

Sources for the Study of Urban History in the Manuscript Division of the Public Archives of Canada

Peter Gillis

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The impact of urban growth on the development of Canada is just beginning to be appreciated by historians. In a similar fashion the archivist has perceived the need for research materials in this relatively new field and has begun to investigate potential sources of documentation. This short note does not pretend to give a comprehensive survey of the records available in the Manuscript Division for the study of urban history; rather it will only mention a few more outstanding examples of reference resources and suggest what sort of information is contained in them.

The standard source for urban historians is at present, and probably will remain, the census rolls (RG 31). Manuscript Division has a relatively complete set of these records for the decades 1851-1871, including the industrial census of 1871. There are scattered returns for the years before 1851, and it is possible to supplement these with numerous statistical records which were compiled periodically by the various colonial governments. As well there are extensive files in the Department of Immigration (RG 76) which help at a later period to establish settlement patterns, and detail many aspects of urban growth. Immigra-

tion material for the period before 1870 is at best limited but there is some correspondence in various Colonial Office series, especially in CO 384 (MG 11). It is hoped that Statistics Canada will release further census material for the vital period after 1871 to augment this valuable research source.

Other government records also provide interesting insights into urban problems. For the period before Confederation, Manuscript Division has extensive land records, petitions, reports, police records and public health files for Canada East and Canada West. The bulk of this material appears in the records of the Executive Council (RG 1) and those of the Civil and Provincial Secretaries, Canada East and Canada West (RG's 4 and 5). After 1867 the records of the Privy Council (RG 2) and other departments like Railways and Canals (RG 43), Transport (RG 12), the files of the Canadian National Railways (RG 30) and various Royal Commissions (RG 33) provide excellent sources of information. It is erroneous to believe that such government records report only the rather dull routine business of policy appraisal and implementation. Quite often they contain large caches of correspondence with a wide variety of individuals, organizations and corporations. Because of the intimate connection of railroad construction and operation with urban growth, the records of the CNR form an interesting and

valuable source for researchers. This group is comprised, for the most part, of the records of the various smaller lines which were at one time or another absorbed by the parent systems. It is this attribute which makes the CNR records a unique and tremendously important reference unit.

The large collection of business records located in Manuscript Division also provides an excellent field of research for the urban historian. Good examples of such units are the Buchanan Papers (MG 24, D 16), the Gilmour and Hughson Papers (MG 28, III, 6), the Van Horne letterbooks (MG 28, III, 20), Kerry and Chace Limited, engineers (MG 28, III, 7), the Centre Amusement Co. Limited (MG 28, III, 31), and the Baring Brothers and Company (MG 24, D 21). It is possible by the exhaustive use of this type of records to investigate such things as wage scales, trade patterns, factory life, social life and entrepreneurial elites. Again these records can be complemented by the records of various labour associations and organizations. Perhaps the best examples of such material in Manuscript Division are the Toronto District Labour Council (MG 28, I 44) and the Toronto Typographical Union (MG 28, I 72). Another excellent source is the files of the Department of Labour (RG 27). These papers document many aspects of important social conditions like the problem of unemployment, working

conditions, ethnic tensions and the apprenticeship system. A more middle-class view of similar phenomena is provided through the records of social and moral reform groups like the National Council of Women (MG 28, I 25) and the Canadian Welfare Council (MG 28, I 10). These particular organizations were set up on a city and town basis and thus offer interesting comments on a great many centres of population.

Actual local records themselves present a much more difficult problem. This type of official record is usually the preserve of the provincial and city archives. As the regional repository for the Ottawa Valley area, however, the Public Archives has acquired custodial privileges over a large and unique collection of documents referring to the cities of Ottawa and Hull. Perhaps the outstanding units of this nature are the Hill Collection (MG 24, I 9) and the Wright Papers (MG 24, D 8). Church records are also kept by Manuscript Division including parish registers and pastoral documentation. These are, however, still fairly scattered. The one exceptional unit just deposited in Manuscript Division is the records of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa which offer a complete picture of that church's development. Such documents give an important insight into society as it develops through time which cannot be found elsewhere.

Peter Gillis

Manuscript Division