thought it desirable that copies should be obtained. I take the liberty of transcribing that portion of the correspondence which refers to them, as it gives a history of the fate of the papers in question. Mr. Dunscomb says :

"The statistics of the Trade of Canada, and the history of this Custom House from the Conquest in 1759 until 1791, when the Province of Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada, down to the passage of the Union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841, cover a very interesting epoch in the annals of the early trade of the country.

"I took charge of this port in 1851, and found the old books and papers in disorder and confusion. The Custom House had been moved from one building to another, and I found the building occupied in 1851 over crowded, small and inconvenient, so that accumulated papers could hardly be kept in order.

"The new Custom House building was commenced in 1856, and was handed over to me for occupation in 1860. Having plenty of room with an admirably designed building, I took the old records in hand, and, with the assistance of intelligent and zealous co-operators, I got a mass of MSS into some shape: the personnel of the establishment, imports, exports and shipping.

"The old orders and letters of the Honourable Board of Customs (B. O.) were curious, as showing the opinion entertained of the Colonial commercial world in those days, a fair reflection of the estimation held by Spain at the present day of the same class. The personnel furnished representatives of decayed families from England, Ireland and Scotland, the army and navy, canvassers for Parliamentary elections and men from the race course.

"In September, 1864, the building was burned and I lost many documents and papers; and the old records, with the work I had done on them, were destroyed.

"Now in those days it was the rule to send every document to the Board of Customs in London, and I have no doubt they have been all carefully kept in the Museum at the Custom House, London. The change in both the volume and the staple articles of the trade is foreshadowed by the extract which I transmit herewith, made from the books of 1791, found after the fire."

I made inquiries through Mr. Kingston, an officer of the Public Record office, thinking it possible that the papers might be found there. Mr. Kingston, writing me on the 19th July, informed me that "The Trade Returns belonging to the Board of Customs from 1759 not being deposited in this office I communicated your letter to the secretary of H.M. Customs, asking him if he could give me any information on the