



Crown-Indigenous Relations  
and Northern Affairs Canada

Relations Couronne-Autochtones  
et Affaires du Nord Canada

# Departmental Records Held by ISC/CIRNAC

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# A “Wealth of Records”

## 268 years of Record Keeping

- Since the establishment of the Indian Department in 1755, records have been gathered, classified and stored on the administration of Indigenous Affairs.
- Nearly every aspect of these activities have corresponding files that were created.
- For example:
  - Treaty-making and implementation
  - Reserve creation and management
  - Estates
  - Band governance
  - Administration of programs and services
  - Funding
  - Schools





# Who Manages the Records?

- There are millions of records that were created by the various entities that managed Indigenous Affairs
  - Indian Department (1755-1860)
  - Indian Affairs Branch (1860-1880)
  - Department of Indian Affairs (1880-1936)
  - Indian Affairs Branch (1936-1966)
  - Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (1966-2019)
  - CIRNAC and ISC (2019- )
- The majority of historic records are not held by CIRNAC and ISC
  - Documents considered no longer of “business value” are either destroyed or transferred to Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in accordance with its disposition requirements for federal records.
  - There is no set timing for the transfer of records from a department to LAC as it is up to each department to determine how long records are needed to conduct the business of the department.
  - Only documents identified as having “archival value” by LAC are transferred and retained in the Archives, when the department no longer requires them.
  - LAC uses archival principles and procedures to determine which records have “archival value”





Fire in the West Block of the Parliament Buildings. February 11th, 1897.

Credit: D.A. McLaughlin / Library and Archives Canada / C-017502





# Where are the All the Records?

- Not all records created by the various entities that managed Indigenous Affairs are kept or have survived.
- Accidental destruction:
  - Fires in government buildings that resulted in the destruction of records, most notably, the February 1897 fire in the East Block of Parliament that held both the Dominion Archives and the Department of Indian Affairs.
  - Fires at the homes and offices of Indian Agents and regional offices also resulted in lost documents
  - Lost documents: regional records were consolidated at several key periods (eg. in 1909). While the goal was to preserve the integrity of the collection, many documents were lost in transit from the field offices to Ottawa
- Planned destruction:
  - Policies around why to destroy government records have evolved considerably since the establishment of the Dominion Archives of Canada in 1872.
  - Departments have always had the authority to destroy documents deemed to be “no archival value” instead of transferring them to the Archives. This could include duplicate copies, simple notes, purchase vouchers or process specific documents-
- Officials of the Department argued on several occasions that “Indian Affairs” records needed to be preserved as much as possible:
  - Lawrence Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent General in 1882
  - Duncan Campbell Scott, as Chief Accountant in 1890
  - Hayter Reed, Deputy Superintendent General in 1895
- Suggested readings: [Sean Darcy, “Evolution of the DIA’S Central Registry Record Keeping”](#), and [Bill Russell, “The White Man’s Paper Burden”](#)





# Accessing Records: LAC

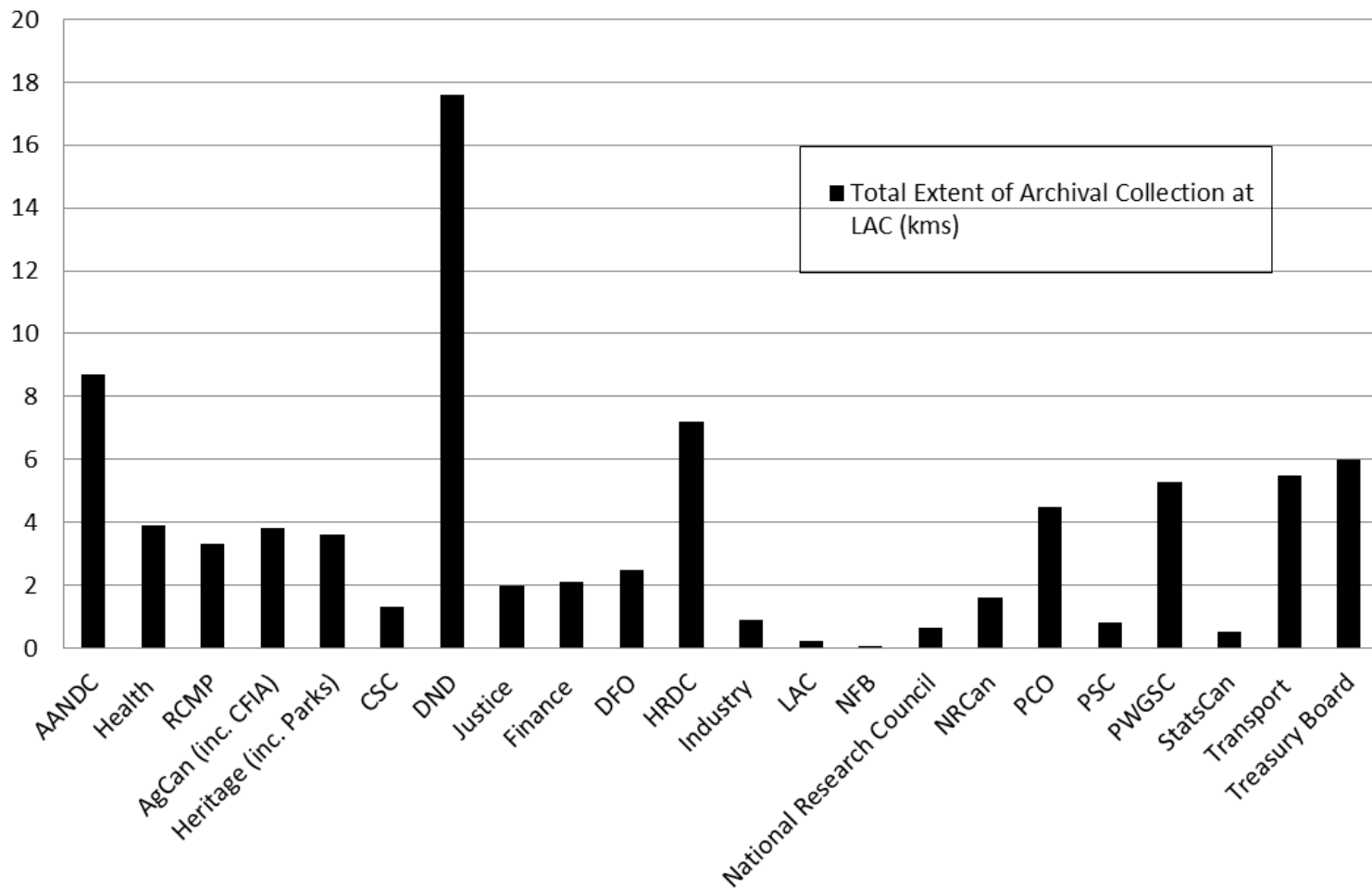
- Searching for Records
  - LAC's [Indigenous History Portal](#)
    - [Indian Residential School Records Portal](#)
  - Specific Government collections:
    - RG10 – Indian and Northern Affairs Records Group
    - RG28 – Health Canada
    - RG18 - RCMP
- Limits to Research at LAC
  - LAC's collection reflects the perspectives and voice of departmental officials that recorded the files. While some student-level experiences might be captured, they are through the perspective of the Indian agent and other officials.
  - There are limits to LAC's online research tools, as the vast majority of its government collections are not digitized.
  - Increasingly, finding aids are available for research through Collections Search. However, there are still some finding aids that can only be consulted on-site, and those that have ATIP restrictions.
  - Most government records are described only to the file-level. To see what is inside a file, the records need to be physically consulted.





# Summary of Estimated Extents of Textual Records for Main Federal Institutions at LAC

Rounded to the nearest kilometre





# Accessing Records: ISC/CIRNAC

- Supporting the Departments
  - The records held by the Departments are those that are of continued and active use by program officers.
  - This include paper files as well as the digital records and documents currently being created by public servants in the Departments.
- Active Files, Not an Open Archive
  - The Records Office of ISC/CIRNAC is not open to the general public.
  - While there are no finding aids as there as at LAC, there are the file classification indices that provide a subject level description of the various files.
  - There is the possibility to consult departmental records by contacting the departmental ATIP office or the Records Office:
    - [atiprequest-airpdemande@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:atiprequest-airpdemande@sac-isc.gc.ca)
    - [recordsncrarchivalresearch@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:recordsncrarchivalresearch@sac-isc.gc.ca)
  - It should be noted that the release of departmental records must follow the federal guidelines and procedures as well as have the approval of the programs responsible for the records.







# Accessing Residential Schools Records

- Archival records documenting the administration of Indian Residential Schools have played a central role in serving as evidence of the federal government's involvement in the system.
  - In 2015, over 4 million documents were transferred to the TRC to support their work from the federal government holdings including INAC, LAC and other departments.
  - In December, 2021, Minister Miller directed that a broader internal review of existing documents be undertaken to ensure transparency and full disclosure of all relevant documents, where possible. This review is currently underway.
  - On January 20, 2022, Minister Miller signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the NCTR to facilitate the sharing of additional documents not previously provided to the TRC. To date about 1.6 million documents have been shared under the MOU.
  - IAP claimants may request access to their application, the voice recording of their hearing, the hearing transcript and the claim decision through the *My Records, My Choice* Program administered by Epiq Class Action Services.
- Today, the NCTR Archives and Collections is the central repository of documents for the residential schools experience.

