

## The View from Ottawa: Researching U.S. Foreign Policy in Canada

While Canadian records are an obvious and necessary source for American historians working on bilateral relations with Canada, I am often surprised by the dismissive reaction of many scholars of U.S. foreign policy to the suggestion that a visit to Ottawa might add considerably to their research. Few countries in the world have such similar political, cultural, and economic values as Canada and the United States. This convergence has made them especially close allies for much of the period since 1945. In the decade after World War II Canada's relative economic and military strength made it a useful American ally in NATO, where it was one of the three founding nations, and at the United Nations, where its accomplished foreign minister, Lester B. Pearson, was often helpful in American efforts to mobilize the world body behind the West. Canada was the fourth largest Western contributor to the conflict in Korea, was active at the 1954 Geneva Conference, and enjoyed a unique perspective on the wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia by virtue of its membership in various international supervisory commissions, which lasted until the spring of 1973.

While Canadian power faded during the 1960s as Europe and Asia recovered fully from the war, Canada remained an active internationalist and a willing, if sometimes difficult, U.S. partner. A committed peacekeeper, Canada was involved in almost every international peacekeeping operation between the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Canadian troops were kept particularly busy minding Western interests in the

Middle East and Cyprus from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s.

Successive Canadian governments pursued a strong free-trade policy and actively cooperated with Washington to promote a liberal international trade order through multilateral instruments like the GATT/WTO, the OEEC/OECD, and the World Bank. This shared outlook on the world economy accounts in part for President Gerald Ford's decision to sponsor Canada's membership in the G-7 in 1975.

From the American perspective, Canada's contribution to the U.S. effort to create a liberal world order has been important on occasion but rarely decisive. Usually, Washington could afford to proceed as it wished, without paying too much attention to its much less populous northern neighbour. This has never been true for Canada, whose economic or political fortunes have often been profoundly affected—sometimes inadvertently—by American decisions. Consequently, Canadian policymakers have made it a priority to know what their American colleagues were thinking and doing the world over. Canadian politicians, diplomats and soldiers, as well as trade and treasury officials, have cultivated close, productive relations with their American counterparts, sometimes attending the same graduate schools and frequenting the same vacation retreats in northern Canada or Florida. Comparing notes and trading information, Canadians worked hard at developing an appreciation of the divisions among American policymakers, of the distribution of power in Washington, and of the likely course of American policy. The Library and Archives of Canada (LAC) in Ottawa contains many of their observations and conclusions and represents an extraordinarily rich source of documentary

information on the evolution and implementation of American foreign policy.

Researchers interested in examining Canadian records should begin at the LAC's webpage, <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/index-e.html>, where an online finding aid, dubbed ArchiviaNet, can help scholars both identify and order the government and private records that they need. Those interested in international affairs should focus first on the departments of External Affairs (Record Group 25), Trade and Commerce (RG 20), Finance (RG 19), and National Defence (RG 24). The records of the cabinet and the Privy Council Office (RG 2), which oversees policymaking within the bureaucracy and provides nonpartisan advice directly to the prime minister, are also vital. With the exception of Privy Council Office (PCO) records, material from each of these departments through to the 1980s has been shipped to the LAC, though not all material has been entered into the online finding aid. This is especially true of the LAC's more recent accessions. The PCO declassifies cabinet documents and minutes under a thirty-year rule, with the latter available online at the LAC website. It has also retained its central registry files for the period after 1959. Researchers who do not find what they are looking for should contact the responsible archivist. Names and contact information will be provided if researchers request this information through the Reference Inquiry Form found at:

<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/contact/index-e.html>.

Having identified the relevant records, researchers should be careful to order them by file rather than box or volume number as this will hasten declassification, an often slow and confusing challenge at

the LAC. Not all material transferred to the archives is declassified by the originating department, which leaves it to LAC staff to review and release material in response to individual requests. This process proceeds in accordance with the provisions of Canada's access to information and privacy legislation, modeled on similar U.S. laws, and may include lengthy consultations with the originating department and other governments, depending on the nature of the files under review. Rising demand over the past few years has placed a severe burden on the LAC, which, despite recent efforts to address this problem, still has a declassification backlog of almost eighteen months.

Researchers should not get too discouraged, however, on learning that a requested file is "closed" and must be processed through the LAC's infamous "Access to Information Unit." "Closed" can actually mean several different things. As the open/closed description is normally applied at the box or volume level and not to individual files, access officers may find that a requested file is actually open, transfer it to an interim box, and make it quickly available. "Closed" may also refer to a file that has been reviewed and partly declassified since closed material is normally stored with its original file. In this case too, a review officer would remove the closed portion of the file, place the remainder in an interim box, and make it available, normally within a few weeks. Unfortunately, however, "closed" sometimes means precisely that, and the long wait times involved in clearing material can make it very difficult for historians working on more recent or specialised topics. Needless to say, it can be very useful to consult regularly with access staff on

the status of requests. Researchers may even wish to point out similar records from other collections that are available elsewhere.

The personal papers of Canadian politicians and officials are not subject to the access and privacy legislation, although LAC archivists normally apply the spirit of the legislation to government documents within private collections. While collections from policymakers active in the 1950s and the 1960s are largely open, more recent collections remain closed, requiring researchers to seek access from donors or their literary heirs. Nevertheless, the rules governing personal collections often remain a little more flexible than the regime in place for official papers, and with the help of a supportive donor and a friendly archivist, researchers can find their way into a surprising number of collections.

Although working conditions and service at the Library and Archives of Canada have declined over the last decade or so, it remains a congenial place to conduct research. The bright and airy reading room, with its panoramic views over the Ottawa River, remains one of the best working spaces for researchers in the world. Open from 7 A.M. to 11 P.M. seven days a week, the LAC's reading room is also one of the most accessible. Unfortunately, as most of its material is now stored off-site, retrieval times are often long, with material ordered after 10:30 A.M. usually unavailable until the following morning. A decision to move much of the LAC staff to a new suburban facility means that archivists too will soon be off-site, with obvious consequences for researchers needing assistance. Photocopying is permitted but is neither cheap nor fast. Regular orders, which can take as long as eight weeks to process, cost 40 cents Cdn/page, while

overnight rush orders can be had for 80 cents Cdn/page. In contrast with most major archives, the LAC is still wrestling with the question of digital cameras, which remain banned.

There are other sources for good material on international affairs in Ottawa. Several government departments, including the PCO, Foreign Affairs, and Environment Canada, offer informal access programs through which senior graduate students and academics are sometimes allowed to consult closed material on a background basis. Although normally restricted to Canadian citizens, these programs have occasionally been able to help American scholars gain limited access to restricted Canadian records on a number of subjects, including the trafficking of illegal drugs, North American environmental regulation, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) at the Department of National Defence operates a small but excellent military archive, which contains a good deal of material on continental defence as well as on NATO and Canadian peacekeeping operations. Happily, DHH has its own declassification authority, which means that records can often be made available expeditiously. DHH maintains a website at: [http://www.dnd.ca/hr/dhh/engraph/home\\_e.asp](http://www.dnd.ca/hr/dhh/engraph/home_e.asp). The Bank of Canada, the country's central monetary agency, also maintains a very good archive, with considerable material on international financial issues. More information on the Bank's archives can be found at [www.bankofcanada.ca/archives/english](http://www.bankofcanada.ca/archives/english).

Finally, researchers who cannot get to Ottawa might be interested to learn of the series *Documents on Canadian External Relations (DCER)*, published by the Historical Section of Foreign Affairs Canada

(FAC). Inspired by *FRUS*, the Canadian series is designed to give scholars a comprehensive record of the government's major foreign policy decisions and their underlying rationale. The first six volumes, which stretch from 1909 to 1939, trace Canada's effort to become an autonomous dominion within the British Empire. Volumes 7 through 11 document Canadian diplomacy during World War II, while subsequent volumes, which now cover the period until the late 1950s, follow Canada's diplomatic fortunes in the Cold War, which provides them with a thematic unity. Widely available in libraries in the United States and Europe, recent volumes are also posted online at [www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/department/history](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/department/history). A limited number of printed volumes for the post-1945 period may be purchased through Government of Canada Publications at <http://publications.gc.ca/control/publicHomePage?lang=English>.