

NEWS IN BRIEF

PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA

HISTORICAL BRANCH: Since the publishing of Annual Reports is being accelerated by the PAC, it was felt that an overview of the Branches' activities would be more appropriate than a detailed account.

This has been a Janus year for the Historical Branch. We have looked backward over 100 years of steady growth celebrated in part by the exhibition and catalogue Archives: Mirror of Canada Past; we are looking forward to a bright future for the National Film Archives Division, the Public Records Division, the proper control of EDP as an archival medium and to the diffusion program which will bring our resources to far more people in a more attractive way. These two last themes deserve some elaboration.

EDP ARCHIVES: For some time now it has been apparent that the latest newcomer to the family of archival media is record produced by electronic data processing (EDP) and that it has been somewhat neglected, to say the least.

This year the Historical Branch undertook the reconstitution of data sets and code books from the raw data on punch cards that was produced for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. It soon became clear that, quite apart from missing elements, here was a vast field of information that was suffering severe physical damage not clear to the naked eye (a punch card slightly distorted by poor storage will be rejected by the computer). Yet this was unique information, invaluable for comparative study which could not be obtained again.

Michael Carroll was seconded from the old Public Records Section to the office of the Branch Director to supervise this project and also to represent the Branch on the EDP Records Management Guideline study team which has already produced several draft reports with profound implications. It is probable that EDP records of permanent value will be transferred in time to a Data Archives Division. The Branch will then encompass every archival media presently in use and look forward to a practical application of holography as the next world to conquer!

THE DIFFUSION PROGRAM: This program is the response of the Branch to the declared policy of the Secretary of State to disseminate, where possible, the cultural resources of the nation.

There is, of course, nothing new about diffusion. Publications, exhibitions and inter-library loan of microfilm have been part of the service for several years. The new program is really an extension which can be described under five heads:

- 1) Exhibitions of limited size and sufficiently mobile to travel across Canada. Display of original material will be restricted to the major museums and galleries. Duplicates and facsimiles will enter a more general display network.
- 2) Deposit of microfilm in the ten Provincial Archives which will consist of the earlier Prime Ministers' papers and finding aids, together with newly-filmed public records and finding aids of particular interest to the various regions of Canada. For example, immigration records for the Prairie Provinces, Upper Canada sundries for Ontario, seigneurial documents for Quebec. The new microfilm will be 16mm and a microfilm reader has been dispatched to each of the Provinces to supplement local resources.
- 3) Publication of a series of volumes (some of which are in conjunction with exhibitions) prefaced by short introductions which will present primary text complemented by pictorial record in an exciting mix designed to appeal to the reader who is interested in appreciating history and the historical record without too much of the historian's gloss.
- 4) The publication of various inventories and listings of maps on selected themes such as township surveys, county maps and bird's-eye views with supporting illustrations and microfilm.
- 5) The publication of 35mm coloured slides.

The involvement of the Divisions in this program will be flexible and will vary from year to year.

The diffusion program is designed to appeal to the scholar through microfilm and finding aid publication, the responsive reader through the text and pictorial record publication and the general public through the exhibitions. It is hoped that through the build-up of PAC microfilms in the Provincial Archives, scholars will be able to study PAC resources in the context of Provincial sources, without having to visit Ottawa in the first instance. An extension of this concept would also see copies of Provincial finding aids increasingly available in the PAC to support the specialized interests of staff and scholars alike.

THE FUTURE: The Branch is deeply involved in a network of programmes both familiar and new. The Picture Division has received special prominence this year because a great deal that has gestated over a long period has now come to fruition in a wide range of activity. As a result the Division is now better poised to respond to an escalating public demand - always provided that conservation and reprography can keep pace.

Fears have been expressed that the Branch is moving too far, too fast, in too many directions but the fact is we are being gathered up in a natural impetus which moved slowly during the first ninety-five years of the Public Archives and much more rapidly over the last five. There are those who ask where we are heading but the truth is we cannot measure progress in a linear way any more. Time was when Divisions carried out traditional functions within their own separate orbits and gently expanded. They aimed to become larger so as to process more material and provide a better service. This was the "direction" in which the Public Archives traditionally "headed", and we have just celebrated a notable century of travel in this manner, with a succession of Dominion Archivists personally charting the course and taking most of the initiative.

Almost imperceptibly, however, linear development has begun to dissolve into a more complex pattern. The Systematic National Acquisition Program (SNAP) saw members of the Manuscript Division becoming involved in the systematic acquisition of manuscripts at the federal level; relatively junior archivists began running their own programs and making responsible decisions as never before, while encountering unfamiliar media such as photographs and so becoming increasingly aware of the work of other Divisions. Meanwhile the clientele of the PAC also began to change; the historian and genealogists were joined by many other "lists", the press, radio, film and TV turned increasingly to the Picture Division; urban studies crossed all divisional bounds; the general public began to show an interest in exhibits requiring input by the Branch as a whole. The Divisions could no longer remain self-sufficient and inevitably there have been some "boundary disputes".

At a more philosophical level, theories of knowledge were also changing. Almost imperceptibly we were being taught to re-engage all our senses. The age of the personal encounter, the rap session, sensitivity groups, environmental studies and consumerism are all aspects of a new personal involvement in society which demanded not only knowledge but experiences, "happenings". Instead of "making progress" or "heading" in a specific direction we try to touch at all points, to make contacts in all directions, to communicate. The giving and receiving of information is no longer linear transmission by memo and letter (although these are still used for the record) as much as by the telephone, the computer and television as the extension of our whole nervous system requiring heightened awareness and fact reactions. This whole climate plays havoc with traditional bureaucratic processes; tidy organizational chains of command are thrown into disarray; apparently secure people often become uncertain and defensive as rules change rapidly and structures give way to relationships in which we must actualize ourselves if we are to live and thrive.

We are all learning to respond to multiple situations as the Public Archives becomes totally involved in the information and conservation business. This may at first seem like a loss of direction and control but only if we retain a traditional view of our rôle.

What then should our goal be? The concept of "onward and upward" with mounting acquisitions endlessly chasing steel shelving and finding aids following (more or less) close behind is certainly inadequate. There is, of course, still much that we must save in an on-going program of permanent retention and acquisition but our final aim should be nothing less than the identification and availability for research of the entire Canadian documentary record wherever it may be. In this, the recognized repositories will be our partners as we share the physical custody and control, but we should take the lead in articulating finding aids, miniaturizing and distributing copies of our holdings and giving aid to small repositories lacking professional staff so that their collections can be examined and evaluated. We will have an increasing obligation to diffuse information through publications and exhibitions, videotape and televisual display, the cassette and the on-line terminal, to create a whole new inter-related environment - the retrievable past - which will not be just the historical past, as it was once understood.

THE 1972 ARCHIVES COURSE: Thirteen students were accepted and all completed the course which was held from 5 September to 6 October and was sponsored jointly by the PAC and the Archives Section of the Canadian Historical Association. The course was designed to assist those with at least one year's experience in the archival profession to obtain a broad training in archival principles and administrative practices.

The seminar approach was continued as before and the first six days given over to archival media "immersion" in the various divisions of the Public Archives. In this way the students were exposed to the contrasts and similarities in techniques and became aware of the interrelatedness of the various media when seen in terms of information. The course terminated with an examination. Michael Carroll was the co-ordinator.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION

New accessions of note included New Democratic Party of British Columbia records, B.C. Federation of Labor records (addition), International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Canada). Local 598 records, F. Henry Johnson papers, and Harry Hawthorn papers (addition).

The University of British Columbia Archives, in conjunction with Reynoldston Research and Studies is working on two Oral History programmes. The first, Early History of U.B.C., consists of interviews with former students and faculty of U.B.C.; the second, commissioned by the Combined Services Trust Committee of U.B.C., will be an Oral History of the C.O.T.C. and related bodies on the campus.