Memos and Minutes: Arnold Heeney, the Cabinet War Committee and the Establishment of the Canadian Cabinet Secretariat During the Second World War
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In March 1940, the duties of the Clerk of the Privy Council were amended to include a secretarial function for cabinet. In the context of cabinet’s tradition of in camera proceedings, this was a significant development which was only accepted, at least initially, because of the peculiar circumstances brought on by the Second World War. Simply put, cabinet needed a more efficient system of making and communicating its decisions because of the urgent nature of those decisions. The secretariat was thus established to acquire supporting documentation, create an agenda, maintain minutes and follow up on decisions for the Cabinet War Committee, which for all intents and purposes replaced the cabinet during the war. Arnold Heeney was the first person to occupy this post. Despite initial reservations by Prime Minister Mackenzie King, Heeney successfully established a non-partisan secretariate which was based upon a British precedent. Historians have ultimately been the beneficiaries of the decision to record the proceedings of Canada’s highest policy-making body. They have been left an invaluable record of committee proceedings which are today available to researchers at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. Unfortunately, a comprehensive study of the provenance of these records has not yet been done by archivists. It is the archival responsibility to relay provenance information about records to researchers. This ensures their integrity as evidence for historical research. With these research purposes in mind, this thesis examines one of the most important records creating and controlling institutions in the Canadian government at a formative point in its history: the Cabinet Secretariat, 1940-45.