

Lost in Shipping: Canadian National Parks and the International Donation of Wildlife

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If you ever find yourself in the Parliament buildings in Ottawa, leave. Head west down Wellington Street, past the Supreme Court, and to the building that I always think of as the nation's supreme (supremest?) court: Library and Archives Canada. This is the central warehouse of Canadian history, where individuals, groups, and government departments deposit their archival papers and records, and where researchers like me, you, and flocks of genealogists can access these materials. A walk down Wellington Street—from legislature, to court, to archives—is like a walk into the past.

One of the many archival collections at Library and Archives Canada is that of Parks Canada, the agency that oversees the country's national parks.¹ When in the 1990s I wrote a Ph.D. on the parks, the collection ran to 500 metres of archival material, like a filing cabinet pulled out the length of five football fields.² There is much more now. There are more parks; they are producing ever-more paper; and there is always more past than there used to be. And, surprisingly, old material is still being discovered. Boxes of files from the late 1800s occasionally get pulled out of places like the Banff National Park administrative headquarters, having been held onto for more than a century because they were thought still useful or alternatively were deemed useless and completely forgotten about.³

The value of such an archival collection to a Canadian environmental historian should be obvious. Our national parks system began with the creation of Banff in 1885, so for almost all of our history as a nation, the government has been establishing and developing parks, and the people responsible for these parks—politicians, civil servants, wardens, scientists—have been writing about them. The parks have also been toured, reviewed, filmed, painted, photographed,

and mapped countless times. As a result, national parks are some of the most documented places in Canada. More than that, parks represent explicit attempts to define what elements of Canadian nature are deemed most precious and worth saving. All this means that researchers and students of environmental history have, in the parks, a wonderful opportunity to see how Canadians have thought about and acted toward nature. What sorts of landscapes have been considered unusually beautiful and yet typical of Canadian beauty, and how has that opinion changed over time? Why have we favoured unpeopled wilderness, attempting to remove all human presence—whether Stoney Indians from Banff or farmers from Cape Breton Highlands—when establishing parks, and then sought to attract as many people as possible? How did knowledge and belief evolve so that forest fires, once completely outlawed, are now ignited by parks staff? Or predators, once systematically killed, now protected? Parks are important to environmental history because, paradoxically, they represent a society's ideal for nature and document the society's actual relationship with nature.

Having a strong source base like the Parks Canada papers is essential when doing history, environmental or otherwise. You might have a good topic, you might have questions to ask, but unless there are sources to examine you won't have the evidence necessary to find answers and make your case. In my experience, some students when researching essays (and some professors when assigning them) gravitate to the relative safety of secondary sources, the after-the-fact interpretation of historical events. And who can blame them? It is natural that they seek the expertise of people who have learned enough about a historical topic to write knowledgeably about it in a journal or book or website. But to focus on secondary sources may mean underutilizing primary sources, the material produced by the participants or witnesses of history: diaries, newspapers, correspondence, census data, legal documents, oral testimony, and much more.⁴ That is a great loss—the difference between a movie and a movie review, between English lit and English crit. Listening to people of the past speak and figuring out what they are saying—what happened and why—is what history is all about. Professors are increasingly incorporating primary sources into undergraduate history courses.⁵ These sources can be intimidating: they appear in the language and often the penmanship of the day, they are without the explanations, signposts, and context that an after-the-fact interpreter would know were necessary, they may not be in the place you want, they may not have what you hope to find, and they are inevitably incomplete. But they are still worth diving into. I have never had trouble finding material of interest when reading primary sources.⁶ And in this world, if you don't decide what you're interested in, someone will decide for you.

Of course, the sheer size of the Parks Canada archival holdings is what makes them daunting as well as valuable. How can you make sense of such a vast collection of sources? How can you locate and determine which sources are necessary in teasing out a history? How do you decide which sources not to write about, and which sources to avoid altogether? And how can you tell the story of a collectivity—whether a government agency, a business, a people, or a nation—when your sources are not written by that impersonal entity but by a collection of individuals over a long period of time?

While working on my dissertation I came across another story amid the miles of files, the story of Parks Canada donating wildlife around the world in the 20th century, to zoos, heads of state, museums, scientists, and Walt Disney. This story seems a particularly apt examination of such a source base,⁷ because the donations program was never formalized to become part of parks

regulations, and references to donations are scattered throughout the Parks Canada collection. Again, what is most challenging is also most rewarding: the historian has the opportunity to piece together the history—to learn more about the past, in some ways, than did the participants themselves.

Most of the Parks Canada holdings at Library and Archives Canada have been reproduced on microfilm, one advantage of which is that people across Canada can borrow the material via inter-library loan. Unfortunately, microfilm makes me nauseous. Winding the reel of film and seeing it glide across the screen, which should offer the pleasant sense of travelling deeper into the past, instead most resembles sitting in the back of my parents' car as a child, watching trees rush by out the window, and getting carsick. It's a common reaction, I'm told. So I got a doctor's note. If there is one thing a government bureaucracy fears, it's a doctor's note. As a result, a day or so after requesting Parks Canada material, I would go to the Archives' third-floor reading room and be given a banker's box with the actual documents inside. I would carry the box back to a large table by the wall of windows that look out over the Ottawa River and, in the distance, to the offices of Parks Canada itself. I would open the box, inhale the smell of old paper, and begin reading.

Perhaps I should define "reading." The files mostly consisted of letters back and forth within the agency's headquarters, and from the headquarters to staff at the individual parks. The correspondence was chronologically arranged and then bound or stapled together, and I spent many days just skimming through these packets for material of interest, like a witness flipping through mug shots. There was some logic to the search—I had requested files that seemed most directly on my topic—but I was also just relying on my growing knowledge of the general field to sniff out other things that might prove significant. It was as unsystematic as that, and there was undoubtedly much that I missed. A historian reading a microfilmed newspaper might decide to systematically sample records, scanning only every third issue, or every tenth, knowing full well that much is being missed. As William Turkel discusses in his chapter of this volume, researchers always have finite time and resources, and so must weigh the likely usefulness of a source and budget their investment in it accordingly.

Applications for Animals

Researching as I was, a letter with Mickey Mouse letterhead stood out. It was 1965, and Walt Disney studios was wondering if the Canadian parks could spare some grizzly bears for the making of the film *Biography of a Grizzly*. A Disney executive wrote, Oh, and if you have a "remarkably tame and tractable" mountain lion, we'll take that, too.

Actually, we could potentially use a big old male with rheumatism and a definite lack of pep and fire, and possibly, blind, whose coat nevertheless, developed into an attractive one and whose size is as formidable as when he was in his prime. . . . For this project, it may even be necessary to somehow obtain cubs before their eyes are open, or, at least, before their mother is able to teach them the fear or hatred of man.

The Canadian parks chief wrote back that the proposal sounded fine, and he was sure the agency would be able to help.⁸

This all seemed strange, at odds with the Parks Branch's stated philosophy that all nature within the parks was to be protected. And the tone of the letters made it clear such arrangements had happened before. True, at varying times such natural phenomena as wolves, fire, and spruce budworm have been outlawed in the parks. But the agency's preservation principle is determined first and foremost not by utility or beauty but simple location: by virtue of being inside a park, nature is subject to protection. Parks Canada is responsible for selecting the most beautiful of Canadian landscapes, turning them into parks, and maintaining them forever. This means removing from the park's nature all taint of commerce, placing it beyond the pale of economic reality that governs the rest of the physical world. Ordinary trees, rocks, and chipmunks become sanctified as symbols of Canadian nature. Whatever prestige, power, and budget Parks Canada possesses, it has because of its ability to effect this transformation. So why surrender this? What was to be gained?

Having found this one letter, I kept my eyes out for more, and soon started to find scattered letters in files on individual kinds of wildlife, and then a set of files innocuously entitled, "Applications for animals." Some requests referenced earlier letters with other file numbers, and in this way I began piecing together a history that went all the way back to the 1910s. It became evident that though the National Parks Branch donated (and traded, and even sold) wildlife for more than half a century, it did so without ever making it a true "program" by making it part of the organization's official regulations. It was almost as ad hoc in the 1960s as it had been in the 1910s, with the staff members responsible for dealing with wildlife requests often unaware of their agency's decades of experience. This was a history that largely existed only in these files.

I learned that the parks system began as an importer of wildlife. At the turn of the 20th century, the first half-dozen parks, all in the mountains of Alberta and British Columbia, were new, and it was thought necessary to fill them with wildlife. Indigenous species such as elk and buffalo were reintroduced and exotics such as Karakule sheep were introduced. By the early 1910s, the Parks Branch felt some responsibility to return the favour. Having helped bring buffalo back from near-extinction and having established sizable buffalo populations in the parks, the agency took to donating buffalo to restocking programs and zoos. The numbers given were small, but the practice seems to have allowed staff to imagine that the parks' preservationist ethic could and should be bent if the reasons were justified. In 1914, the London Zoological Society asked to trade two of its polar bear cubs for a pair of mountain goats. The Parks Branch happily agreed, having been told "on high authority" that the zoo in the town of Banff was the perfect habitat for polar bears.⁹ In the same year, the agency gave a Saskatchewan sheep breeder Persian rams from Banff, and discussed selling him more.¹⁰

Even in these first cases, the three main issues that would surround the donation of parks wildlife for the next half century are already evident. First, there was the animals' symbolic value. The London Zoo came to the National Parks Branch for mountain goats because the animals were symbols of Canada and because the agency was a likely source of them. The very thing, then, that made the agency the guardian of Canada's wildlife made it the Canadian agency to which international groups would turn to acquire wildlife. This would be increasingly difficult for parks staff to reconcile over time, in that they internalized the belief that Canadian parks wildlife really were superior to those outside Canada and outside parks. Even during the Persian ram transfer, Banff warden B. F. Woodworth told the breeder "that I did not like these foreign animals as well as our Canadian animals, and if I had my way I would feed them to the animals in the Zoo."¹¹

Woodworth's comment earned him a reprimand—but in 1922, Banff's exotic sheep were indeed killed and fed to the zoo animals.¹² The second issue, tied to the animals' symbolic value, was their economic value. Like the Parliament Buildings or Niagara Falls, all parks wildlife were to be beyond commoditization: they were to be literally priceless. In theory, a Banff beetle was as valuable as a Banff bear. But parks staff could not really accommodate such thinking, particularly when the wildlife were deemed surplus or were being traded for equally priceless animals from elsewhere. For example, in discussing the proposed sale of the Persian rams in 1914, parks staff discovered that a purebred would sell commercially for \$1,000 (alas, theirs had no papers). How could one from a national park possibly be worth less than that? Rather than going further down the path of determining the worth of wildlife, staff in this instance chose to trade breeding sheep now for young sheep later. But the question of what value, if any, to place on parks wildlife remained, tied to the third issue surrounding donations: the logistics of actually capturing, holding, and shipping wildlife. If it was impossible to put a price on wildlife, there were nonetheless real costs—financial and otherwise—in donating them. Mountain goats were particularly troublesome to transport. Of the two to be given to the London Zoo in 1914, one died immediately upon capture, a victim of “worry and fretting.”¹³ The National Parks Branch's experience in donating wildlife would see much more of this.

Requests for wildlife were made sporadically through the 1910s and early 1920s, but rose sharply in the second half of the decade. Perhaps the Parks Branch's generosity was becoming better known.¹⁴ Parks staff did what they could to accommodate those who asked. Six Rocky Mountain sheep for a zoo in Milwaukee. Two timber wolves to the Calgary Zoo. Forty-nine sheep and 25 wapiti to the B.C. Games Branch. Two buffalo to the city of Johannesburg. And many, many more. The parks took to assembling lists of “outstanding orders” to be filled, most of which eventually were.¹⁵ The number of animals involved certainly climbed into the hundreds, and in a letter from the early 1930s a Banff employee boasted that “the Game Department at Banff have caught and shipped to all parts of the world, thousands of head of big game, including sheep, goat, elk, moose, etc.”¹⁶

Rarely did I find the Parks Branch actively seeking credit or publicity for its actions. When donating Rocky Mountain sheep to the San Diego Zoo in 1931, the Branch sent along a bronze plaque reading “These animals from National Parks of Canada” that it requested be fixed permanently to the sheep's cage.¹⁷ Perhaps such requests for acknowledgement were commonplace and just did not usually make it into the written record; historians are well aware of the difference between what happened and what happened to be recorded, kept, and preserved. Still, I would have expected to find more such evidence if it existed. So, if the National Parks Branch was not seeking publicity for donating wildlife, what did it hope to gain? I believe the answer relates to whom the agency agreed to give wildlife, and whom it refused. The Branch typically accepted requests made by public, non-commercial institutions. Municipal zoos and provincial and state game agencies were granted wildlife. The American Museum of Natural History was permitted to shoot and stuff the largest bull moose it could find in Banff. (In its petition, the museum had explained that Canadian moose were larger and more impressive than American ones. A compliment to Canadian wildlife in general, but an insult to the specific moose.)¹⁸ Parks wildlife were also presented directly to foreign countries on behalf of the nation. In such cases they served very

directly as symbols of Canada. Poland was presented with four buffalo, Hungary two. The donation of elk and buffalo to the Berlin Zoological Society in 1936 led Reichsjägermeister (Master of the Hunt) Hermann Goering to ask Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King for more information about the national parks and conservation in Canada. King rejected the Parks Branch's first response—a foot-high stack of pamphlets—as insufficient, and had staff instead write a report amalgamating all available federal and provincial material. It may well be that the most comprehensive document to that point on Canadian environmental policy was one commissioned for Nazi Germany. I have yet to find evidence that Canada kept a copy.¹⁹

The Parks Branch also accommodated the requests of scientists, and justified donations in the name of science. Scientists were given permits to trap birds, fish, amphibians, and rodents in the parks.²⁰ Marten were transported to an Albertan fur farming project “for experimental purposes,” and a bighorn sheep, replacing one killed in an earlier shipment, was sent to a Texas A&M University lab “for the sake of science.”²¹ The respect accorded science was in keeping with the Parks Branch's broader attempt of the day to make its management of wildlife more scientific. In the 1930s, staff came to interpret the ecological concept of carrying capacity, that there is a maximum population of a species that a given area can sustain, to mean that there is always a right number for all species in all places.²² Parks managers soon talked of wildlife “slums” and of “surplus” wildlife. Such thinking did not simply result in two categories of wildlife, wanted and unwanted: since the “surplus” animals were whichever ones wandered into paddocks or crosshairs, all park animals were effectively reconceptualized. Beginning in the 1940s, the Parks Branch developed much more extensive programs to donate breeding stock to the Canadian North, while establishing slaughter programs of species believed to be overpopulating.²³

The great majority of requests for wildlife came from individuals and private businesses, and were almost always refused. The Parks Branch quite reasonably feared that if it permitted some, it would be swamped with more. Also, businesses and individuals who wanted these animals usually had plans to charge for their breeding or display, and the Parks Branch did not want its wildlife cheapened by becoming associated with money. The agency's standard rejection letter of the era read in part, “There are no surplus animals in the Parks, except bison, for disposal to private interests. . . . Commercialization of the Park animals except bison is not encouraged by this Branch in any way.”²⁴ (However, for a brief time during the Depression, the Parks Branch—needing funds and deciding that if animals were surplus, why not give them away, and if giving them away, why not sell them—actually did put prices on surplus wildlife: \$100 for moose, \$150 for Rocky Mountain goat, and so on.²⁵ This policy was quickly reversed.)

The fact that the National Parks Branch was willing to donate wildlife to public zoos but not private ones, to scientists but not businessmen, and to government agencies, universities, and heads of state suggests to me what the agency was getting out of the arrangement: cultural power. Donating wildlife was a way to demonstrate the wealth of nature at the Branch's control, demonstrate the Branch's generosity, raise the Branch to the same plane as the recipients (who also had cultural power), and forge alliances with them. It also flattered both donor and recipient, reinforcing their cultural positions and setting them apart from the mass of humanity obliged to follow park regulations. And for the exceptional, exceptions to policy could always be made. So, for example, publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, a private breeder, was allowed to buy buffalo for his San Simeon estate.²⁶

Yet other requests we might expect to see approved were not. In 1929, for example, Commissioner James B. Harkin himself rejected the appeal of His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester (uncle to Elizabeth) to shoot a grizzly bear as a memento of a trip to Banff. Harkin referred to the “likelihood [of a] public reaction against any violation of sanctuary.”²⁷ The Parks Branch was in a tricky spot. On the one hand, it would have liked acknowledgement and credit when handing over wildlife. The agency occasionally even wrote press releases about its very largest donations projects. On the other hand, it was understood that to receive attention might lead to criticism from politicians, wildlife groups, and the general public. The agency seems to have recognized that donating wildlife did not fit well with the overall parks philosophy. (Having said that, I found not a single letter in more than a half-century of parks correspondence of a staff person philosophically opposed to the practice.) It was also understood that publicizing the donations would likely lead to more requests. I believe that is why the agency never formalized its donations work, and that the work never became official policy discussed in its regulations or annual reports. This succeeded in keeping the practice quiet, but it also meant that staff in the Parks Branch largely invented and reinvented procedures as they went along. The lack of regulations did not protect the wildlife involved and eventually led to some groups exploiting the Branch’s generosity.

Favourable Publicity

After 1945, many zoos of continental Europe were desperate for wildlife, their stock having been bombed or barbecued during the war. The Parks Branch initially promised three buffalo to Dutch zoos, but expressed reservations when asked for a dozen more. Canada’s military mission to Germany likewise asked the parks for buffalo, though External Affairs stepped in and made the legitimate point that, for the moment, “aid” should be limited to the more traditional food and shelter.²⁸ Other curious diplomatic moments occurred. In 1946, the Prague Zoo asked Canada for beaver and otter. Parks Branch staff was unsure what to do: Czechoslovakia had been liberated by the Russians, who were now supporting the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Did a gift of wildlife constitute providing comfort to the enemy? While parks staff debated the zoo’s request, in 1948 the Communists (in an apparently unrelated development) staged a coup. Undersecretary of State for External Affairs Lester B. Pearson, who a decade later would win the Nobel Peace Prize and become Prime Minister of Canada, wisely counselled parks staff that if for some reason they could not *catch* the animals—hint, hint—they could not be blamed for being unaccommodating. Pearson concluded, “Could you tell Mr. Klima [the Czech *chargé d’affaires* in Canada] that the otters which you have already earmarked are social democrats in tendency, and are now unwilling to join communist animals in the Prague Zoo, where, no doubt, a purge has already taken place!”²⁹ Nonetheless, after another plea from the Czechs, two Canadian beaver defected.

Though kidding, Pearson was right to recognize the wildlife as symbols of Canada. If they weren’t, there was no reason to donate them, and no reason for anyone to ask for them. When zoos, governments, and heads of state sought animals from Canada, they tended to seek ones associated with Canada, like the beaver. I found no requests for frogs, or snakes, or fish. Requests sometimes even arrived simply for “typical” Canadian animals, and parks staff knew that the petitioners did not want dogs or cats: they wanted wild mammals native to Canada and, if possible,

only Canada. In the immediate postwar period, buffalo, raccoons, chipmunks, and skunks travelled from Canada to Ireland as four-footed ambassadors; two buffalo flew first class to Chile, at a cost to the Chilean government of \$16,000. And in the single largest shipment I have found, 3 elk, 3 buffalo, 10 wolves, 1 wolverine, 2 pumas, 8 raccoon, 12 marmots, 6 beaver, 2 skunks, and 24 chipmunks were sent to the Edinburgh Zoo.³⁰ (The inclusion of chipmunks is especially strange. In 1913 North American grey squirrels escaped from the Edinburgh Zoo, and in time drove native red squirrels out of the city and surrounding counties. One wonders why the zoo needed—or wanted—more.³¹)

Calls for Canadian parks wildlife rose dramatically in the 1950s.³² Baby-booming North American families wanted to see wildlife, so zoos and wildlife agencies needed more animals. Every donation, especially the well-publicized ones, in turn made the parks seem more like giant pet stores. The Branch instituted some changes, first in declaring that only some specific animals could be donated: “elk, bear, beaver, raccoon, chipmunks, and possibly deer,” according to its standard letter of the day. “Buffalo could be lent.”³³ To save the park costs, petitioners were for a time allowed to catch specimens on their own, though “Trapping and shooting is to be done in such a manner as not to attract public attention.”³⁴ Other conditions were periodically added, such that scenery could not be destroyed, that the Branch reserved the right to repossession, and so on.

But dealings with two parties, Al Oeming and Walt Disney, suggested that control of the donations process was slipping away from the national parks agency. Oeming was both President of the Edmonton Zoological Society and operator of a small game farm; he first received permits from the parks for wildlife in 1956 after being vague about whether the animals were for his own business. He was always careful to couch his requests in scientific terms. Wolverines were needed for “behaviour and breeding studies,” donated muskox could “advance our knowledge of such little studied animals,” and on his letterhead his game farm was a “Research Centre for Cold Climate Animals/ Public Education and Conservation/Supply Base for Zoological Gardens.”³⁵ But he was also an entertainer. Three paragraphs after describing the scientific value of a muskox program, he declared, “Wrestling promotions are still my bread and butter.”³⁶ Oeming quickly became the Parks Branch’s worst-case scenario. First, he seemed ready to continue requesting animals indefinitely, using the parks as a breeding ground for valuable animals. Second, he threatened to actually compete with the Branch, particularly in the raising of buffalo. Third, there was indication that he was taking park animals and flipping them he sold eight mule deer in the United States shortly after receiving four from Waterton Lakes National Park, though he swore they weren’t the same ones. Yet his requests for parks wildlife continued to be approved. He was always careful to outline precedent, refer to the scientific benefit, and ask for a relatively small number—never more than eight—of only a few species in any given year. In 1962, having been given a permit for 24 animals the previous year (six mountain goat, six caribou, six mule deer, six bighorn sheep) and catching only 15, Oeming asked for another 24. The minister in charge of the parks wrote Oeming personally, explaining that the agency was concerned about the public’s reaction if they got wind of this apparent breach in the parks philosophy, and asking him to accept just four of each animal. Oeming still groused: would the public see a philosophical distinction between 16 animals and 24? Oeming was given what he wanted.³⁷

It would be a mistake, however, to see the Parks Branch simply as a put-upon body, forced into animal donations by devious opportunists. When the agency felt in control of the process, when it believed it stood to benefit from giving wildlife away, it was quite happy to. This is evident in its relationship with Walt Disney. In 1954, the Disney studios asked to film some wolverine footage in Banff. Parks Director J. R. B. Coleman wrote Banff that everything possible should be done to oblige, “since favourable publicity will be given the wildlife resources of the National Parks and to the Parks staff.”³⁸ When the film crew arrived, wardens trapped two wolverines—the first of many that would eventually be used. The filmmakers then started violating park regulations. They trapped and fattened park rodents to feed the wolverines. The crew tired of this, and imported lemmings obtained from labs (and so probably containing the disease listeriosis). They drugged the wolverines to make filming easier. The Parks Branch felt obliged to act: the animals were moved just outside the park, where regulations did not apply. Could there be a more cynical way to demonstrate that wildlife within the park were being accorded protection? A year after the Banff wolverine population had been estimated at 23,³⁹ 14 were extradited to a five-acre compound enclosed with electrified fence. The wolverines were very aggressive at first and would throw themselves against the wire, injuring their faces. But they were soon tamed by the Disney crew, and would eat from their caretakers’ hands. As a result, they could not be returned to the wild afterward. A few were given to zoos, others to scientists, and the rest were presumably destroyed.⁴⁰

The Parks Branch continued to assist Uncle Walt in the following years, supplying black bears in 1958 and more wolverines in 1964. But the agency grew less starry-eyed in these dealings. When a mountain lion was trapped for Disney in 1965, the park contacted the filmmakers to pick it up and never heard back; much the same happened with two wolverines caught for them. When Disney wrote asking for grizzly and cougar—the letter that started my research into the donations program—the Parks Branch was still willing to help, but not so excited by the opportunity. One administrator suggested that Disney should be directed to get all the wildlife it needed at Al Oeming’s game farm.⁴¹

Shipping Fever

In 1966, the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature petitioned the Parks Branch for a bison specimen, which it hoped to stuff and display alongside horse and rider to illustrate the great buffalo hunts of the past. Assistant Parks Director John Nicol replied that bison should be no problem, and “I may even be able to assist you with the horse, however, the subject of the rider is a problem. No one from this Branch seems prepared to volunteer to become a museum specimen for such a worthy cause.”⁴² A joke, but perhaps hiding a larger truth, that the parks staff felt they were sacrificing enough. The parks system in the 1960s was receiving more petitions for wildlife than ever, even as more restrictions on the process were being established. I believe that three factors gradually moved the Parks Branch away from donating wildlife in this era. First, the budding environmental movement, predicated on the growing awareness of how humans were affecting nature, likely led visitors and staff alike to believe more strongly that, in parks, nature should be granted complete protection. Staff consequently saw far less publicity value—and far greater

potential of harm—in giving animals away. But even in this period, there are no memos or letters within the parks files opposing the donation of animals on philosophical grounds.

The second—and, I would argue, the most important—reason the Parks Branch grew disaffected with wildlife donations was the sheer cost of time, money, and energy that had to be devoted to it. Park wardens, scientists, and managers were involved; crates had to be custom built at considerable cost; trucks were driven to inaccessible corners of the park; and even helicopters were flown in. One administrator suggested that since wildlife capture was becoming a full-time job, why not actually train a few wardens to do it exclusively?⁴³ This might have been a sensible idea, but the Branch did not wish to institutionalize the process to that degree. In 1966 the Director worried that the parks would soon be inundated with requests from new zoos created as Centennial projects, and asked whether there was some way to avoid “subsidizing the consignees.”⁴⁴ Leaving wildlife alone, besides being consistent with the parks mandate, tended to be easier and cheaper than donating them.

The third factor, and the most unrelenting and difficult-to-ignore problem throughout this entire history, was the injuries and deaths to wildlife sustained in the process of trapping, holding, shipping, and releasing them. Two beaver on the way to London Zoo were killed by a third, in conditions a warden later compared to “Chinese coolies in the hold of a ship.” A “centennial beaver” being flown to the Paris Zoo in 1967 gave birth on the airplane, and in the excitement ate her young. A beaver heading to New Zealand starved.⁴⁵ Many animals died mysteriously just after arrival in their new homes: a moose in the Pittsburgh Zoo, four of 22 marten relocated for restocking purposes, a beaver at the Channel Islands Zoo, and a bighorn sheep sent to Texas A&M.⁴⁶ It took decades for such cases of “nerves” to be understood as “shipping fever” pneumonia, which results when animals are brought together from diverse geographies and genetic backgrounds.⁴⁷ From my reading of hundreds of cases where the Parks Branch donated wildlife, I would estimate that 25 percent of the animals died during the process—and that figure was surprisingly consistent over time.⁴⁸

Rocky Mountain goats were especially fragile creatures. Parks staff dreaded requests for them. There was a long stream of reports throughout the decades of these animals dying from scours, fractures (resulting in their having to be put down), “fright,” shipping fever, and other diagnoses.⁴⁹ In a 1965 case, one goat captured in Banff was dead before the truck was out of the park. The Superintendent who reported this incident guessed that, over time, more than half of all Rocky Mountain goats being donated were “lost in shipping.” He urged his superiors in Ottawa to put an end to the practice of donating them. He was told that under existing guidelines, requests for them were still legitimate and would continue to be approved.⁵⁰

The 1960s are an odd decade for any historian of the Canadian state to research, because bureaucrats suddenly seemed to circulate a great deal more paper and say a whole lot less—as if they realized, for the first time, that what they put to print might be retained and they might be asked to defend it. For the longest time, I believed simply because I stopped seeing references to wildlife donations beyond the mid-1960s that the program had petered out around then. But years later I came across a few letters that said otherwise. In 1967, the Parks Director wrote of receiving “an ever increasing number” of inquiries for animals, and highlighted new conditions that would be put on all requests. Publicly owned organizations now had to provide written approval from their province; assure all health requirements were met; indemnify the government

from claims; pay crating, shipping, and out-of-pocket expenses; and so on—nine conditions in all.⁵¹ This policy—an administrative measure designed to solve what was seen as an administrative problem—was notably directed at small, publicly run zoos. Having long before instituted policy that justified refusing individuals, the parks were now essentially weeding out another group with which they saw no value in being associated. More surprising to me was the discovery of a 1970 “price list.” The Parks Branch had recently introduced a cost recovery practice when donating wildlife, and was already raising its prices. Turtles, for example, would cost \$1, grizzly bears \$500. At \$400, mountain goats were the second most costly animals, presumably because of their fragility.⁵² Though the Branch was not actually selling wildlife, but rather defining the expenses incurred in donating them, its willingness to put a dollar figure on them—the first time it was willing to do so since the Great Depression—is still surprising. The parks system had been around for more than 80 years, the Parks Branch for 60, but even the people in charge of parks still found it difficult to conceive of there being nature beyond all economic calculation.

In 1973, Director Nicol drafted a policy document entitled “Control and Disposal of Surplus Animals in National Parks.” Over the decades, parks scientists and managers had grown confident that they knew how many of each animal population should be in each park, and therefore what numbers were “surplus.” Nicol’s innovation was in arguing that all management questions related to surplus—should wildlife be given away? to whom? should they be killed? how should the meat be distributed?—were in fact related, and that too often in the past, “A response to demand has been the order of the day.” The parks’ own needs must instead be paramount. In respect to donating wildlife, Nicol described how the parks would hereafter keep on hand lists of accredited institutions, ask them yearly if they had any wildlife needs, and supply them, with the Director’s approval, only in the process of fulfilling park management objectives.⁵³ What is striking is that Nicol’s document, the most comprehensive and purposeful statement the Parks Branch ever made about donating wildlife, was written in an era when actual requests were all but disappearing. Maybe these things are related, of course: maybe tightening up the process sufficiently discouraged groups from asking for wildlife, thus drawing to a close a practice that had no place in modern parks management. Or maybe by the 1970s people simply assumed that the Canadian national parks system would certainly not be giving wildlife away.

Conclusion

“The cook . . . peels the potatoes but he does not do it on the dining room table,” an early 20th century Canadian historian cautioned.⁵⁴ He meant that historians should write history, not about how history is written. But the textbook you are reading is about exactly that, or that as well. As much as I want you to see the parks system’s history of donating wildlife exactly as I do, with the same trends, the same larger meanings, I also want you to think about how that history was conceived and presented here.

Consider how I told the story. For one thing, I knew when I began that, come hell or high water, this would be a history of 7,500 words, not 750 or 75,000. The medium—an essay of a length an undergraduate student could conceivably read the night before class—defined the message. This necessitated wearing away the rough edges, streamlining the story down to what

I took to be important turning points and interesting moments. More intrusively, I used the writings of a whole group of people spread across the country, working a broad range of jobs over more than a half-century, to create the history of a single protagonist, “the Parks Branch.” But of course there was no “Parks Branch,” just a series of people in its employ, making individual decisions in very specific contexts. True they presumably acted as representatives of existing or hoped-for Parks Branch policies—but this is still problematic when one of my arguments is that there often was no explicit policy and only limited institutional memory, so staff did not act consistently. In much the same way I simplified matters by writing as if this were a history of only the Parks Branch, as if the agency was entirely free to act as it wished. The walk-on roles by Mackenzie King and Lester B. Pearson show this isn’t really true: the Parks Branch was always under some pressure from politicians, government bodies, the public, and other actors to behave in certain ways—and staff self-imposed such pressure, too. But simplifications like the ones I employed are necessary to tell stories of groups of people, and there are good reasons for telling such stories.

Consider also what stories I didn’t tell. There are the stories internal to the parks system that shaped decisions relating to donations: for example, the story of First Nations prohibited from hunting in the parks, and wildlife populations increasing as a result to the point that park staffers culled their numbers . . . and gave the meat to First Nations. There are also stories external to the parks system that affected the donations program markedly, like the Great Depression or the development of the tranquilizer gun. I regret not being able to describe the lives of the many animals involved, or their deaths. I regret ignoring all the work done every day by countless Canadian Parks Branch staff members in saving and preserving wildlife. Beyond all this, many stories are untold because their elements were never properly understood, never written down, never held onto, never archived, never accessed. The history I have written is a very, very small subset of the past it describes. And that is true of all history.

What does the history told here tell us about Canadian environmental history? I hope at least four things. First, it demonstrates the association between nation and nature. Canada the political space defines itself largely by Canada the physical space and the natural elements within it. Climate, foliage, seasons, landscapes, and wildlife are given larger meaning: they stand in for the nation. In some cases, as with internationally donated wildlife, nature sometimes even acts as our ambassador when abroad. Second (and related to the first), it demonstrates that we find much to value in nature—but that modernity makes it difficult to think of value in terms entirely divorced from economic value. Even staff at the Canadian Parks Branch, responsible for keeping parcels of nature above commerce, could not help themselves and at times thought of the parks and their contents in the same terms as everywhere else. Third (and related to the second), it demonstrates that parks are good places to see nature, but also culture. Perhaps because parks are supposed to be, but aren’t, the antithesis of how nature is treated in the rest of a society, they end up being very clear expressions of that society. Fourth (and related to the third), it demonstrates how useful the study of governments can be to environmental history: they are both reflections and determinants of our thoughts about and actions toward nature. And, of course, governments save and store more stuff than other groups do.

There were times when researching at Library and Archives Canada that I wished the Parks Branch had thrown out more. I would find myself mired in a back-and-forth Ottawa-and-Jasper correspondence about the shipment of an otter, and question my career choice. I wasn't saving these animals; I wasn't even influencing present-day parks policy. I would gaze out the window at civil servants hustling across the Portage Bridge—some on their way to work at Parks Canada—and wonder if I should be joining them. I convinced myself otherwise. Looking out the window, I came to believe that though a healthy society spends most of its energies trained on the present and the future, a healthy society also devotes some of its energies to remembering and understanding its past. The historian's job is to tell or remind people today about the lives of people—and other animals—in the past. That's it. Doing so goes a small way to fulfilling the obligation that (admittedly, some of) the people of (admittedly, some of) the past are not forgotten. And it holds a promise and a threat to people of today, that they won't be forgotten either. Getting people to read such history requires that it be written; that it be written requires that it be researched thoroughly. So I would turn away from the window, open another box of files, and get back to work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the nature of the Parks Canada archival collection—mostly correspondence written between the head office and staff in individual parks—shape what history can be told from it?
2. Are primary sources more trustworthy than secondary sources because they were written during the time in question, or are they less trustworthy for the same reason?
3. Why do many Canadians (and others) prefer nature to be “wild” and unpeopled?
4. Parks managers are often placed in situations where they have to value some lives above others. Deer, for example, prefer to feed on agricultural crops when they can find them, may host parasites like lungworm, and serve as food for carnivores like wolves. Managers can find themselves trying to keep the deer from farmers' fields, dosing them to kill parasites, and shooting wolves to limit predation. How do you think managers make these decisions about which animals to protect? How should they?
5. Why do animals serve as such good symbols for a nation? Which animal makes the best symbol of Canada: goose, beaver, moose, or muskox? Why?
6. Does wildlife seem a more “natural” topic for environmental history than other animals do? Can there be an environmental history of livestock? Of pets?
7. What makes something a gift? How is an exchange of gifts different from trade? Why is it important that the animals discussed in this chapter were “donated”?
8. Is historical research in large paper archival collections like the one discussed here still relevant in the digital age? How might technology change such research?

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NOTES

1. The federal agency in charge of national parks in Canada has gone by a number of names since its 1911 founding. In this chapter I will refer to it in historical contexts as the National Parks Branch, and in present-day terms by the name it took in 1973, Parks Canada.
2. This was only in RG (Record Group) 84, Parks Canada's own holdings. There was perhaps an equal amount of parks-related material in the collections of Indian and Northern Affairs (RG22), Interior (RG15), Canadian Wildlife Service (RG109), and others. *National Archives of Canada: Government Archives Division*, compiled by Cynthia Lovering (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1991).
3. The case study that follows suggests that though bureaucracies keep files to create an institutional memory, they are often institutionally incapable of using the files to remember.
4. I do recognize the irony: this chapter is largely a secondary source, interpreting Parks Canada in the 20th century. (Though it is also a primary source, if you are studying historians' experiences in early 21st-century Canada.)
5. For discussion of this evolution, see Chad Gaffield, "Primary Sources, Historical Thinking, and the Emerging Redefinition of the B.A. as a Research Degree," *Facsimile* nos. 23–35 (2000–2001): pp. 12–17. The Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History project—www.canadianmysteries.ca is a fine example of how teachers are bringing the study of primary sources to students.
6. Occasionally, I have stumbled upon great stories—like Martin Luther King being turned away from Fundy National Park in 1960. See Alan MacEachern, "Why Martin Luther King Didn't Spend His Summer Vacation in Canada," *The Globe and Mail*, January 14, 1995, p. D2.
7. Research at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) eventually led me to the LAC Western Regional Centre, a warehouse in an industrial section on the outskirts of Edmonton. As the notes to this chapter will attest, the Parks Canada material there also proved very useful.
8. Erwin L. Verity to Winston Mair, chief, National Parks Branch, May 14, 1965, RG84 vol. 2133, file U261 vol. 2, LAC. Mair to Verity, June 1, 1965, *ibid*.
9. See James Harkin, National Parks commissioner, to W. W. Cory, deputy minister of the Interior, February 1, 1914, RG84 vol. 137, file B239, LAC.
10. RG84 vol. 137, file B238, LAC.
11. As reported by Woodworth to Banff Superintendent S. J. Clarke, September 1917, *ibid*.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Woodworth to Clarke, 8 June 1914, *ibid*.
14. The parks' policy of donating buffalo to museums and zoological gardens was mentioned in the House of Commons in 1928, and picked up by the *Toronto Star*, with a resultant rush of requests by individuals wanting their own buffalo.

15. See, for example, RG84 vol. 34, file U210 vol. 2, LAC; and RG84 acc. E1985-86/147, box 2 file A10 pt. 1, LAC Edmonton.
16. RG84 acc. E1985-86/147, box 10 file G1 pt. 2, LAC Edmonton.
17. See Harkin to O.H. Patrick, president, Calgary Zoological Society, June 29, 1931, RG84 acc. E1985-86/147, box 2 file A10 pt. 3, LAC Edmonton. Years later, the Calgary Zoological Society asked permission to credit the parks as the origin of some exhibited animals; the Branch approved on the condition that the sign be simple and brief. See J. R. B. Coleman to superintendent, Banff National Park, June 25, 1954, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 114 file 295 pt. 3, LAC Edmonton.
18. See *Calgary Herald*, December 3, 1938.
19. The previous prime minister, R. B. Bennett, had apparently approved the transfer of animals prior to King taking power. See King papers, pp. 185490–1 and 187908, LAC. On Goering’s environmental interests, see, for example, Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1996): pp. 67–69. On King and Nazi Germany, see Brian Nolan, *King’s War: Mackenzie King and the Politics of War, 1939–1945* (Toronto: Fawcett Crest, 1988): p. 15. On the parks document, see King to T. A. Crerar, Minister of the Interior, July 10 and July 24, 1937, King papers, pp. 200164 and 200184, LAC; and “E.A.P.” to King, July 1937, King papers, p. 200186, LAC.
20. See, for example, RG84 acc. E1985-86-147, box 17 file P11, LAC Edmonton. On the Victorian relationship between zoos and science, see Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987): pp. 210–11.
21. Parks Controller F. H. H. Williamson to superintendent, Banff, March 5, 1940, RG 84 vol. 137, file B77, LAC; and Parks Controller James Smart to W. D. Taylor, March 24, 1941, RG84 vol. 34, U210 vol. 4, LAC.
22. R. Y. Edwards and C. David Fowle, “The Concept of Carrying Capacity,” Transactions of the Twentieth North American Wildlife Conference (Washington, DC: Wildlife Management Institute, 1955): pp. 589–602, discusses how a supposedly scientific term such as this can lose precise meaning due to its popularity and apparent universal applicability. In 1955, the authors were already writing that “most definitions of carrying capacity are vague and that some are almost meaningless.” (589)
23. On these breeding programs, see Chapter 5 of Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada’s Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006): pp. 121–48.
24. Harkin to Col. E. E. Johnson, Canton, Illinois, January 17, 1928, RG84 vol. 34, U210 vol. 2, LAC.
25. Hoyes Lloyd to Harkin, September 16, 1932, *ibid.* In a remarkable footnote to this episode, the assistant director of the Branch, F. H. H. Williamson, handwrote a warning to Harkin: “Do not tell Superintendent of policy or prices fixed.” The Branch had recently banned its wardens from selling the furs of animals accidentally caught in traps meant to catch predators: it was feared that some wardens had been operating their own private fur trade in the parks. Having just barred staff on the ground from profiting by the sale of animals, the head office wanted to hide the fact that it would be doing the same thing. Williamson to Harkin, April 1934, RG84 vol. 34, file U210 vol. 3, LAC.
26. See RG84 vol. 34, U210 vol. 3, LAC.
27. Harkin to Banff Superintendent Stronach, May 28, 1929, RG84 vol. 137, file B212, LAC. The Superintendent had recommended approval, since “They are plentiful in the park and if one [sic] shot would be less possibility of danger to tourists from them.”
28. See *Montreal Gazette*, December 28, 1946.

29. “Mike” (Pearson) to Hugh Keenleyside, deputy minister, Department of Mines and Resources, May 19, 1948, RG22 vol. 134, file 32-2-8 pt. 1, LAC.
30. See *ibid.*, and RG84 vol. 34, file U210 vol. 5, LAC.
31. Personal communication with Dr. Mel Tonkin, co-ordinator of the Scottish Wildlife Trust’s Scottish Squirrel Survey, May 31, 2007.
32. See James Hutchison, director, National Parks Branch, to F. H. Collins, commissioner, Yukon, February 4, 1957, RG84, vol. 49, file U210 vol. 6, LAC.
33. For example, James Smart to Germain Bourassa, Department of Agriculture, Quebec, January 10, 1952, RG84 vol. 34, file U210 vol. 5, LAC. But in practice, many more requests were approved. In a single file from the 1950s, the following requests from zoos and fish and game clubs were approved: beaver to Windemere, British Columbia; marmots, gophers, and ptarmigan to Moose Jaw; mule deer to Charlesbourg, Quebec; elk and Rocky Mountain sheep to Calgary; Rocky Mountain sheep and wolverine to Winnipeg; Rocky Mountain sheep and goats, and otter to Rapid City, South Dakota; black bear to Toronto; lynx to London, England; Rocky Mountain sheep and elk to Quebec; wolverine, elk, Rocky mountain sheep, and goats to Granby, Quebec; lynx and wolverine to Edinburgh; Rocky Mountain sheep to Catskills, New York; and Rocky Mountain sheep to Prof. Ian McTaggart-Cowan of UBC. RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 114 file 295 pt. 3, LAC Edmonton.
34. Permit, January 9, 1956, RG84 vol. 445, file WLU302 pt. 1, LAC.
35. Cited in J. R. B. Coleman, chief, National Parks Division, to W. F. Lothian, April 1956, RG84 vol. 49, file U210 vol. 6, LAC; Oeming to F. J. G. Cunningham, assistant to deputy minister, January 10, 1958, RG22 vol. 368, file 370-5 pt. 1, LAC; and, for example, Oeming to Atkinson, superintendent, Jasper National Park, September 27, 1961, RG84 vol. 2128, file U210 vol. 7, LAC.
36. Oeming to F. J. G. Cunningham, assistant to deputy minister, January 10, 1958, RG22 vol. 368, file 370-5 pt. 1, LAC.
37. See RG84 vol. 2128, file U210 vol. 7, LAC; and RG84 vol. 477, file U210 vol. 8, LAC for the entire Oeming correspondence. The minister was Walter Dinsdale, minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources from 1960–63, and a friend of Oeming’s. Through Dinsdale rarely interceded directly on Oeming’s behalf (and was not minister in the early years of his relationship with the Branch), it may well be that the Branch acted on what it believed would be its minister’s wishes.
38. Coleman to Superintendent, Banff National Park, February 1, 1954, RG84 vol. 512, file B283 pt. 1, LAC. The remainder of the episode is in this file.
39. Hutchison to John C. Anderson, February 18, 1954, RG 84 vol. 181, file U300, LAC.
40. One wolverine escaped. Disney’s Erwin Verity reported to the Branch, “We are darned sorry to have lost this animal and, believe me, the boys feel badly. . . . [E]vidently, this animal’s cunning exceeded the intelligence of his human captors.” Verity to B. I. M. Strong, superintendent, Banff National Park, September 9, 1954, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 113 file 283, LAC Edmonton. We know so much about the entire wolverine episode because Banff warden H. U. Green was greatly interested in the scientific value of parks, and afterward wrote a report on what lessons the affair offered on wolverine biology and behaviour. “Notes on the Trapping, Biology, and Behaviour of the Wolverine,” May 12, 1956, RG84 vol. 512, file B283 pt. 1, LAC.
41. See W. E. Stevens, regional superintendent, to B. I. M. Strong, chief, National Parks Division, June 29, 1965, RG84 vol. 2128, file U210 pt. 10, LAC.

42. Nicol to J. D. Herbert, director, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, September 29, 1966, *ibid.*
43. W. E. Stevens, regional superintendent, to B. I. M. Strong, chief, National Parks Division, June 29, 1965, *ibid.*
44. Coleman to regional director, Western Region, March 23, 1966, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 114 file 295 pt. 4, LAC Edmonton.
45. H. U. Green, special warden, Banff National Park, to James Smart, director, September 5, 1946, RG84 vol. 512, file B272 vol. 2, LAC; G. Davies, Parks Management Section, to Flanagan, May 26, 1967, RG84 vol. 2128, file U210 vol. 11, LAC; and J. S. Brigham, Town Clerk, Auckland, New Zealand, to Harkin, February 14, 1930, RG84 acc. E1985-86/147, box 2 file A10 pt. 3, LAC Edmonton.
46. H. U. Green, Special Warden, Banff National Park, February 6, 1946, RG84 vol. 137, file B277, LAC; F. H. H. Williamson to Gibson, June 30, 1938, RG84 vol. 34, file U210 vol. 3, LAC; and James Smart to W. D. Taylor, March 24, 1941, RG84 vol. 34, file U210 vol. 4, LAC. Buffalo sent to Newfoundland were allegedly eaten by Newfoundlanders, but that is another story. Alex. J. Reeve, assistant director, to Charron, October 17, 1967, RG84 vol. 2128, file U210 pt. 11, LAC.
47. See The Merck Veterinary manual, <http://www.merckvetmanual.com/mvm/index.jsp> (accessed November 15, 2007).
48. The rate may well have been higher. If an animal died in the process of being trapped, wardens had little motivation to report the death to anyone.
49. The Parks Branch asked the Canadian Wildlife Service's Donald A. Flook to study the matter in 1958, but he declined, saying that, as the only full-time biologist overseeing 10 parks, he could not possibly. Besides, he said, there was the question of whether "this disposal of park animals is in keeping with park ideals." No parks staffer replied. This was the closest there ever came to an internal debate of whether donating wildlife was a legitimate practice for the Canadian parks system to be involved in. Flook to chief, Canadian Wildlife Service, August 19, 1958, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 114 file 295 pt. 3, LAC Edmonton.
50. Dempster to Coleman correspondence, June 1965, RG84 vol. 477, file U210 vol. 9, LAC. Removal of animals also had broader ecological effects. For example, mountain goat bands do not tend to intermingle, so capture of just a few members of the band could spell the end for the entire band.
51. Coleman to regional directors, January 16, 1967, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 114 file 295 pt. 5, LAC Edmonton. Coleman includes a sample of the new policy, Alex J. Reeve, assistant director, National Parks, to A. G. Griswold, biologist, Halton Region Conservation Authority, January 3, 1967.
52. The recipient also paid for health testing and crating, which could be very expensive. Jean Charron, acting director, to regional directors, January 23, 1970, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 155 file 62/7-A2-3, LAC Edmonton.
53. John I. Nicol, director, to regional directors, February 20, 1973, RG84 acc. E1997-98/160, box 155 file 62/7-A2, LAC Edmonton.
54. George M. Wrong, "The Historian and Society," *Canadian Historical Review* 14 (March 1933): p. 8, cited in Marlene Shore, ed., *The Contested Past: Reading Canada's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002): p. 67. He might well think so: his principle was hardly original. Seven years earlier, W. S. Wallace had written, "nothing damns a book so quickly as excessive and indiscriminate annotation and citation of authorities: one might as well bring the kitchen utensils into the dining-room." *Canadian Historical Review* 7 no. 3 (September 1926): p. 201.

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