

PAC Archives Course 1981

The 1981 Public Archives of Canada (PAC) Archives Course ran from September 8 to October 2, and drew more than thirty participants, representing every province and territory in Canada. The course was outstandingly successful in fulfilling its mandate of drawing together relatively new entrants to the profession, and providing them with a basic grounding in archival practice, while making them feel full members of the country's archival profession.

The design of the course did not differ greatly from the pattern established in previous years. The majority of speakers were drawn from PAC staff, though lecturers from outside that institution included Hartwell Bowsfield of York University, Jane Nokes of the Bank of Nova Scotia Archives, and Leonard Rapport from the U.S. National Archives and Records Service.

The course provided a lively and animated forum in which speakers and participants were consistently pressed to come to terms with the substantial issues facing archivists today. Much discussion was generated around the concept of "total archives." Participants tended either to be numbed or ecstatic about the apparent implications of future information retrieval technology. Records management topics more often than not drew a yawn, while the concept of unified cataloguing was enthusiastically received.

Among the many highlights of this year's course was Hugh Taylor's thought-provoking presentation describing the different approaches that Jenkinson and Schellenberg have bequeathed to archival science. Michael Swift, Terry Cook and Andy Birrell of the PAC delineated the various ramifications of institutions holding archival materials of various media. Barbara Craig of the Ontario Archives cast much light on the troublesome subject of case records, and Terry Cook joined Ed Dahl of the National Map Collection to deliver a heady session on archival ethics.

Director of the 1981 course was Tom Nagy, who took over this major responsibility at fairly short notice, following Gordon Dodds' move to Winnipeg. Tom's keen organizational ability and his easy-going and relaxed style contributed to a comfortable learning atmosphere that was much appreciated by course participants.

The fact that the course was sponsored by and presented at the PAC helped to ensure its success, but on occasion it also militated against some of the course's broader aims. Participants were shown the inner workings of Canada's great national archival institution and were able to see the many specialized programmes and other benefits that accrue from the remarkable concentration of materials and expertise that exists in Ottawa. Participants were also shown the organizational and other problems that arise in an archival bureaucracy such as the PAC. Candid insights into PAC workings were usually instructive, although on occasion discussions of institutional rivalry detracted from the educational focus of the course.

A matter of concern to some was the lack of "hands on" activities to enable participants to put into practice some of the information presented in lecture form. During an immensely informative session on the conservation of textual records, for example, the importance of deacidification was stressed, and a tour of the conservation laboratory was conducted during which deacidification processes were explained in some detail. However, participants were not given an opportunity to undertake any conservation work themselves under the direction of the PAC's highly experienced staff. Similarly no workshop sessions were planned in which participants might have tried their hand at such tasks as arranging, describing or cataloguing archival material.

An essay was required of each participant, and this was related as closely as possible to the duties that individual would later be performing in his or her work. The rich collection of

archival literature in the PAC Library provided the basis for many hours of profitable reading.

There must be something about intellectual effort within a pleasant social context that engenders an aura of warm memories after the effort is finished. Few can recall their university days without several sharp pangs of nostalgia. In the same way the PAC Archives Course manages to weave its own kind of special memories. As September 1981 slips into history, it is doubtful that many archives course participants will easily recall the never-ending Ottawa rain, or the last minute rush to finish their papers. But who could forget those nights at the Beacon Arms, or the wind-up party at The Place Next Door?

The PAC Archives Course does more than simply provide a sound grounding in archival practice. It also serves as an important link within the profession between its more recent recruits and its honoured and established members. From any such perspective, the 1981 course was a great success.

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Canadian Historical Association Conference, 1983

The 1983 Canadian Historical Association Conference will be held in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia. The Programme Committee invites proposals for papers and sessions from members, other historians, and members of related professions. Three theme areas have been selected for special emphasis at the conference: the history of the family, Canadian historical geography, and early modern European social history. In addition joint sessions with the Canadian Political Science Association and the Canadian Society for the History of Medicine are being planned. As usual the conference will also present papers in Canadian, American, European, Asian, African and other historical fields. Those wishing to place proposals before the committee are asked to write the chairman or the appropriate co-ordinator. The committee consists of: Peter Ward (History—UBC), chairman; Robin Fisher (History—SFU); Yvan Lamond (Centre d'Études canadiennes françaises—McGill), co-ordinator for Francophone historians; Douglas Owrarn (History—Alberta), co-ordinator for proposals from CHA member sub-groups; Joy Parr (History—Queen's), co-ordinator for family history; Allan Smith (History—UBC); Donald Sutherland (History—Brock), co-ordinator for European social history, and John Warkentin (Geography—York), co-ordinator for Canadian historical geography. Deadline for submissions is 15 September 1982.