

would make rational choices to use public or private transit. Instead auto owners also factor in physical ownership of their transportation (the car) and its attendant comfort, prestige and privacy. Given the choice between public and private commuting, Americans — perhaps encouraged by the auto industrial complex (p. 135) — abandoned public transit systems in the mid-twentieth century.

The consumer character of automobiles is introduced early in the book (pp. 7, 11), and pops up in various guises throughout the text (e.g. pp. 122, 154, 164). All of Chapter Ten is devoted to social change. The discussion, however, focusses on how to change people's transportation — not their consumer — habits. In the

end, ecologically sound changes in automobile use will not occur (at least according to this reviewer) until society changes its attitude about the consumer value of the auto. Cigarettes were a once widely esteemed consumer product in North America; could something similar happen to the motor vehicle?

The Ecology of the Automobile is a thoughtful book that raises many troubling questions about the role of the automobile in North America. While this reviewer does not agree with all the authors' observations and conclusions, the book certainly sheds light on the complex relationship among economics, human behaviour, and technology associated with the use of motor vehicles.

National Archives of Canada, *Treasures of the National Archives of Canada*

HELGE KONGSRUD

National Archives of Canada. *Treasures of the National Archives of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. 365 pp., \$50.00, ISBN 0-8020-5022-0.

The present volume is not a guide to the institution's stock of archives in general. Neither is it an inventory of some archives in particular. It is rather to be read and reviewed as a *boasting-book* or an archival thesaurus in which the National Archives of Canada proudly presents its treasures of information. The institution has abundantly demonstrated that it keeps plenty to boast of.

Such a presentation can be organized in different ways. The survey may follow the outline of archives and collections in question, and simply conform to the cherished principle of *provenance*, like a comprehensive inventory or guide. Alternatively, it may reproduce precious items of historical records, irrespective of their provenance. The latter presentation may also arrange the examples in chapters devoted to various themes and enlightened by relevant records.

The book at hand has combined the two latter solutions, and this method is perfectly legitimate. The bulk of the text is divided into eight chapters, and readers are introduced to just as many themes. We find descriptions of cartographic, architectural and engineering records; documentary art, philately, and gov-

ernment records; manuscript, private, and genealogical records; moving image and sound records; and photographic records. Finally, there is a chapter on preserving the records of the past. In this way, the National Archives hopes "to give readers a glimpse into our holdings and perhaps also to help them understand what archives are and the role they play in society" (p. 11).

The institution has certainly succeeded. The book is lavishly illustrated, and text and illustrations are closely interconnected, so as to support each other. The chapters consist of a general introduction, followed by relevant examples, rendered in facsimile and briefly discussed on the opposite pages.

This calvacade of "treasures" is impressive because numerous full colour illustrations reproduce the documents so sharply and vividly that the printing quality enhances the impression of authenticity. However, several presentations may invite the reader to some criticism. In general, the comments seem often too brief. In particular, private records of Canada's past include some items in facsimile which the general public can hardly be expected to read in the original. Take for example the tantalizing extract from Agnes Macdonald's diary, reproduced on pages 169 and 194; no transcription is given, although the page opposite 169 is almost empty. A complete

transcription would have helped the general reader who may be put off by the flimsy handwriting from the 1860s.

True, Lady Macdonald's hand reminds us that Great Britain and her dominions escaped most of the "Gothic" traits which burdened the palaeographic traditions of the German-speaking peoples and the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, examples of handwriting dating from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, given on pages 173, 174, 175, 177 and 183, should also have been introduced by transcriptions. There is space left for them on the opposite pages.

The National Archives includes categories of records which one in the Nordic countries expects to find in specialized museums. The boasting-book does not present only "documents" in the traditional sense. Themes of the various chapters, as well as typical artifacts shown in stock, remind us that there is a vacillating borderline between archival material and other fields of historical evidence. This border is being perforated by the variety of records at disposal in different institutions.

On the other hand, unusual items may also by their provenance be observed to form genuine parts of traditional archives. A striking example is the Indians' address, presented to the Governor General and discussed and reproduced on pages 198 and 199. The description informs us that this "Amerindian" document is "written on birch-bark and bordered by two strings of white wampum beads." Nonetheless, the address is directed to Lord Lorne in his capacity as Governor General. Consequently, the document should have been left in the archives of that office. But the informative piece of birch-bark has been preserved through private possession, among the Marquess of Lorne papers. This seems to be the only reason the book surprisingly introduces it among private records.

Another similarly displaced document, found in the same section, is the commission investing the Minister concerned with full powers to conclude a treaty regulating the Pacific Halibut Fishery (pp. 218-219). King George V had empowered Mr. Ernest Lapointe to act in his capacity as Minister of Marine

and Fisheries, but the original document has been preserved in private possession, among the Ernest Lapointe papers.

We may sometimes suspect prominent politicians and civil servants of dealing with their equals in terms of a "gentlemen's agreement." This attitude may explain why certain gentlemen tend to keep "state papers" in their private archives.

An archivist reader cannot but miss more exact details of administrative and political structure. The official record of Canada's past includes, for example, a presentation of the Cabinet conclusions (pp. 158-159). Here the text informs us that the Canadian Cabinet "did not maintain a formal record of decisions, or 'conclusions', until 1944." How did the Cabinet record its decisions until that year? And what is the relationship between the (archives of the) Cabinet and (those of) the Office of the Governor General? The latter government authority is mentioned in passing on pages 161 and 198.

A historian reader is frequently invited to join in a moving "reenactment of past experience." Films preserved from both World Wars are cases in point. Have a second look at the photos showing the fronts in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France (pp. 283, 289-290, 341); not to speak of Yousuf Karsh's immortal portrait of Winston Churchill (p. 349). These pictures linger in the reader's mind, particularly after the fiftieth anniversary of the D-day. *Dulce bellum inexpertis*.

The inclusive index registers even "mid-wifery," though not "microfilming." The latter activity is "one solution to the problem of storing and handling records," the concluding chapter rightly maintains (p. 358). The National Archives destroyed the original census returns of 1891 after they had been microfilmed (p. 242). In other words, the institution has solved a problem by eliminating it. However, should important statistical material be scrapped at all? There is the duty to preserve originals from wear and tear by providing security-film for the public, although there is the palpable lack of free space in repositories. Will we always be on the horns of this dilemma?