

The Inter-American Technical Council on Archives

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THE Inter-American Technical Council on Archives is an inter-American organization that specializes in matters of interest to Latin American archivists. The members of the Council are for the most part the Directors of the National Archives of Latin American countries. This organization had its beginning in Washington, D. C., on October 27, 1961, when a group of 43 Latin American archivists and scholars participating in the First Inter-American Archival Seminar under the direction of T. R. Schellenberg of the National Archives agreed unanimously to create the Council. The group of 43, representing 17 Latin American countries, had been meeting each day for 3 weeks in a concerted effort to examine and analyze various aspects of the archival profession in the Americas. At the end of their prolonged discussions they came up with a series of suggestions and recommendations that constitute a program for the improvement of the status of the archival profession in Latin America.

One of the suggestions that received immediate approval was the one recommending the creation of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives. Those participating in the 3-week seminar were preparing to go home, but before leaving they wanted to form some kind of organization that would keep the group together and make archival cooperation easier in the future. Their solution to this problem was the formation of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives. This Council was expected to continue the work started by the First Inter-American Archival Seminar and to seek ways and means of implementing the program agreed upon for the improvement of the archival profession in the Americas.

My discussion will cover, first, the work of the First Inter-American Archival Seminar, which was responsible for developing

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the broad archival program for Latin America, and, second, the activities of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives in the first 2 years of its existence.

The idea for an Inter-American meeting to discuss archival problems in the Americas was conceived and proposed by Dr. Schellenberg during a meeting of the Commission on History of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador, in January 1958. The proposal was heartily endorsed, and immediately an *ad hoc* committee was formed composed of representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, and the United States. The chairman of the *ad hoc* committee was Dr. Schellenberg. The committee finally fixed the date for the First Inter-American Archival Seminar as October 1961. The sponsors for the seminar were the U. S. National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Pan American Union, the Department of State, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation provided a generous financial grant that made the meeting possible.

The agenda for the seminar provided for discussion of the basic archival problems in Latin American countries. Working groups were formed and assigned to study these basic archival problems and to report their findings. In addition, the directors of national archival institutions in Latin American countries as well as other outstanding archivists and scholars from state archival institutions and university archives were invited to participate and to prepare papers on specific archival topics. This literature is a lasting and valuable contribution of the First Inter-American Archival Seminar.¹

Among the archival manuals that were produced for the Seminar and distributed to archivists during the meeting are the following:

Transcription of Paleographic Documents, by Jorge A. Garcés (82 p.).

Buildings for Archives, by Victor Gondos, Jr. (117 p.).

Reproduction of Records on Microfilm, by Albert H. Leisinger (70 p.).

The Status of the Archival Profession in Latin America, by Gunnar Mendoza (96 p.).

Principles of Archival Arrangement, by T. R. Schellenberg (151 p.).

Techniques of Archival Description, by T. R. Schellenberg (165 p.).

Manual of Archival Science for Latin America, by Aurelio Z. Tanodi (285 p.).

¹ T. R. Schellenberg, "Inter-American Archival Seminar," in *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 58:138-145 (1962). This is an excellent report of the work accomplished by the seminar, including the professional literature produced.

With respect to the 90 monographs, I shall limit myself to mentioning the following, each of which was prepared by the Director of the National Archives indicated in the title:

The Archival Program of the National Archives of Nicaragua, by Clementina M. Arcia.

Accessioning Policies and Reference Service in the National Archives of Chile, by Juan Eyzaguirre E.

Techniques of Archival Description in the National Archives of Guatemala, by Joaquín Pardo J.

Arrangement of the Holdings in the National Archives of Mexico, by Jorge Ignacio Rubio Mañé.

The National Archives and Other Public Archival Institutions in Brazil, by José Honório Rodrigues.

The History of the National Archives of Panama, by Enrique J. Sosa.

The Organization of the National Archives of Haiti, by Laurore St. Juste.

The manuals and the monographs just mentioned were reproduced in limited numbers, in Spanish, and are now for the most part out of print. The titles I have given are my translations of the original Spanish titles.

On Sunday, October 8, Wayne C. Grover, the Archivist of the United States, met and entertained the visiting Latin American archivists at a reception at the Cosmos Club in Washington. This was a delightful social gathering that we remember with pleasure. The real work of the seminar, however, began the following day, and during the next 3 weeks sessions were held every weekday. The mornings were devoted to general sessions, attended by all participants, at which the formal papers on the prepared agenda were read. In the afternoons, the 43 Latin American archivists met in small working groups that discussed the following problems, which the Latin Americans considered to be the most important: (1) archival arrangement; (2) archival description; (3) preparation of guides to historical sources for Latin America; (4) professional training of archivists; (5) archival terminology; (6) historical editing and transcription; (7) microfilming; and (8) development of sound archival programs. Participation was voluntary so that an archivist could attend any of the working groups he chose, depending on his interest or inclination. Many a rousing discussion took place. The chairman of every working group prepared a final report in which he listed the principal difficulties mentioned during the discussion of his particular topic and made recommendations on the best way to overcome these difficulties.

The last 2 days of the seminar were devoted to presenting the findings of the working groups and in evaluating the work that had been done. It was generally agreed that the seminar had fulfilled its two short-range objectives: first, it had been successful in promoting professional solidarity among the archivists of the Americas; and, second, it had brought together for the first time the leading archivists from Latin America and provided them with an opportunity to discuss common archival problems and to recommend the best ways to solve those problems.

To the surprise of no one, the findings revealed that many archival institutions in the Americas were in a deplorable condition. This was clearly shown in a special study of 28 archival institutions in 17 Latin American countries.² The study revealed that of the 28 archival institutions covered, only 3 have buildings that were specially constructed for archives; only 1 building is provided with air conditioning; 14 of the institutions are operating in buildings that do not belong to the archival agency; 17 use metal shelving, at least in part, but only 5 use metal or cardboard boxes for storing records. On the other hand, this study also showed that 7 countries plan to construct modern archival buildings in the near future.

Inadequacies were also reported in the salaries paid to archivists, in the professional training of archivists, and in legislation affecting accessioning and disposal of records. In view of these shortcomings, a broad program for the improvement of Latin American archives was outlined.³ Among other things, this program included the following recommendations:

- (1) That Latin American archivists everywhere work for the enactment of sound archival legislation in their respective countries;
- (2) that the establishment of an Inter-American School for Archivists was urgently needed, perhaps by expansion of the facilities of the present School for Archivists at the University of Córdoba, Argentina;
- (3) that the preparation of guides to historical sources of Latin America be initiated as soon as possible;
- (4) that a professional archival journal similar to the *American Archivist* be published in Spanish;
- (5) that the exchange of specialists among the various archival institutions

² Gunnar Mendoza, *La situación actual de los archivos Latino-americanos. Manual de información básica* (Washington, 1961). This study contains the latest and most complete information on the status of archival institutions in Latin America.

³ *Informe final, resoluciones aprobadas y otros documentos de la Primera Reunión Interamericana sobre Archivos* (Washington, 1961). This is the final report of the activities of the First Inter-American Archival Seminar and includes the complete text of 23 approved resolutions.

be increased as a means of disseminating information on archival techniques and practices;

(6) that in archival arrangement the principle of provenance be adhered to;

(7) that the technique of collective description by which record groups, subgroups, and series are described in single entries be adopted as the most practical method of getting large quantities of records under control; and

(8) that the next meeting of Latin American archivists be held in Guatemala. No dates, however, were set for the meeting.

It was at this point that a decision was made to establish the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives. It was felt that this Council would enable the participants in the seminar to continue to work together as a group and thereby enhance the possibility of achieving their archival goals.

The Council was quickly organized, with a membership consisting of Directors of the National Archives of Latin American countries and selected staff members of other archival institutions. It was determined that the executive body should consist of a president, four vice presidents, and a secretary general. T. R. Schellenberg of the National Archives of the United States was chosen president. The four vice presidents were: Jorge Ignacio Rubio Mañé, Director of the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico; José Honório Rodrigues, Director of the Arquivo Nacional of Brazil; Joaquín Pardo, Director of the Archivo Nacional of Guatemala; and Gunnar Mendoza, Director of the Archivo Nacional of Bolivia. George S. Ulivarri of the National Archives of the United States was named secretary general.

The specific objectives of the Council are being carried out by committees. There are now eight committees, each with five members. The committees and their chairmen are as follows:

Committee on Arrangement: T. R. Schellenberg, National Archives of the United States.

Committee on Archival Programs: Luis M. Rodríguez Morales, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

Committee on Professional Training: Aurelio Z. Tanodi, Escuela de Archiveros, Universidad de Córdoba, Argentina.

Committee on Terminology: George S. Ulivarri, National Archives of the United States.

Committee on Descriptive Techniques and Guides to Historical Sources for Latin America: Gunnar Mendoza, Archivo Nacional of Bolivia.

Committee on Paleography and Diplomatics: Agustín Millares Carlo, Universidad Nacional de Zulia, Maracaibo, Venezuela.

Committee on Archival Legislation: Roberto Etchepareborda, Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

Committee on Microfilm: Luis F. Málaga, Archivo y Biblioteca Municipal, Lima, Peru.

This has been the organization under which the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives has operated for the last 2 years. During this time, the Council has participated in various archival activities of interest to the countries of Latin America. It has requested and received from the Rockefeller Foundation a generous grant for compiling a guide to documentary sources in the United States for the history of Latin America. This guide will be in the form of a union catalog. Cards will be prepared according to correct archival descriptive techniques and will be organized in relation to a number of major fields of activity—such as diplomatic, social, political, religious, personal, military, and cultural. The exact number of fields will be determined in consultation with scholars interested in Latin American affairs. The cards will also be organized in relation to chronological periods and geographical areas.⁴

The archivist recommended to head this descriptive project is Gunnar Mendoza, Director of the National Archives of Bolivia. Dr. Mendoza is an especially well-trained Latin American archivist, thoroughly familiar with modern archival techniques of description. At present he is serving as chairman of the Committee on Descriptive Techniques and Guides to Historical Sources for Latin America. This project has been placed under the direction of John P. Harrison, formerly a staff member of the National Archives and now the Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas. Work is scheduled to begin on November 1, 1963, and will require approximately two years for completion.

Another interesting project concerns the Mexican National Archives. Jorge Ignacio Rubio Mañé, Archivist of Mexico and one of the vice presidents of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives, was successful in obtaining from the Ford Foundation its financial support for the improvement of the National Archives of Mexico. The project requires the professional services of a trained archivist from the U. S. National Archives; he will go to Mexico to initiate a training program at the National University for staff members of the Mexican Archives and will advise on the reorganization of the holdings of this institution for the period of independence. T. R. Schellenberg was selected to head this project but

⁴ T. R. Schellenberg, Memorandum entitled "Project Statement: Production of Guides to Latin American Historical Sources" (Apr. 1962).

unfortunately he was unable to accept because of ill health and the project had to be temporarily postponed.⁵ This project, however, will be reactivated as soon as a new specialist is selected.

In another area, Council members from several countries have reported some small gains in the field of archival legislation. For example, the Bolivian Government has authorized the creation of a national commission whose principal function is to stimulate the preparation of archival guides, inventories, and other finding aids that describe important documentary sources for historical research.

Some progress has also been reported in the number of societies or associations of Latin American archivists. Until a few years ago such organizations were practically unheard of, but now they exist in at least three countries. They are:

The Society of Archivists of El Salvador; president, Alfonso Mira Castro.

The Society of Mexican Archivists; president, Enrique L. Morales.

The Peruvian Society of Archivists; president, Oscar Malca Olguín.

The Inter-American Technical Council on Archives is extremely interested in two projects that have not yet materialized—the establishment of an archival journal in Spanish and the establishment of a school for Latin American archivists. The Council, however, has been publishing a newsletter entitled *Boletín Informativo*, which is mailed to Latin American archivists every three months. A typical number of this publication has on the front page the photograph and a short biographical sketch of the Director of one of the National Archives in Latin America. The rest of the newsletter is devoted to disseminating information and news of interest to members of the archival profession. Especially important, in my opinion, is a series of articles about schools that offer training to prospective Latin American archivists. The schools thus far discussed are:

School for Archivists, University of Córdoba, Argentina; directed by Aurelio Z. Tanodi.

The National School for Librarians and Archivists, Mexico City, directed by Roberto A. Gordillo.

Course in Hispanic American Science, Seville, Spain, directed by José Antonio García-Noblejas, Director General of Spanish Archives and Libraries, and José de la Peña y Cámara, Director of the General Archives of the Indies.

⁵ Dr. Schellenberg has indicated that he will have to resign as president of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives as soon as a new president can be designated. On Oct. 15, 1963, after 29 years of Government service, he retired from the National Archives and Records Service.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that these are only a few of the activities in which the members of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives have participated. We are certain that these activities have been beneficial to the archival profession in this part of the world. We are also aware that much more needs to be done. Latin America has many deficiencies in archival buildings, in equipment, and in trained personnel. These deficiencies cannot be corrected overnight. The financial resources that today are being devoted to the archival profession are not sufficient to eliminate these deficiencies even in the foreseeable future. Latin America is one of the economically underdeveloped areas of the world, and for this reason financial assistance from outside sources is needed and welcomed. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that such assistance may be forthcoming from private foundations, from inter-American organizations, or from the well-known agency designated as the Alliance for Progress. If this should happen, the goals of the Inter-American Technical Council on Archives would be much easier to achieve.

“... deviations from every record ...”

Immediately on entering upon our Office, we examined the Records of the Office, which were found to have suffered exceedingly by time, but especially by their removal on the invasion of the British.

The importance of the original Surveys and Sections required immediate measures for their preservation. We have caused them to be carefully mounted on linnen and have repaired them carefully where torn or defaced.

The Maps of the Water property and all other plans and Maps of importance have under gone the same process of repair and preservation.

All the other documents and original records, and copies of records of squares, have been collected and collated. This has been a laborious undertaking and such numerous errors have been discovered that it is not yet completed. — and will require still much labor, because in examining on the ground itself the dimensions set down in the papers we have found deviations from every record existing.

—B[ENJAMIN] HENRY LATROBE and ROBERT KING, Surveyors of the City of Washington, to Thomas Munroe, Superintendent of the City of Washington, Washington, D.C., Jan. 3, 1816, in Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, National Archives, Record Group 42.