

In general terms, one could characterize most of the articles as pragmatic. There is a certain strength in this, but the pragmatic too often borders on the pedestrian. One might have liked something more on the philosophical-theoretical plane, given that this seminar was an attempt to reconcile representatives of several distinct vocations which handle information, its preservation and use. The calling of the archivist is never defined in terms other than how to solve problems of document use, a perspective which in turn is clearly based on the assumption that the archivist is, to use F.K. Crowley's infelicitous term, an "information specialist." Crowley further adds that "it is no longer appropriate for historians to act as bibliographers and archivists" (No. 6, p. 55). Crittenden and the editors, A. Ives and E. Nathan (No. 5), also see the true archival "professional" in the strictly narrow sense of an "information specialist." It seems to this reviewer that "information specialist" is a rather fatuous, formless designation for an archivist, a definition elicited by the trendy needs of modernity which strives to categorize all vocations into "professional" categories. It is as if archivists, in self-abnegation, must cease being what they are, and must become something different to make themselves "relevant" within the modern ethos of specialization and professionalism.

An archivist needs to be something much more than an "information specialist," as both Powell and Osborne intimate. Powell, writing on researching in the field of historical geography, and Osborne, discussing the new field of "communications" (ignored in Australia as a legitimate discipline), imply that the archivist needs to be aware of developments in the academic realm, that he should have some academic orientation: how else, one might ask, can he fulfil his obligation to preserve what is of value for study for future generations. (This is a risky and problematic proposition at the best of times, but how much more so if "professional" archivists master finding aids and catalogues, but know nothing of history, past and current!).

Largely for this reason—the lack of a theoretical-philosophical dimension to most of the contributions to the seminar, (at least on the basis of the articles in Nos. 5 and 6)—one wonders to what degree this seminar was successful in attaining its declared aim, which was to establish cooperation amongst historians, archivists, librarians, and bibliographers. How can one establish cooperation, other than in minor details, when one avoids a philosophical, vocational definition of the role of the archivist?

This is not the only seminar which fails in this respect; most assuredly, it will not be the last. But then, this was not the main intent of the seminar; and its proceedings have earned no small merit in their attempt to resolve many of the difficulties which compromise both the preservation of the historical record and its accessibility to researchers.

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The Saskatchewan Oral History Conference Proceedings 1981. Edited by KRZYSZTOF M. GEBHARD. [Regina]: Saskatchewan Archives Board, 1981. \$5.00.

Of all Canadian provinces, Saskatchewan would seem most peculiarly suited to adopting oral history methods as a means of uncovering its past. Only the Northwest Territories or the Yukon, I would imagine, can compete with Saskatchewan for a sense of immediacy and intimacy with its historical experience which all the inhabitants of that province seem to

display. It is fallacious to think that the people who inhabit regions with a long recorded historical past have, necessarily, a sense of history to correspond with the richness of their inheritance. In my experience, people who live next to a Roman Wall tend to be impervious to its meaning and consider history to be the preserve of a cultivated élite. Not so in Saskatchewan. When I arrived there in 1965, fresh out of a European university, what struck me forcibly in Saskatoon was a grass-roots knowledge and enthusiasm about family and provincial history (and this long before searching for one's roots became a fashionable pastime). Because virtually everyone, except for the Indian population, had come there within living memory, the city was almost, one could say, overburdened with a sense of history. It was rare for any social evening to pass without someone serving up a tale about the pioneer experiences of family members. If I'd have heard of oral history then I might have made a dash for a tape recorder but, alas, blinkered by a conservative historical tradition I failed to recognize the opportunity which was being offered. Now, almost twenty years later, oral history has become popular and, not surprisingly, the people of Saskatchewan have taken to it with enthusiasm. Moreover, it is pleasing to see archivists playing an important role in promoting and supporting oral history in the province.

With my own experiences in Saskatchewan behind me, it was, therefore, with a sense of considerable anticipation that I turned to the proceedings of the Saskatchewan oral history conference but I must confess to a certain sense of disappointment in the final analysis. This, I think, was not so much to do with the conference or its proceedings but rather with oral history and the state of the art at the present time. Oral history conferences should abandon the "show and tell" technique which seems to be all pervasive; the sort of attitude which describes the project, and the way the interviews were conducted, but forgets the historical insights which are surely the point of the exercise in the first place. Moreover, oral history conferences are just too overloaded with defensive statements about the value of oral history. This becomes tiresome after a while. Now I realize that this is an understandable reaction to professional historical attitudes in this country which tend to view the oral historian as a rarefied combination of a harmless, amiable amateur and a suspect member of the lunatic fringe but, nevertheless, the best response to this bias is to ignore it and dig up the gold which a good interview can yield and which traditional historical enquiry will simply not uncover.

In other words, the best rebuttal is success. Oral historians should, by now, be assuming the value of their methods and producing strong definitive analyses of results. Perhaps it is even time to disband oral history societies as separatist movements and move oral history, with dispatch, into the mainstream of historical studies in this country. It is simply wearisome to discuss over and over again, for example, the pros and cons of the reliability of human memory. Certainly memory is unreliable but then so are written records. Paul Thompson in his book *Voice of the Past* quotes Richard Crossman, a former British Cabinet Minister, as telling A.J.P. Taylor that, "I have discovered having read all the Cabinet papers about the meetings I attended that documents often bear virtually no relation to what actually happened." (p. 51). Solace for the oral historian and a salutary warning to the "documentalist" school.

The title of the conference was, to a certain extent, misleading. I anticipated details about how oral history was contributing to knowledge of the history of Saskatchewan. This was certainly there but the conference also dealt more generally with oral history in Canada and, ironically, these were, on the whole, the strongest papers. One of the most unsuccessful parts of the proceedings deals with an experiment using oral history in Saskatchewan schools. No doubt the children did learn a great deal but I am not sure the reader does. It is important to make history "relevant" and give children a sense of its excitement but I am not sure much history comes out of it. I should have preferred to see more evidence of what history the children did discover rather than how they were trained to do the job.

As an overview of the state of oral history in Canada and Saskatchewan, however, the proceedings do succeed and are well worth the \$5 pricetag. The conference was obviously a success, the book is well presented and some of the papers are very good indeed. My main regrets are simply that the conference did not focus entirely on the history of Saskatchewan and that there was just not more emphasis on historical knowledge as being the paramount purpose of all the taping.

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Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid Victorian Peel County, Canada West. (Ontario historical studies series.) DAVID GAGAN. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. xxi, 197, tables. ISBN 0-8020-2435-1. \$20.00 pa.

Historians, especially the North American variant of the breed, are fond of propounding new ways of looking at the past, of creating, rather paradoxically, "new" histories. The process has in fact reached that point of culmination at which we can ruminate over several generations of aging and even old "new" histories. Although it is easy to be cynical about the overuse of the phrase, it does behove archivists to prick up their ears when they hear of new histories. Those histories may well have implications for what we acquire and how we organize it.

In David Gagan's book, we have a very fine example of a "new" demographic history, which indeed is not very new, especially outside the sphere of Canadian scholarship. It is social history in the strictest definition of the word, dealing almost not at all with conventional political concerns. It is statistical and takes a quantitative approach to society. Like much of the social history and a great deal of the Canadian history being written at this time, it is regional, even local in its focus and limited in its time frame.

To the relief or disappointment of archivists, depending on their outlook, Gagan's work does not point the way to any new directions in acquisition. The sources he uses are familiar to any archivist who has ever dealt with a genealogist: manuscript census returns, abstracts of deeds, records of probate and surrogate courts, parish and other denominational records and occasionally, narrative accounts of travellers and residents. Where Gagan differs from a genealogist, of course, is in the computer-based methodology he uses to sort his data and the sophisticated questions he poses to it. The methodology and approach of an historian like Gagan may well affect how archivists describe what they collect.

Gagan sees Peel County in the period in which he is examining it, 1840 to 1870, as going through a sharp transition. By 1840, Peel had already passed from a "pioneer" to a "mature" society in terms of availability of land. Between 1820 and 1842, 95 per cent of its lands had passed into private hands. Increasingly in the 1840's, there was heavy pressure on land from incoming migrants. The appearance of an American market for Canadian agricultural produce promoted a system of extensive cropping of wheat. In the 1850's, the coming of the railways heightened the market orientation. The money made by farmers was used to buy even more land often to provide for the next generation. Land prices rose rapidly as outsiders were attracted. The 1860's, however, brought falling prices and declining exports. The soil was overcropped and yields fell. By the 1870's, an adjustment had been made with a new emphasis on mixed farming at the same time as traditional export markets were revitalized.