The Records of Business and the Urban Historian

The nascent National Business Archives Program, part of the Systematic National Acquisitions Program (SNAP) at the Public Archives of Canada will soon release several new collections of manuscript and other materials of interest to urban historians. The business archives program was officially announced to the business community via the Financial Post in early February of this year, although unofficially begun before hand. Dominion Archivist Dr. Wilfred I. Smith said in the announcement that business records were obtained in the past by a hit-or-miss process and declared that this very weak area of acquisition would be considerably enhanced if the business community would co-operate in helping the Public Archives acquire and preserve records of firms and individuals of national importance. Dr. Smith noted that "an individual or a company whose records are not preserved, or are not available and accessbile, is going to be forgotten." His appeal provoked a generous response and as a result the negotiations for several significant collections are presently nearing completion. But for successful continuation of the program, it is important that the scholarly community assist in the location and acquisition of other significant collections of business materials. It is particularly appropriate that this appeal be directed to urban historians.

Among the most important selection criteria for the acquisition of business materials are the following: Are the records of inter-provincial, national or multi-national organizations, institutions, associations? Are the papers a collection or about an individual or individuals who are either persons of Canadian residence or citizenship who have held international, national or extra-provincial offices or positions? Are the papers of individuals, organizations or corporations which may be local, provincial, or regional in nature, but which are representative of commercial, financial or industrial activities which are of national significance? And, finally, are the records because of certain special features(for example very large bulk) impossible of service or maintenance at other repositories? These criteria are open to interpretation and are intended to serve as a useful guideline.