

The Fourth International Congress of Archivists

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ONCE AGAIN this year Europe became the stamping ground of several hundred American scholars and professionals, who went overseas to rub elbows and confer with their colleagues from many lands. Among these cohorts, those who attended the International Congress of Archivists constituted only a small fraction. It was the fourth such Congress, and it met in Stockholm, Sweden, from August 17 to August 20, to be followed by the International Historical Congress with its much larger crowds. Characteristically, archivists registered for their convention were identified by a silver pin with the three crowns of Sweden, while the same symbol in gold was reserved for the historians. Both Congresses enjoyed the help of Unesco and the financial assistance of the Swedish Government and certain of its institutions, and Prof. Åke Sällström of the State Archives of Göteborg splendidly served them in the capacity of secretary general, assisted by an able and multilingual office. In all probability, managing the relatively small Archives Congress prepared Professor Sällström for the more exacting task of handling the historians.

Needless to say the archivists, some 450 strong, had little impact on Sweden's capital city. Larger conventions had preceded us, even larger ones were going on while we were meeting, and there was the danger of personally being engulfed by them. One of our *confrères*, who shared a taxi from his hotel with what seemed a Swedish fellow archivist, made this discovery when his guest asked him about a number of unknown American colleagues in the field and praised the work on pyorrheal pockets that one of them had done. The man was headed for the Centennial Congress of Dentists, and our colleague—Robert Bahmer—got out of the taxi as soon as he could.

Host to many groups of professional men and women, Stockholm displayed all the charms of an ancient European capital. Its lakes,

* Ernst Posner hardly needs an introduction in this journal. Past President and now Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, former dean of the Graduate School of the American University and now chairman of its Department of History, he has been a frequent and valued contributor. This paper was read at a luncheon, Oct. 7, 1960, during the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists at Boston, Mass.

woods, rocks, and architectural beauties—to say nothing of its restaurants—combined to furnish an impressive setting for the Congress, though cold and frequently rainy weather interfered with its enjoyment. Also, to our bewilderment, people insisted on driving on the wrong side of the road, which made crossing the street a hazardous enterprise, best accomplished if one managed to have one's right flank protected by some sturdy Swedish men or women.

Except for the opening session of the Congress and certain excursions, the meetings took place in the Swedish Academy, the former Stock Exchange in the heart of the old city called Riddarholm, close to the Royal Palace, the Palace of the Nobility, and the old Rikssarkiv or Royal Archives. Like many ancient buildings, the Stock Exchange had atmosphere, but lacked some of the amenities that facilitate a convention of any size. The conference room proper, in Empire style with backless benches upholstered in blue, was adequate enough for its purpose. There were, however, no anterooms or corridors of any size where people could circulate and get acquainted, and there seemed to be only two facilities for creature comforts, one each for males and females. Worst of all, no simultaneous translation system had been provided for the sessions. As a result, communications had to be followed by translation into at least one and frequently two other languages—a procedure that on me had a soporific if not deadening effect.

It was in these slightly inadequate surroundings that the Congress, attended by representatives of 40 countries, did most of its work. As could be expected, Sweden with its 86 archivists outnumbered all other contingents, closely followed by France and Germany with 77 and 71 respectively. The iron-curtain countries—and I use the term with some trepidation for reasons that I shall explain—furnished a total of 31 delegates, including 4 newly admitted members from Red China. The Near and Middle East were represented by colleagues from Turkey, Israel, and the United Arab Republic; Africa sent delegates from Southern Rhodesia, Madagascar, and Nigeria. The last was represented by the affable and jovial Lloyd Chike Gwam. The splendid blue costume he wore at the first meeting and the new role of Africa in world affairs made him quite a center of attention.

The contingent from the Western Hemisphere consisted of delegates from Brazil, Canada, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, and the United States. According to the roll there were to be 17 of us from the United States, not counting our better halves, if any. Robert Bahmer, wearing the two hats of Secretary General of the International Archives Council and representative of the National Archives and

Records Service, served as our spiritual head and a useful channel to the ruling elite. In addition to Bahmer, there were four members of the National Archives staff—Messrs. Bauer, Gondos, Muntz, and Sherman. Mr. Church, Mrs. Blackwelder, and my fellow-delegate Mr. Duniway came from the States, while institutional archives found a spokesman in Miss Jacklin from Cornell. Our ranks were reinforced by Mr. Barrow from Richmond, Mr. Jenkins from Chapel Hill, Mrs. Lake from Illinois, and Professors Deutsch and Westergaard from Washington State and U. C. L. A. respectively.

To name but a few of the archival celebrities that adorned the convention, they included the Council's Honorary President, Charles Braibant, a little more stooped but as vivacious and charming as ever; Étienne Sabbe, well known to us from our Detroit meeting, now Director General of the Belgian Archives; Sir David Evans from the Public Record Office; and Mr. Belov, head of the Soviet Central Archival Administration, always shadowed by an interpreter. There were Professor Lombardo, Inspector of the Italian State Archives, and Professor Sandri, Chief of the new Italian Central Archives; Georg Winter, retired head of the Archives of the German Federal Republic, and Johannes Papritz, Director of the West German Archives School; Mr. Lamb from Canada, though I never saw him; and, last but not least, our friend Enrique L. Morales Rosas, Director General of the Mexican Society of Archivists, who, his calling card announces, is dedicated to "the service of Mexico and to the cultural and economic betterment of the archivist," a most laudable goal.

As could be expected, the political situation had its repercussions even at a meeting of archivists. Thanks to the stand taken by Dr. Buck at the Florence meeting with regard to Red China and adopted by the International Archives Council, we admit to membership not countries, but archival institutions, associations, and individuals.¹ At the Stockholm meeting, therefore, the question of admitting archivists from East Germany as a separate group was not raised. Other international meetings had to deal with this thorny problem: at the International Historical Congress the issue was skilfully side-tracked by the executive council, but at about the same time the Astronautical Society of the Soviet Zone and its Geographical Society became full-fledged members of their respective international organizations, which thus tacitly acknowledged the existence of the

¹ Dr. Buck called the council's attention to the constitution as revised in 1950. See Margaret C. Norton, "The First International Congress of Archivists, Paris, France, August 21-26, 1950," in *American Archivist*, 14: 15 (Jan. 1951).

"two Germanies." In the case of the archivists, those of East and West Germany were listed in straight alphabetical order in the Congress directory, as if they were all members of the same Olympic team.

Latent tension among the archivists came into the open, however, at the session on economic and social archives. In his excellent report, M. Marquand of the Archives Nationales had spoken of the practices of the "iron-curtain countries" and had called the Polish trade unions quasi-official organizations. As the first speaker in the discussion period, Altman of Poland accused him of having given a distorted picture of the status of these completely autonomous trade unions, and he also accused him of injecting cold-war language into the work of a learned gathering. Mr. Belov of Soviet Russia repeated and reinforced the attack on M. Marquand. It was skillfully counteracted by Étienne Sabbe, who suggested that the matter might appropriately be referred to the Council's Committee on Terminology. He further observed that the term "capitalistic" as used in socialist countries was not to be considered a complimentary or unloaded term, either. Otherwise, the archival Olympics went on in an atmosphere of good will and comradeship. The Congress' work and activities might best be summarized under the following headings: the formal opening session, the business meeting, the three working sessions, meetings of the various committees, professional sightseeing, and, finally, assorted social functions.

The business meeting, or Constituent Assembly as it is called, actually preceded the opening of the Congress. After tribute had been paid to deceased members of the Executive Committee of the International Archives Council—Count Filangieri, its onetime President, former Vice President Jimenez Rueda of Mexico, and Dr. Winckler of the Bavarian State Archives—the meeting received reports of the Council's officers and committees for the period 1956-60. New business transacted included the following: Article 15 of the constitution was changed to expand from 6 to 8 the membership of the Executive Committee. The vacant positions, thus increased from three to five, were filled by the election of Sir David L. Evans of England, Mr. Lamb of Canada, M. Chamson, Braibant's successor as Director General of the French Archives, Mr. Belov of Russia, and Mr. Altman of Poland. Following established custom, our host Mr. Andersson was elected President. The dignities of Vice President for the Eastern Hemisphere and Vice President for the Western Hemisphere were conferred on Étienne Sabbe and Wayne Grover respectively. The former will be host at the Fifth International Congress, to be held in Brussels in 1964.

A short debate developed with regard to the proposed increase of dues, when the Danish delegate suggested levying a contribution of one Swiss franc per member on the participating associations. This would have hit the larger associations pretty hard. I found myself in the eloquent company of M. Bautier of France, when I pointed out that I would not dare face the membership of this Society were I to bring back the news of an increase of our contribution from 75 francs to approximately 400. The motion, which had not been seconded, was defeated; and the Executive Committee's proposal was adopted. It increases our annual dues from 75 to 100 francs; that is, from \$30 to \$40.

The business session was accompanied by no little confusion. No translation service had been provided for this session, officers and delegates talked French or English, as the case might be, and half of them seemed uncertain of what was actually before them. There was also considerable disregard of Robert's Rules of Order, and several times, before my inner eye, I saw a former president of our Society rising to his feet and interjecting his "Mr. Chairman, point of order."

Far greater ceremony surrounded the formal opening session, for which the Assembly Hall of the Palace of the Nobility provided an impressive setting. Within its walls, decorated with the escutcheons of Sweden's noble families, an audience of some 500, alerted by the trumpets of two Royal Guards, listened to the opening address of the Swedish Minister of Education, to the greetings of a representative of Unesco, to the welcome of Ingvar Andersson, and to the response of Sir David Evans, who replaced Count Filangieri as President of the Congress.

About the working sessions little will be said, not because I goofed but because the reports prepared for them had been distributed in advance and "will in time be published in *Archivum*, together with abstracts of the comments made on them during the sessions."² Some general remarks will suffice. For the first session, on state (*i.e.*, public) archives, Étienne Sabbe was the reporter. And I think his was the most difficult task. In the first place, some important countries—Soviet Russia for instance, and all the Latin American countries—had not responded to M. Sabbe's detailed questionnaire. Also, as a result of misunderstandings, his request for information reached the Society of American Archivists much too late to circulate it to the various State archival agencies. The Secretary of the Society on January 7 called the attention of the Secretary General of

² Robert H. Bahmer, "The Third International Congress of Archivists," in *American Archivist*, 20: 157 (Apr. 1957).

the Congress to this situation, politely pointing out that there seemed "to be some confusion in the minds of some of our European colleagues as to the specific relationship of the National Archives and the Society of American Archivists"³ and supplying him with a microfilm copy of the State Records Committee Survey of State Archives for 1959-60. Existing misconceptions were further corrected by Mr. Duniway, who explained the status and function of our State Archives in the discussion of the Sabbe *Report*.

As I said before, I felt M. Sabbe had been given a well-nigh impossible task. In 40 pages, he had to digest a great quantity of most diversified data under such headings as organization of state archives, creation of state archives, personnel of state archives, holdings, elimination of useless records, techniques of preservation, etc.; and some of the information sent in was decidedly irrelevant, as for instance the fact that "Our colleagues in Rhodesia-Nyasaland work 37 hours weekly at Lusako and Zamba, but 40 in Salisbury," or that the "lending of books to the staff is generally tolerated" by archival agencies.

M. Marquand's report, on archives and modern social and economic research, gave evidence of thorough knowledge of the field and its literature. He made good use of the best of American literature, such as Mr. Holmes' articles on business archives and Mr. Lewinson's study of archival sampling and survey of labor archives, though I am afraid that he gave too rosy a picture of business-archival developments in the United States.

Inasmuch as in communist countries business records are public records and are treated as such—both Mr. Altman and Mr. Belov were anxious to make it clear how effectively they had tackled the problem—it would have been appropriate to have two reporters deal with the topic, one from the East and one from the West. Strangely enough such division of labor was provided for the one topic that lent itself clearly to worldwide treatment regardless of race, creed, or color, namely new techniques, new materials, and new experiences concerning restoration of documents and seals, preservation of maps and plans, and photography since 1950. Robert Bahmer discussed developments in the Western Hemisphere, pretty much those in Canada and the United States, and Johannes Papritz covered those of Western and Central Europe, paying considerable attention to the leading role of the United States in this field. Techniques and experience of the Soviet Union and the so-called Peoples' Democracies were dealt with by Mr. Belov, not too

³ Letter to Åke Sällström, Secretary General (photocopy).

revealingly I thought, although undoubtedly the work of the Central Research Laboratory of the Soviet Union's Central Archival Administration seems to be of a very high caliber.

The discussion periods, which at each of the working sessions followed the brief introductory remarks of the reporters, were disappointing. Apart from laudable exceptions, such as Mr. Church's remarks, they contributed very little. Most of the interveners, it seemed, enjoyed the opportunity to address an international gathering and used it to ride their respective hobby horses or to repeat in detail the information they had supplied to the reporters. Others confirmed Mr. Justice Frankfurter's experience of the "limited appeal that relevance has for a discussion."⁴ To make matters worse, all interventions had to be translated into at least one foreign language, and since most of the interveners cavalierly disregarded the time limits indicated by the session chairman and since the latter did not use the gavel to enforce them, a single intervention might take up to 30 minutes. There would seem to be room for considerable improvement, many of us felt.

The so-called working sessions were preceded and supplemented by the meetings of the Committees on Terminology, Sigillography, and *Archivum* and by a session of the Central Commission on the Latin American Guide. To touch briefly on two of them, the Committee on Archival Terminology under Mr. Hardenberg of the Netherlands was able to show considerable progress and would seem to deserve amply the financial support it requested in its report to the International Archives Council. Information on the plans for the projected Guide to the Sources of Latin American History is on p. 363-366 of the July 1960 issue of the *American Archivist*. The mechanism for the preparation of the Guide consists of the Central Commission, composed of representatives of the Council, the heads of the interested archival administrations and the specialists who, in turn, constitute the International Technical Committee charged with the scholarly direction of the work on the Guide. Pending the appointment of a specialist from the United States and the establishment of a national commission, your reporter, in the capacity of chairman of the Society's Committee on International Relations, attended the meeting of the Central Commission in Stockholm. With a view to the forthcoming publication of the Guide to Latin American Material in the National Archives and to that on Archives and Manuscripts in the United States (prepared by the National Historical Publications Commission), our National

⁴ *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces, Recorded in Talks With Dr. Harlan B. Phillips*, p. 201 (New York, 1960).

Commission will be well on its way to contributing effectively to the work on the Latin American Guide.

Professional sightseeing made up for some of the disappointment that many of us felt after the working sessions. At a technical exhibit we saw various types of compactus shelving and interesting specimens of collapsible archives boxes, products of the highly developed Swedish paper and cardboard industry. Also, we had an opportunity to view a magnificent exhibit of documents of the Swedish Riksarkiv and were generously given a splendid volume containing facsimiles of many of them. We did not visit the present Riksarkiv and its various branch offices, but instead we were taken to the site of the new Riksarkiv, an underground installation in a hill outside the city of Stockholm.

Disappointed as there was nothing left to see except the enormous galleries driven into the rock, the members of the Congress, on what was an abominably rainy day, had to wear white steel helmets to protect themselves from falling stones while slithering down the tunnels into the interior of the mountain. It was quite a hilarious affair, though far less instructive than the later visit to the Municipal Archives of Stockholm, already installed in underground bombproof facilities.

Bedraggled as we were, we went to the beautiful modern City Hall, where the Municipal Council of Stockholm offered us a fine reception. The Vice Chairman of the council, a rather young and charming lady, welcomed us to sherry and port in the magnificent Golden Hall of the building. There, for the first time, delegates could mingle easily and freely. To many of us the most enjoyable of the cultural attractions was a performance of Pergolesi's light opera, *Il Maestro di Musica*, in the eighteenth-century court theater of Drottningholm, the Royal Summer Palace. For several years a center of musical life, this little theater had stood neglected until recently—with the result that the old costumes, decorations, equipment, and stage-machinery were preserved intact. My wife and I sat on the bench reserved for *hordamer* (ladies in waiting) and tried to behave accordingly, while later registrants at the Congress had to be content with the places for "His Majesty's second valets and barbers." Though somewhat prepared by the court atmosphere of the theater, we did not have an audience with His Majesty the present King of Sweden, as later the historians did.

Other amusement provided for the Congress included sightseeing in the city of Stockholm, a cocktail party at the Thiel Art Gallery, an all-day excursion to Uppsala, and various functions for the ladies. It all added up to an enjoyable and profitable week in the Swedish capital, enjoyable because of the opportunity to meet again or for

the first time so many outstanding archivists of foreign countries, profitable because of the professional information obtained from conversations with them and to some extent from the working sessions. To quote again from Robert Bahmer's report on the International Congress in Florence, I would like to "assure you personally that an international meeting is an experience that every American archivist should have."⁵

And, if I may add a footnote to this, an international meeting is doubly enjoyable if, after a day's work, one can return to a little American enclave, such as some of us had established at the Apollonia Hotel. It helped us to review and digest the intellectual and other intake of the day and, as far as my wife and I are concerned, it confirmed and increased a sense of belonging that even in the "Archivist's One World"⁶ remains a most precious possession.

⁵ *American Archivist*, 20: 161.

⁶ *Editor's note*: The allusion is to a term employed by Solon J. Buck as the title of his presidential address before the Society of American Archivists in 1946. See *American Archivist*, 10: 9-24 (Jan. 1947).

Necessary Confusion

The only other matter . . . that now remains to be considered, is the question of confusion and incompleteness in the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands.

As is natural, the clerks in the Adjutant General's Office on the one side, and the clerks of the Bureau at the time of its transfer to the War Department on the other, gave testimony directly in conflict. The one party charged that there was confusion of records before; the other maintained that whatever confusion was found occurred after the transfer to the War Department, and was due to carelessness and recklessness in the removal.

The Court did not deem it necessary to investigate *this dispute*.

It is certain that there must necessarily have been confusion which would arise without fault in any one. To transfer to new hands, in a very short time, and to remove to another building the immense and varied records of so extensive a business machinery; so ramified throughout the country; in the hands of so many different people; for so many different objects; and covering a period of seven years, as that of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, implies necessarily greater or less confusion for a long time after such transfer, even if it had been made by the same officials previously engaged upon it and there had been perfect harmony on the subject.

—Report of the Special Court of Inquiry to investigate charges against Brig. Gen. O. O. Howard, as published in War Department General Order 75, A. G. O., July 3, 1874.