

Caribbean Archives Conference, 1965

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FOR some time, historians, archivists, and librarians have been concerned about the preservation of the source materials pertaining to West Indian history. In June 1963 the Council of the University of the West Indies discussed the desirability of a conference of the custodians and scholars interested in such materials. In February 1964 the Council nominated a standing committee to assume responsibility for organizing a conference. The committee included representatives of the Government of Jamaica, the Jamaica Archives, the Institute of Jamaica, and the University of the West Indies.

The first Caribbean Archives Conference, which was financially supported by the Government of Jamaica, was held at the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica, between September 20 and 27, 1965. Delegates came from Antigua, Barbados, Bermuda, British Guiana, British Honduras, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Montserrat, the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, and the Virgin Islands of the United States. In addition to institutional representatives from various cultural organizations in Jamaica, the following institutions from other islands and countries were represented: the OAS, Unesco, the University of Puerto Rico, the Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, the Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, the Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos of Spain, the Public Archives of Canada, and the Consulate General of Colombia.

The general sessions of the Conference were devoted to three major matters: (1) the location and availability of public and private records in the Caribbean countries; (2) the location and availability of archival material abroad; and (3) general professional and technical problems in surveying, appraising, storing, administering, and repairing records and in recruiting and training archivists.

Although less sophisticated than the discussions at meetings of

The author discussed "Principles of Archival Appraisal" and "Archival Training in the Caribbean Countries" at the Conference and was chairman of one of its general sessions.

the Society of American Archivists, the general sessions, in a very practical way, served to elucidate the elementary problems that are encountered in countries where inadequate attention has been given to research materials. Much of the discussion from the floor was quite properly devoted to a review of the particular problems of various Caribbean countries, for such problems, obviously, should be resolved with regard to local conditions. Michael J. Chandler, Archivist of Barbados, and E. C. Baker, Archivist of the University of the West Indies, led the discussion of local problems in finding and storing archival material; Enos Sewlal, Archivist of Trinidad and Tobago, the local problems of access and availability; Miss U. Raymond, Library of the University of the West Indies at Trinidad, the local problems of recruitment and training; and Clinton V. Black, Archivist of Jamaica, the local problems of archival preservation. The repair techniques in the Caribbean area, it became obvious in the discussions, should be designed to deal with the "brown rot" caused by fungus and should be applied with facilities less complicated and less expensive than those used in large archival institutions in the United States and Europe. The function of record centers was discussed by L. Rodríguez Morales, Archivist of Puerto Rico. Since some records pertaining to the Caribbean countries were either removed to Europe or do not exist because they were destroyed or because they were never created in the first instance, considerable attention was given to the reproduction of European archives and to the production of audiovisual records relating to folklore. The latter problem was discussed by J. D. Elder of the University of Pennsylvania.

Information given by the delegates, both orally and in writing, makes it possible to provide a brief summary of archival developments in the Caribbean islands. Very good archival institutions are found in Jamaica, Guadeloupe, and Puerto Rico; and records are housed and administered quite well in Barbados, Bermuda, the Netherlands Antilles, and Surinam; but in most other islands most essentials for good archival programs are lacking—legislation, staff, and housing. The following situations exist:

Antigua. Because proper provision was not made for their preservation, most of the island's records were sent in 1954 to the Colonial Office in London, which later put them in the care of the Public Record Office. They are now in the Ashridge Park repository.

Barbados. In 1964 the Barbados government enacted legislation that established a Record Office, which is under the jurisdic-

tion of the Ministry of Education. The Office, located in the Lazaretto Building, Black Rock, St. Michael, is headed by a trained archivist who has one assistant. Records are stored in cardboard containers on steel shelving in an old hospital building that was converted into a repository.

Bermuda. The Bermuda government made the Historical Monuments Trust responsible for the preservation of records, as well as for the upkeep of historic buildings. It appropriates funds for the employment of an archivist and for the maintenance of records in the Bermuda Library, adjacent to its reference section. The building is airconditioned and equipped with steel shelving, and it has a workshop.

British Virgin Islands. The Administrator has recently appointed an Archives Committee, which is attempting to acquire an Archives Room to which records, now stored in a government vault, will be transferred.

Dominica. There is no archival agency.

Grenada. There is no archival agency. Most public records are in the General Registry at St. George's.

Guadeloupe. In 1951 the Overseas Department of France established the Archives Départementales at Basse-Terre, the work of which is regulated by basic French archival laws. The agency's staff consists of six persons headed by a well-trained archivist. A well constructed, fireproof, and hurricane-proof building, equipped with steel shelving and with a repair shop and bindery, has been provided by the government. The hand lamination method developed by Y. P. Kathpalia is employed. A library is attached to the archives, which serves as a center for legal and administrative studies. In addition to being responsible for public archives, the archivist advises government departments on management procedures and supervises the management of municipal archives.

Jamaica. In 1879 legislation modeled closely on the English Record Office Act of 1838 provided for the establishment of an Island Record Office. This Office failed to discharge all of the archival responsibilities provided by the legislation. In 1950 Sir Hilary Jenkinson, then head of the Public Record Office, London, recommended in his Report on the *Archives of Jamaica* that the legislation of 1879 be implemented. Shortly thereafter archival responsibilities were assumed by the Institute of Jamaica. In 1961 the Jamaican Government erected a modern, fireproof, airconditioned repository at Spanish Town. Records are stored in cardboard containers on steel shelving. A well equipped repair shop and

bindery are available. The Jamaica Archives is headed by a well-trained archivist, assisted by a staff of 14 persons. The story of the Jamaican Archives is fully told in six broadcast talks by Clinton V. Black, which were reproduced in a pamphlet entitled "Our Archives," issued by the Government Printer in Kingston in 1962.

Montserrat. There is no archival agency, but two repositories exist for public records: an Archives Room in Government House, in which most of the island's surviving records are kept; and the Registrar's Office in the Supreme Court.

Netherlands Antilles. Records antedating 1845 were transferred to the General State Archives of the Netherlands; post-1845 records of the federal government are kept by the Gouvernements Archief in Curaçao, and records of insular governments are kept in the respective islands.

Puerto Rico. The Archivo General de Puerto Rico is under the jurisdiction of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. Its organization and functions are described by its Director, Luis Rodríguez Morales, in his article "Puerto Rico—The Documents Administration Program," which appeared in the *American Archivist*, 26:379-382 (July 1963).

St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. There is no independent archival agency in the islands, but a Permanent Archives Committee, under the chairmanship of the Administrator, has been established, and a fireproof Archives Room has been provided in a newly constructed government building. Public records will be transferred to it shortly.

St. Lucia. There is no archival agency, but an Archives Committee, under the chairmanship of the Administrator, is concerning itself with public records.

St. Vincent. Since no special accommodation exists for archives, the Public Library, with the support of the local historical society, has indicated its willingness to house any records made available to it.

Surinam. In January 1957 a new archival program was begun, and since then qualified personnel has been appointed. The Landsarchiefdienst in Paramaribo is under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs. The archival staff consists of a chief archivist, an assistant archivist, clerical staff, and a binder. It has available an old wooden building, for which the government is now seeking a replacement, that is equipped with a repair shop and a bindery. In addition to being responsible for public records transferred to his custody (those antedating

1845 having been transferred to the General State Archives of the Netherlands), the archivist advises government departments, which employ two archivists, on the management of records. Most records postdating 1845 are still located in various government departments. In rural areas, district records are preserved in the offices of the district commissioner.

Trinidad and Tobago. In 1958 Clinton V. Black and T. R. Schellenberg surveyed the archival situation in these islands and wrote a report, *The Archives of Trinidad and Tobago*. The recommendations of this report have not yet been fully implemented: an archivist has been appointed, but no facilities have been provided for the storage of records. The Archivist is promoting a plan whereby noncurrent records will be arranged and stored by officials of various Government departments, each of which is to provide its own repository. Photographic and repair work is done by some Government departments, and funds are appropriated for filming historical documents abroad. The archival functions are executed under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister.

Virgin Islands of the United States. Since there is no archival agency, public libraries are assuming responsibility for whatever records are available locally.

The Conference appointed a Drafting Committee, which, following the general sessions, summarized the discussions and issued a report of recommendations. The recommendations, of which there were 22, constitute a good blueprint for an archival program in the Caribbean area. They relate to such matters as archival legislation, administrative measures for the preservation and care of records, policies in regard to public inspection and research, the preparation and publication of lists and guides, the development of a workshop on repair and preservation, archival training, and the reproduction of overseas materials pertaining to the Caribbean countries. The Drafting Committee also resolved to establish a Caribbean Historical Association and elected a committee to bring such an association into existence.

While the Caribbean Archives Conference was primarily significant for the professional interchange of views among the archivists, librarians, and scholars who attended it, it yielded an important byproduct. This was in the form of finding aids to records, prepared both in the Caribbean countries and overseas. These aids will greatly stimulate interest in the archival profession in the Caribbean area, for the most effective action an archivist can take to

develop an appreciation for his work is to provide a description of the materials with which he works. Though the Drafting Committee in its report stated that a great need still exists for descriptive lists and indexes, the finding aids produced for the Conference represent an important contribution to our knowledge about Caribbean historical sources, and they should, as the Drafting Committee recommended, be reproduced for general distribution.

The following lists were specifically prepared for the Conference :

- Records in *Barbados* in official repositories, by W. J. Chandler.
- Records in *Barbados* not in official repositories, by W. J. Chandler.
- Records in the *British Virgin Islands*, by E. C. Baker.
- Records on the *Caribbean* in the *Public Record Office*, by D. B. Wardle, Records Administration Officer, Public Record Office, London.
- Records on the *Caribbean* in *England* and *Wales* not located in the Public Record Office, by D. B. Wardle.
- Records on the *Caribbean* in *Scotland*, by D. A. G. Waddell, University of Edinburgh.
- Records in *Guadeloupe* in the official archives, by J. P. Hervieu, Archivist of Guadeloupe.
- Records in *Jamaica* in the official archives, by C. V. Black.
- Records on the *Lesser Antilles* in the *Archives of the Indies, Spain*, by Francisco Morales Padrón, University of Seville.
- Records on the *Netherlands Antilles* and *Surinam* in the *General State Archives of the Netherlands*, by Mrs. M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofz, of the Netherlands General State Archives.
- Records on the *Virgin Islands of the United States* in the *Royal Archives at Copenhagen, Denmark*.

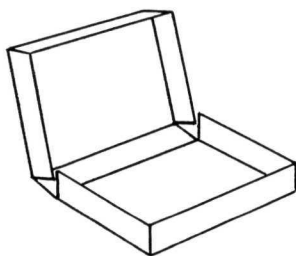
In addition, the following lists, which appeared originally in French journals, were translated and reproduced :

- Records on the *French Colonies* in the *French National Archives*, by Etienne Taillemite.
- Records on *French Guiana*, by Jacques de Font-Réaulx.
- Records on *Grenada*, by J. C. Nardin.

While not specifically prepared for the Conference, two very valuable guides opportunely appeared at the time it convened. They were based on surveys of official, semiofficial, and private records and were made possible by grants from the Rockefeller and Nuffield Foundations. The guides were published for the University of the West Indies by B. Blackwell, Oxford, England. They are entitled *A Guide to Records in Barbados*, by M. J. Chandler, and *A Guide to Records in the Leeward Islands* (Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Christopher, and the British Virgin Islands), by E. C. Baker. *A Guide to Records in the Windward Islands*, also by E. C. Baker, is to be published in the near future.

Research in Caribbean history should also be greatly facilitated by a project, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, that is administered by the University of Florida Libraries. It has resulted in the filming of newspapers and others items worthy of preservation in the following places: Barbados, British Guiana, Curaçao, Dominica, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique, Nassau (Bahamas), St. Lucia, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago. A complete list of the serial titles was presented to the Conference by Stanley L. West, Director of Libraries, University of Florida Libraries.

A very useful bibliography was also prepared for the Conference by Arthur E. Gropp, Librarian at the Pan American Union, who produced the well-known *Guide to Libraries and Archives in Central America and the West Indies* (New Orleans, Tulane University, 1941). It is entitled "Bibliography of Archival Resources Relative to Latin America." The complete documentation of the conference is given in the processed *Report of the Caribbean Archives Conference Held at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, September 20-27, 1965 . . .* ([Mona, 1965?]).



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