

proliferation of collecting activity must be self-policied, or we will fail in our duty to preserve the cultural heritage of the nation and of mankind.

CONFERENCE COVERAGE: WORLD CONFERENCE ON RECORDS

Salt Lake City

August 5 - 8, 1969

Most archivists must, by now, be well aware of the interest shown by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in genealogical records. In England, twenty years ago, Mormon organizers and microfilm operators working in this field impressed us with their tremendously efficient operation, their integrity, and the great care with which they treated the material which they were using. Their professionalism and dedication was not in question and this, in the first instance, won initial support for their work when, in ecclesiastical circles, there was naturally enough some suspicion about their programme and the religious basis for it. Local archivists were very quick to realize the immense value of the work and the generous terms on which copies were offered. The usual pattern was for us to pave the way for the Mormons by gaining permission from the various church authorities so that their access would be unimpeded when the time came; we also promised these authorities that we would supervise the work in a general way. Even so, I think most of us felt that the project would fail because of the sheer magnitude of the task or through lack of funds. Indeed, there was a time when the Mormons did have to make some staff economies, and I was fortunate enough to secure one of their microfilm operators in my own record office who was with me for many years and gave splendid service as a microfilm operator and an expert in genealogy. For most of us, it was often hard to visualize the immense operation which lay behind the microfilm cameraman who patiently accepted the often cramped quarters which was all we could offer him. An invitation twenty years later to visit Salt Lake City, the heart of this great programme, was an opportunity not to be missed. On the face of it, "Records protection in an uncertain world" seemed a somewhat daunting theme, and the filling of the four-day conference with over 270 lecture papers delivered in 207 seminars appeared likely to strain the convention system to its limits. However, the mind ran back quickly through those twenty preceding years since the last war and to the thousands of reels to film which had been professionally and expertly completed, copied, dispatched and stored in Salt Lake, and somehow, one knew that the organization which could achieve that could indeed achieve the impossible with an event of this size.

The one ingredient that would prevent such an occasion becoming little more than a vast culture factory was an all-encompassing humanity to soften the proceedings, and right from our arrival at the airport at Salt Lake, we realized there would be plenty of human kindness. The Mormons, especially in their own mother city, are a remarkably warm and friendly people with a natural buoyancy and bursting good spirits which carried them and us along during the days to come. We, the speakers (and there were nine Canadian archivists among us), were entertained at the

Hotel Utah, one of those vast city hotels, not faded as so many are, but spotlessly kept and still gleaming with an early twentieth-century plushness reminiscent of the railway age and the charming notion that travelers are entitled to stay in palaces. Indeed, Salt Lake City seems quite devoid of dirt of any kind.

Throughout the four days, there were concerts by the Utah Symphony Orchestra and Ballet and, of course, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Every evening, in the outdoor theatre, there was a performance of the "Promised Valley", a dashing musical in the old style of "Oklahoma!" or thereabouts, which tells the story of the great trek of the Mormon pioneers to Utah from their earlier persecutions. This was performed mostly by younger artists, and was immensely professional in its production and drive. To some of us, it may have seemed rather old-fashioned, but it is nevertheless, extremely well done and performed with obvious joy and pleasure in the doing, and this is conveyed to us in a very real way.

The three hundred papers were given in the Salt Palace, an immense functional building, very simple but most effective for the purpose for which it is intended; namely, to gather thousands of people together to hear each other speak. Every hour, just short of the hour, bells would ring and a great concourse of folk would flow around the corridors and rooms as they re-grouped themselves for the next session. Over 8,000 were on the move at one time, flowing from lecture to lecture. Half of the audience were members of the Mormon church; the other half, genealogists and others interested in the field of records. It was impossible to attend more than a few of these papers, but copies would be handed to you on your way in or sent to you if they hadn't already been prepared; and if you were unable to attend any lecture, then you could purchase a copy of the paper for 25¢. This in itself was an immense service and involved something like five million sheets of paper in the process. An army of volunteer workers kept everything moving smoothly and greatly added to the general efficiency. Probably no other organization in the world could command such a faithful band of helpers on a scale like this. The result was that, although there was a great deal going on, it was all carried out very smoothly and without fuss, very cheerfully, and on a most informal note so that no one felt as if they were being hustled or ordered around or forced to move faster than he felt inclined.

The various broad fields of study were lettered from "A" to "M" which gives you an idea of the range covered. Areas "A" and "B" were of the main concern to archivists since they dealt with the creation, storage and preservation of records in archives and libraries, and modern methods of retrieval storage and preservatiōn. Nevertheless, he would have been a dull dog indeed who did not savour some of the more esoteric delights of this occasion, such as the ancient royal genealogies of Egypt and the extent and preservation of original historical records in Japan or the content and use of Chinese local history, each as always, delivered by an expert in the field brought to the Conference at the expense and on the invitation of the Genealogical Society of the Mormon Church. No one could complain at the standard of the papers, which was very high indeed. In many cases, they were of the survey type, opening up a whole field unfamiliar to many hearers, but delivered with a clarity, grasp and command which only an acknowledged authority in that field could provide.

There was plenty of opportunity for informal talks with specialists from most parts of the world that one wished to know about, and in this

miniature genealogical Expo, over 46 countries could be visited in conversation.

But, behind this great concourse and sound of learning and not too many miles away, the lasting monument to the vision of the Genealogical Society of the Church of Latter-Day Saints is its granite mountain vault. The Society, which has its offices in the centre of the city, was founded in 1894 and by the present time, employs 550 people and has a budget of \$5 million a year. It is at present filming the records of 17 countries and each month receives 400,000 feet of microfilm. The copies of this film are available in the offices of the Society, but the original masters are permanently maintained in the granite mountain vault. Here, an astonishing piece of engineering has carved a hole out of the middle of a mountain which will make the vault "proof" against anything but a direct hit from nuclear weapons. Above the vault, there towers 700 feet of solid granite mountain which gives some idea of the size of the operation. The natural humidity is almost exactly correct, although it is controlled, and at present, 650,000 rolls of microfilm are stored here. The vault consists of six rooms, each with a capacity of 885,400 microfilm rolls. In addition (and this is a bonus which the engineers did not expect to receive), there is a natural spring which provides just the right kind of water for processing the film, yielding 8,700 gallons a day which is 2,700 gallons in excess of the present daily requirements.

Parish registers and similar sources are not just left on rolls of film but are being compiled on to computer tape and printed out in alphabetical arrangement for search purposes. I had the great personal pleasure of seeing parish records once in my custody which had been filmed while I was in England and processed in this way. These are not available for sale to the public since they are not published, but the public are invited to make simple, short and specific inquiries which do not involve research. This service of the Society is not restricted to members of the Mormon Church.

To my mind, the conference resolved one of the great questions which was uppermost in the minds of most of us who attended, and that was the fate of all this great mass of record on microfilm which was streaming out of Europe and across the world. Was it just being accumulated against a time in the indefinite future when it might be processed? Was all this information locked up to be used only for the benefit of the L.D.S. Church? Was the scholarship which was going into the transcribing of ancient parish registers adequate for the task which was being performed? All these questions were soon answered. The L.D.S. Church was in effect setting up a world-wide centre for vital statistics and vital records which will probably be unique of its kind and may develop into a great central research agency. The very highest standards are being maintained in all the work being carried out and transcription is being checked and cross-checked all the time. Film is being processed continually, and there is a staff of 500 within the genealogical society dealing with the collections in one way or another. Of course, the records are primarily being used by members of the L.D.S. Church and to see 250 microfilm readers all working at full stretch in one room is quite a revelation. At the same time, the Society is most conscious of its debt to those institutions which have made available their treasured records and it is prepared to provide copies of film from the masters stored in the granite mountain vault in the event of loss or damage to the original record. The Society respects most meticulously any restrictions which may be placed on access

to the filming of records, and institutions need, therefore, have no apprehensions on this score.

This great conference will have allayed any doubts which may have lingered about the capacity of the Church of Latter-Day Saints to carry out its programme, and anyone who is approached by members of the Church to discuss a project for his own area can expect that, if an agreement is reached, it will be on very generous terms and honoured absolutely.

Ed.

CONFERENCE COVERAGE: PRAIRIE ARCHIVISTS' MEETING

Regina

October 18th, 1969

Fifteen archivists from various repositories in the Prairie Provinces assembled in Regina on 18th October 1969 -- the first regional meeting of its kind in Canada. The purpose of the meeting was to enable archivists who could not always attend the annual conferences of the Canadian Historical Association's Archives Section, to meet with one another and to discuss common professional, technical and regional matters of interest. In attendance were:

- 4 from the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan
- 3 from the Provincial Archives of Manitoba
- 1 from the Provincial Archives of Alberta
- 4 from the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives, Calgary, Alberta
- 1 from the Chancery Office, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, Alberta
- 1 from the Archives of the University of Alberta, Edmonton
- 1 from the Archives of the Canadian Rockies, Banff, Alberta.

An agenda, stemming from brief talks held in Calgary on 1st March, 1969, during the Conference on Western Canadian Studies was drawn up and circulated in advance of the meeting by the Provincial Archivist of Alberta. Bearing in mind the common wish that a meeting would be as informal as possible, no papers were prepared in advance, but for each of the main topics for consideration, one delegate was requested to chair the meeting so as to provide some direction to discussions. Out of five special topics proffered on the agenda, two had to be omitted owing to shortage of time. Discussions were so fluent and relevant that the meeting unanimously agreed that it was more profitable to explore fewer topics in depth than to skim over others simply because they were on the agenda.

The morning opened with welcoming remarks by Allan Turner on behalf of the Saskatchewan Archives Board and his colleagues from Regina and Saskatoon. He chaired most of the morning session when a representative from each institution spoke of the main features of his repository, methods of budgeting and operating, programmes in hand and proposed, and staff matters. These résumés were interspersed with many questions and comments: members were impressed by the variety of organizational arrangements respecting the protection of archives in the prairie region and there was a general agreement that stemming from the experience of each office,