

Photo Essay

Doughty's Dream: A Visual Reminiscence of the Public Archives

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With the new millennium now here, this is an opportune moment for the Canadian archival community to look back almost a century ago to May 1904, when Arthur Doughty was appointed the new Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Records. The post had been vacant for almost two years since the death of the first Dominion Archivist, Douglas Brymner, and Arthur Doughty was faced with three challenges in his role as archivist: first, to assert control over the records of government; second, to obtain a new headquarters building for the Public Archives; and third, to impress upon Canadians a sense of their own history. (Doughty's situation has striking parallels to the current situation. Our new National Archivist, Ian Wilson, has taken over the position after a long vacancy – more than two years – and is facing challenges markedly similar to Doughty's in reshaping the Archives for the twenty-first century.)

Ian Wilson has documented in some detail major achievements attained by Doughty soon after assuming office.¹ The Archives budget, which was \$9,000 in 1903, increased to \$20,000 by February 1905, and to \$50,000 by February 1907. A contract to build a new Archives building on Sussex Drive was let in September 1904, less than five months after Doughty's appointment, and the new building opened in 1906, at an estimated cost of \$80,000. Much of what Doughty accomplished was due to his personality, as Wilson's research has so thoroughly demonstrated. But he was also a master strategist, who knew how best to conjure up Canadian history. Wilson notes that in presenting the Archives' face to the public,

Doughty ... possessed the artist's appreciation of the research and teaching potential of visual records. Maps and plans, paintings and sketches, notices and posters had their importance as historical documents, recording past scenes, buildings, public appeals and cultural levels. Equally important, as educational materials they possessed an immediacy about the past that had an impact on school children and the general public seldom carried by prose documents. Doughty recognized this almost instinctively.²



Figure One In the Archive Rooms. Published in the *Canadian Magazine* 16 (January 1901), p. 207. NA, C-27735.

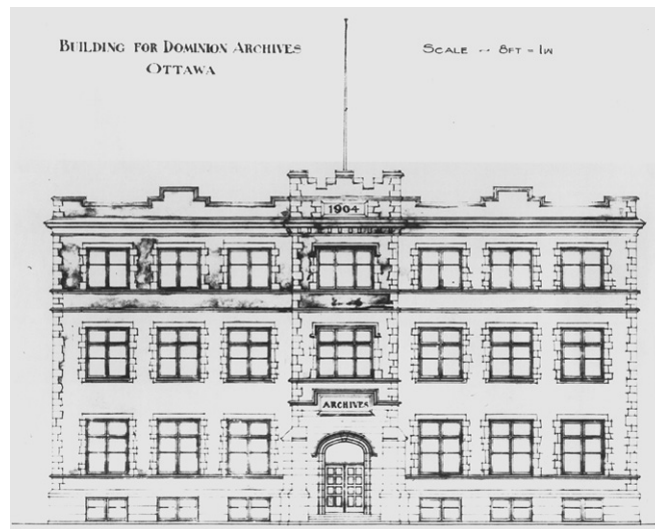


Figure Two Front elevation of the new Archives Building, one of ten plans for the original building still held by the Department of Public Works and Government Services, Canada. Electronic image made from a photocopy of the original design, kindly supplied by Ian Wilson.

In 1925, upon publication of the first *Catalogue of Pictures... in the Public Archives of Canada*, Doughty expressed his philosophy on collecting art, writing that:

We are so accustomed to Canada as we see it now, and as we move in it, that we are hardly conscious of the fact that what are to us to-day thriving cities and familiar scenes, formed, only a few years ago, part of a vast wilderness untrodden by the foot of the white man. It is here that illustrations associated with the beginnings and the advance of our civilization prove such valuable aids, since they permit one to obtain a connected and systematized view of our development.³

Doughty had an initial struggle to persuade his Minister to allow him to buy pictures. Ian Wilson recounts the dispute between Sir Sydney Fisher, Minister responsible for the Archives, over the purchase of some works by Cockburn and Heriot. The works were eventually sought by Charles Fitzpatrick, the Minister of Justice, in whose office they were hanging when Sir Wilfrid Laurier saw them. Laurier thought they belonged in the Archives. Fisher eventually instructed Doughty to "buy all the pictures you can; these are things to be proud of." Doughty concluded to a friend in 1935 that "perhaps that answer is responsible for much."⁴

But it was not just the actual purchase of pictures which achieved Doughty's aims; it was how he used them. In 1901, the *Canadian Magazine* published an article on Douglas Brymner. The piece lauded Brymner, stating that the "archives, as seen to-day in the Langevin block, are not only a collection of priceless value to the country, the Empire and the English-speaking world, but will prove an enduring monument to the zeal ... of the first Archivist of Canada." Unfortunately, that priceless value lacked aesthetic appeal; the story noted that the "Archives rooms" featured "tiers upon tiers of volumes," the two photographs accompanying the article only buttressing a sense of the remorseless weight of the historical record. Although the Archives had acquired some works of art as early as 1888, they were not on display and were known only to a few.

With a new Archives building in the planning stages in 1904, Doughty undoubtedly had already formed a fair idea of how he wanted to present Canadian history. Unfortunately, there is no actual documentation indicating what impact Doughty had on the planning process or on the architectural plans for the new building. But very shortly after the archives staff occupied the building, Doughty wrote to a London dealer announcing that "we have now removed to our new Archives building and I wish to make a collection of Canadian prints and portraits, if I can buy them at a reasonable price. Please keep me advised of anything you may have relating to Canada."⁵ Although other letters do not survive, Doughty almost certainly wrote to other dealers in London, as well as Paris, New York, Montreal, Toronto, and elsewhere. The



Figure Three The Public Archives Building, Sussex Drive, Ottawa, ca. 1910, showing the tennis court outside of the building, on which Doughty and his staff would occasionally challenge visiting scholars to a match on summer afternoons. NA, W.J. Topley Fonds (Acc. No. 1936-270), PA-12619.



Figure Four The Quebec City Model (the Duberger Model) in the Public Archives of Canada, ca. 1910. NA, Miscellaneous Collection (Acc. No. 1970-001), C-34006.



Figure Five Room No. 1 of the Public Archives Building showing Dr. Doughty, Dr. Grey, and Miss McDonald, ca. 1910. NA, Miscellaneous Collection (Acc. No. 1967-1), C-11602.



Figure Six Dr. Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist, in his office in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, ca. 1910. NA, Miscellaneous Collection (Acc. No. 1970-1), C-34005.

Archives soon began acquiring works from a wide variety of antiquarian book dealers, art dealers, and amateur collectors.⁶

Using this material, Doughty began to demonstrate his fine sense of history and his qualities as a showman, displaying the newly acquired works both in his office, and throughout the rooms of the new Archives building, but most particularly in the Archives Museum rooms on the ground floor. These were opened to the public in 1907. As Ian Wilson has noted,

Doughty's dream of producing an historical work combining art and literature in unifying harmony remained elusive, yet through his far-reaching acquisitions policy, the Archives itself was beginning to embody that dream ... Paintings and prints festooned the walls and artifacts lay in display cases, tangible, decorative and highly visible reminders and perhaps, public symbols of the Canadian past.⁷

Doughty began attracting prominent visitors to the new Archives building, using connections with the vice-regal court at Rideau Hall. One of these visitors was Violet Markham, an English friend of Mackenzie King, who was a guest at Government House in 1907. She spent a day at the Archives and afterwards wrote:

My visit to the Archives will count as one of the most delightful recollections of this or any of my previous visits to Canada. One breathes an atmosphere within your walls which has no existence elsewhere and must mean so much as regards the moral and intellectual development of this country.

I hope I may without impertinence express my deep admiration for the work you have created and the noble monument of disinterested enthusiasm.

Canada as a whole lacks the realization that a great nation is founded upon great ideas and ideals - not upon dollars and real estate. The hallowing touch of the past may prove the inspiration of the future, when as in this country there is a past well worthy of the admiration of all Canadians.

I think you are laying a foundation stone in the life of the Dominion.⁸

Another visitor to the Archives in 1908, the celebrated English writer Mrs. Humphrey Ward, recorded similar impressions of the Archives, later quoted in her biography:

Such nice people at Ottawa, and such interesting people. ... some day it will be a great city. The Archives represent the birth and future of Canadian history, and a Canadian patriotism - four years' work, and already it is influencing ideas and politics, among a young people who did not know they *had* a history.⁹

The visibility of the new Archives had much to do with its success. Along the main route from Rideau Hall to Parliament, it stood out as a conspicuous



Figure Seven A view of Grey Room in the Public Archives Building, Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, ca. 1926-30. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137716.



Figure Eight The Map Room in the Public Archives Building, Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, ca. 1926-1930. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137707.



Figure Nine A Reading Room in the Public Archives Building, Sussex Street, Ottawa, Ontario, ca. 1925. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137709.



Figure Ten Northcliffe Room, Public Archives of Canada, Sussex Street, Ottawa, Ont. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137718.

landmark on Sussex Drive. Visitors could find their way to the Archives with comparative ease. By contrast, another visitor to Ottawa in 1910, William Watson of Montreal, tried to find his way to the National Gallery of Canada. Neither the desk clerk at the Russell Hotel nor a policeman on Sparks Street had ever heard of it. Eventually, a local art dealer directed him to the Government Fisheries Exhibit Building on O'Connor Street. There he was confronted in the ground floor entrance by a large, ten-foot high marker buoy on one side (the Fisheries exhibit occupied the main floor), while on the other was a plaster cast of the Venus de Milo. Behind it, a creaking wooden staircase and hand-painted sign with pointing finger directed him to the second floor to the National Gallery. The Gallery's entire collection was hung in a single room, and its entire catalogue consisted of a single sheet of paper.¹⁰

The same year as Watson's visit to Ottawa, the Dominion Archives attracted the attention of *Saturday Night* magazine, which published a multi-page story, beginning on the front page of the Women's Section in its 22 October 1910 issue. Entitled "The Dominion Archives: A Treasure-House for the Canadian Historian," the story locates the Archives immediately within the landscape of Ottawa: "Just across the Rideau Canal from the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, there stands a prim three-story building of stone. It has an official bleakness of aspect and a harshness of outline which gives it a rather forbidding expression. Over the door is the one word 'Archives.'" The writer continues by describing the guard on duty, the lobby entrance, and the plaques on display, then moves on to the interior of the building, which in neatness and tidiness "would delight the heart of a New England housewife." What struck the author most immediately was a "splendid collection of old Canadian prints, some of which are wonderfully well done. Niagara Falls seems to have been a favourite subject with the old engravers ... There is also the first oil painting of the falls ever made ... by Sir James Erskine, who painted it in 1784. ... There are altogether about five thousand engravings and coloured prints ... these engravings compare very favourably with any work that is being done in the country today."¹¹ The story went on to describe other parts of the Archives, which included on display such treasures as rare manuscripts in the Archives Library, the Duberger model of Quebec City, circa 1795, in the basement,¹² the magnificent collections of maps, and General Brock's coat. The article noted the work of amassing manuscript documents begun under Dr. Brymner, and concluded:

In 1904 the work was taken over by Dr. Doughty, the present Dominion Archivist, and since that time its growth has been phenomenal. Not only has a fine building been erected and equipped for the purpose, but the collection of manuscripts has grown from its small beginnings to its present magnificent proportions of twenty thousand volumes, containing tens of thousands of valuable documents in the original. This is a record which speaks for itself and for the men whose ability and untiring energy have made it possible.¹³



Figure Eleven Office of the Deputy Minister, looking southeast, Public Archives Building, Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, 1930. NA, Doughty Collection (Acc. No. 1932-342), PA-66665.



Figure Twelve Grey Room in the Public Archives Building, Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, ca. 1926-30. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137715



Figure Thirteen Minto Room, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, arranged for reception to delegates for the Imperial Conference, Aug. 1932. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137714.



Figure Fourteen War Posters Room, Public Archives Building, Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, ca. 1927-30. NA, Public Works Collection (Acc. No. 1979-140), PA-137708.

By 1925, the picture collection of the Public Archives had grown to more than 25,000 works. These along with other collections, including those of the War Records Office, meant that the building erected in 1904-6 was now wholly inadequate to the Archives' needs; a new wing was added in 1926. The new wing included a museum on the ground floor, a reference room, the Manuscript Division and the Library on the second floor, and the Map and Picture Divisions and the war pictures on the third floor.¹⁴ Arthur Doughty took advantage of the opportunity to increase the quantities of works on display, and renamed the various rooms after benefactors whose assistance (and papers) he had sought over his years as Archivist. He even had Archives' craftsmen carve these benefactors' coats-of-arms in wood, and placed over the entrances to the Minto Room, the Grey Room, and the Northcliffe Room.

Two particular initiatives launched by Doughty and the economist and historian Adam Shortt enabled the Archives to come into its own as the cradle of Canadian historical research. In 1911, a programme of summer courses was launched which paid university students \$50 per month for three months to study at the Archives. This continued until 1920, while in 1922, the Queen's University School of Research in Canadian History, which lasted until 1940, was begun. These two programmes laid the foundation for the ongoing relationship between the Archives and the Canadian academic historical community. Until the Public Archives moved to its Wellington Street location in 1967, generations of Canadian scholars would spend their summers in the confines of the second floor reference room, and would find relief from their long hours of research gazing at the works in the Archives museum or on the walls of the various rooms and corridors. As Duncan McArthur noted in his presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1934:

[Doughty] made the Archives building a place of interest and of beauty by the display of historical mementos and of paintings and other pictures. An institution dependent on the support of the state cannot afford to neglect such a significant mode of contact with the public as is provided by what may be termed the historical museum.¹⁵

As the twenty-first century begins, and the possibility of yet another Archives headquarters building looms, it may be worthwhile to look back at Doughty's dream for a Public Archives – the shape and essence of a building which inspired many Canadians to learn more about their history.

Notes

1 Ian Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: the Cultural Role of the National Archives of Canada, 1904–1935," (M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1973).

2 Ibid., p. 112.

3 James F. Kenney, *Catalogue of Pictures Including Paintings, Drawings and Prints in the Public Archives of Canada* (Ottawa, 1925).



Figure Fifteen Historical Research scholars at the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, 1911. Front l. to r.: George Maheu, E.R. MacNutt, Dr. A.G. Doughty, D.A. MacArthur, (Rear) H.R. Gordon, Baldur Jonsson, George Weir, L.A. Nadeau, Allan Fleming, J.C. MacFarlane. NA, Arthur Doughty Collection (Acc. No. 1939-84), PA-66741.



Figure Sixteen Public Archives of Canada, showing the 1925 addition. NA, Gustave Lanctôt Collection (Acc. No. 1948-121), PA-66863.

- 4 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," pp. 113–14.
- 5 NA, RG 37, D Series, Vol. 328, 1906 Correspondence.
- 6 By 1910, the Archives had purchased pictures from Francis Edwards, Maggs Bros., Henry Stevens Sons & Stiles, Walter T. Spencer, Robson Bros., and the Museum Book Store, London, England; Edward Nield of Bristol, England; American dealers George Goodman of New York and John Skinner of Albany; and Canadian dealers Phileas Gagnon of Quebec, Eben Picken of Montreal, W. W. Williamson of Toronto, Louis Laurin of Pte. Gatineau, and James Wilson of Ottawa, among others. NA, RG 37, D Series, Volume 328, Acquisition correspondence.
- 7 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," pp. 113–14.
- 8 Letter from Violet Markham to A.G. Doughty, 26 September 1907, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.
- 9 Quoted in Janet P. Trevelyan, *The Life of Mrs. Humphrey Ward* (London, 1923), p. 216.
- 10 This anecdote is recounted in the manuscript draft of William Watson's "Retrospective: Recollections of a Montreal art dealer, 1908–1958," which he compiled in 1972. NA, NPC Accession No. 1984-334, pp. 20–23.
- 11 "P.O.D.," "The Dominion Archives. A Treasure-House for the Canadian Historian," *Saturday Night* (22 October 1910), p. 25.
- 12 The Duberger model seems to have been constructed by the Royal Engineers as part of their work in planning the fortification of Quebec. It had been found by Doughty in Woolwich, England, where it had been sent in the nineteenth century, and had been returned to Canada, where it was restored by Archives staff, and displayed by the Archives for many years. When the Archives moved to its new building in 1967, and relinquished the old building to the Canadian War Museum, the model remained behind and continued on display until its eventual transfer to Parks Canada, who now have it on display at Parc de L'Artillerie in Quebec City.
- 13 "The Dominion Archives," p. 29.
- 14 "Introduction," by Wilfred I. Smith in, *Archives: Mirror of Canada Past* (Ottawa, 1972), p. 14.
- 15 Quoted in Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," pp. 115–16, footnote 81.