

Notes and Communications

Oral History Conferences

The Canadian and U.S. oral history associations held their annual conferences jointly in the Ottawa region, 8-12 September 1976. The Public Archives of Canada was the site for the third annual conference of the Canadian Oral History Association, while the U.S. counterpart paradoxically chose the American bicentennial year to celebrate its eleventh annual Colloquium in the palatial retreats of Montebello. The choice of sites reflected the character of the two organizations. The U.S. organization, which was the first in this field and still keeps the name of The Oral History Association, has grown to the point of viewing itself as a movement which acts as an international focal point for all oral history concerns. As a result, it has developed a tradition of holding its annual conferences in exotic, exclusive and partly inaccessible places which would attract only the most serious, full-time adherents of oral history. Conversely, the Canadian organization, availing itself of the facilities provided by the Public Archives, attracted those interested in finding out about oral history techniques and methodologies in order to apply them to their own particular situations. Thus, it was the two-day workshop on oral history, jointly sponsored by the Canadian and American associations, and held in the Public Archives that witnessed the most productive interaction among conference participants.

Oral historians tend to be a variety of amateur and professional journalists, academics, and archivists. Issues in oral history, therefore, can be traced to the respective interests of the individuals involved. The long-standing debate of transcript versus the tape itself as the end-point of oral history is one such case in point. For the historian, the target is historical scholarship expressed partly in article or book form. It is his interest that relevant oral history data be transcribed for easy reference use. For the journalist, the end product is an entertaining interview that will appeal to a prescribed audience. Whether the interview is transcribed or not depends simply upon whether the interviewer is a broadcast or print journalist. For the archivist, the aim is a historical sound recording that adds to or completes the existing historical record. It is his interest that oral history be preserved in its original tape form. The decision to select and to transcribe part of this historical record lies solely with the individual researcher. This debate extends even to a national level with the Canadian preference for oral history in its original tape form being contrasted with the American emphasis on the final transcript. The reason for the differing approaches lies perhaps in the fact that oral history in Canada has been heavily influenced by the Public Archives and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation—two publicly-owned institutions which are primarily concerned with collecting sound recordings on tape only.

Oral historians should not be regarded as separate entities in themselves but rather as a group of individuals of diverse backgrounds united by a common methodological tool—the tape recorded interview. Therefore, it was not surprising that the most useful sessions took place within the two-day workshop rather than in the more specialized offerings of the

conferences. The session which introduced the documentary produced by the Sound Archives on proper recording techniques for oral history interviews was perhaps the most enthusiastically received item in both conferences—partly because this was the first time such a documentary on purely technical aspects of oral history had been attempted and partly because it had a practical value to all forms of oral history projects.

Both conferences supplied examples of individual excellence of oral history in wide-ranging areas. The talk by Charles Hill of the National Gallery on the use of oral history in preparing an exhibition on Canadian painting during the Thirties and the outline by Michael Mullins from Alice Lloyd College of his involvement with a local Appalachia community in rediscovering its own history provided a glimpse of the newer frontiers of oral history. The description by Daniel Reed from the U.S. National Archives of the archival problems presented by the Nixon presidency and journalist Daniel Schorr's parallels of oral historians to journalists with respect to the question of revealing source materials gave insight into possible future controversies. Barry Broadfoot's explanation of his success in oral history and the delineation by Bernard Ostry, National Museums Corporation, of his previous work in the Pearson television biography aptly demonstrated the private enterprise and public traditions that can both now be found in oral history journalism. But perhaps the best statement on the current state of oral history came from Samuel B. Hand, Editor of the *Oral History Review*, on criteria for acceptance of articles in his journal. What is least needed are articles on personal projects defending the legitimacy of oral history because the time for these articles has passed. What is most needed are articles assessing the weaknesses and strengths of existing oral history collections from the perspective of the researcher. The time for these articles, as evidenced by these conferences, is still to come.

Richard Lohead
Public Archives of Canada

Archives and Records Association of New Zealand

The Archives and Records Association of New Zealand was formed 2 October 1976. Forty-five individuals attended the inaugural meeting in Wellington, and adopted a constitution which had been circulated widely beforehand. A council and officers were elected. The officers are: Thomas Wilsted (President); Ian Matheson (Vice-President); Rosemary Collier (Secretary); and Robin Griffen (Treasurer). The Council elected Stuart Strachan to the position of Editor of the Association's publications. Mr. Strachan is the editor of the existing bulletin of the Archives Committee of the New Zealand Library Association, *Archifacts*.

The Association is intended to be an "interest" rather than a professional organization because New Zealand is a small country at an early stage of archival development, with few professional archivists. The objectives of the new Association are:

- To foster the care, preservation and proper use of archives and records, both public and private, and their effective administration.
- To arouse public awareness of the importance of records and archives and in all matters affecting their preservation and use, and to co-operate or affiliate with any other bodies in New Zealand or elsewhere with like objects.
- To promote the training of archivists, records keepers, curators, librarians and others by the dissemination of specialized knowledge and by encouraging the provision of adequate training in the administration and conservation of archives and records.