Documenting the Great Migrations and a Century of Ethnicity in America

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OF THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD, the cultural pluralism of the American people remains a particularly noteworthy characteristic. More than to most nations, the great migrations of the hundred years between 1820 and 1920 have contributed a cultural richness and diversity to both rural and urban populations. For American archival institutions interested in the history of American society whether at the national, state, or local level, the phenomenon of immigration should be of interest and importance. Documenting the great migrations and the resulting ethnic character of American society presents a unique kind of challenge to the archivist. Documents relevant to the field are not always readily apparent. Since immigrants settled all across the U.S., there is a need for cooperation and sharing among archives in America. Also, since the great migrations were truly a worldwide phenomenon affecting both the nations emigrated from and the nations immigrated to, there is a vital need among the world's archives for awareness of collections pertaining to this important movement. In this article, we seek to introduce and explore the question of documenting the great migrations and to outline the experience of the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan in contributing to its solution.

Statistics clearly illustrate the impact of immigration on American life. Between 1820 and 1920, the peak immigration years, over 34 million foreigners arrived in American ports.[1] This is a truly staggering mass migration, and the figures do not include those who migrated to South America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The great migrations were a worldwide phenomenon, but North America and particularly the United States received the largest share.[2]

Thirty-four million individuals passing through select ports of entry and settling throughout the United States must have left behind a trail of documentary records regarding their experiences, activities, and, in some cases, observations. For the archivist, trying to isolate such records is not always a simple task. Literacy rates varied considerably among the migrating generations of various groups. Personal

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[1] Statistics on immigration can be found in brief form in *Historical Statistics* (Washington, D.C., 1961). More detailed information is located in the massive forty-one volume *Reports of the Immigration Commission* (Washington, 1907-1910).

[2] Reino Kero, *Migration from Finland to North America in the Years between the United States Civil War and the First World War* (Vammala, 1974); Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the 19th and 20th Centuries" in *XI^e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Stockholm 1960, Rapports, V: Histoire Contemporaine* (Göteborg, Stockholm, and Upsala, 1960), pp. 32-60.

papers, letters, and diaries, therefore, the traditional stuff of social history, are often lacking. To document immigrant experiences in America one really must be aware of the general process of migration and settlement of various groups and realize that important sources for the study of immigrants are often buried in collections which might seem most useful for the study of other topics in American history, such as church records, business records, government records, social welfare records, and newspapers.

It is risky to suggest a universal model for a complex process, particularly one so varied as migration. However, in considering what kinds of documents might be useful to the study of the migrations, an archivist should become more aware of the dimensions of the process of immigration and settlement. Intelligent inquiry into the better literature of the field should help the archivist to define more clearly the relationship to migration studies of existing or potential collections.[3]

Immigration can and should be examined both from the perspective of the individual migrant and from the perspective of immigrant groups. The immigration process was based fundamentally on millions of individual decisions to uproot and resettle. That the experiences of uprooting and resettling were shared among individuals of similar national backgrounds adds a group dimension to the process.[4] The extent to which the group dimension persists over generations would suggest a third dimension, the ethnic dimension.

From an individual perspective, the process of arrival and settlement is of particular importance. Since immigrants arrived at different points in time, experiences must have varied a great deal. Particularly useful would be documents suggesting certain pull factors which attracted immigrants to the United States—such things as guidebooks, immigrant observations, and shipping and railroad company promotional material. Documenting the process of settlement demands knowledge of available housing, transportation, financial assistance, and information regarding general immigrant settlement patterns, information often locked in social welfare records, census records, government reports, and business records.[5] Crucial in the settlement process was the necessary economic adjustment by immigrants. The search for work in America was often the most difficult phase of migration. Many came with skills very much in demand. Others were able to retool themselves, but most were unskilled and occupied the most tedious and low-paying jobs if they could find jobs at all. Information on the work experience of individual immigrants is extremely useful. Payroll records and census records have been the traditional window to this phase of the process. For settlers in rural areas economic information would be as hard to find as personal papers.[6]

For the most part, immigrants are anonymous Americans who as individuals leave behind very little in the way of personal papers and diaries. Thus the docu-

[3] The framework for this outline of the process of immigration is taken from the broad outlines of Oscar Handlin's classic work *Boston's Immigrants* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959). Other important general works on immigration include Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration 1607–1860* (New York, 1961); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York, 1961); Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Contadini in Chicago, A Critique of *The Uprooted*" in *Journal of American History*, vol. 51 (Dec. 1964): 404–17; Brinley Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, England, 1954); Maldwyn Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1960); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, 1955); David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants* (New York, 1971).

[4] Ulf Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago* (Upsala and Chicago, 1971); Kero, *Migration from Finland.*

[5] For example, see Moses Rischin, *The Promised City, New York Jews 1870–1914* (New York, 1962).

[6] Payroll records often buried in larger corporate collections have been particularly useful, such as those at Baker Library, Harvard University, of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company. Studies of mobility of immigrant Americans usually rely on manuscript census data.

menting of their individual experiences poses the most difficult challenge to the archivist. To date, statistical information remains the chief source. Hard as it is to document the American phase of the individual immigrant experience, archivists must also be aware of the foreign dimension. Inasmuch as there were pull factors attracting immigrants to the United States, there were also push factors encouraging individuals to leave their native lands. These factors, such as the Irish potato famine and the Czarist persecution of the Jews, are European history but bear importantly on the international context of the migrations. Likewise the native heritage of immigrants is important. The social structure and economic structure of the native city or village have direct relevance to individual behavior and adaptability to life in the United States.[7]

As wave upon wave of immigrants arrived in selected ports of entry and settled throughout the United States, communities of fellow countrymen emerged. Entire sections in the American city and countryside began to take on characteristics peculiar to the particular group which settled—German settlements in the midwest; Scandinavian settlements in the upper midwest; Russian, East European, Irish, and Italian in major urban-industrial centers. The pattern has many variations. As the numbers increased, these communities became institutionalized and structured. The immigrant communities were areas where the retention of transplanted old-world traits was attempted in America.[8] This attempt to preserve vestiges of native culture was manifest in the institutional life of the immigrant communities. Voluntary associations, such as the Turner societies or the Sons of Norway served to provide a sense of group identity. Special shops, businesses, and services grew both in response to specific needs of various national groups and from the tendency of immigrants to want to deal and associate with their own kind.[9]

Particularly important, both as institutions for immigrants and as sources for the study of immigrants, were the newspapers which served the communities. Published in many languages and dialects, most of these journals were short lived. Because of the language and condition of the newspapers, many libraries chose not to preserve this printed record. The copies that exist are rare and deteriorating rapidly. However, newspapers do remain the chief nonstatistical source of information about daily life and thought in immigrant communities.[10]

The group consciousness of immigrants was fostered not only by a sense of common identity but also in reaction to problems in the new world. Various nativist movements among earlier settlers in America often took a hostile view of the newcomers, particularly in times of economic depression when competition for jobs was often fierce. Thus documents relating to how immigrants were perceived in America can be as useful as documents concerning their actual behavior. Also, conflict among and within the groups themselves often occurred. German Jewish immigrants were frequently embarrassed by the condition of newer Russian Jewish groups. The Irish often split along "lace curtain" and "shanty" lines."[11]

[7] For works on anonymous immigrant Americans, see particularly Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), and *The Other Bostonians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); Humbert Nelli, *Italians in Chicago 1880–1930* (Chicago, 1970); Tamara K. Hareven, ed., *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in 19th Century Social History* (Englewood Cliffs, 1971).

[8] Caroline Ware, ed., *The Cultural Approach to History* (New York, 1940); Robert Park and Herbert Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (Chicago, 1925); Joanne Bock, *Pop Weiner, Naive Painter* (Amherst, 1974).

[9] Rischin, *Promised City*; Handlin, *Immigrants*; Beijbom, *Swedes*.

[10] Hansen, *Atlantic Migration*; Thernstrom, *Poverty*; Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975).

[11] Higham, *Strangers*; Barbara Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

Embracing and sometimes creating the conflicts and problems of immigrant life were the churches and religious societies. No institution was more pervasive in the daily lives of immigrants than the churches. Thus the records of midwestern Lutheran churches and urban and rural Catholic churches are in fact records of the immigrant communities they served. Churches were not only important as religious institutions but often provided education, health care, voluntary societies, and a structure of values for the newly arrived. The pervasiveness of the churches provided order within immigrant community life and often effectively isolated immigrants from the larger society. The power of the churches in the late nineteenth century became symbolic of the potential power of immigrants.[12]

Sources for understanding the development of immigrant communities can therefore be found in a variety of places. Business records and church records may not simply be the records of businesses and churches but might also contain the history of immigrant communities which they served. In a field where individual personal papers were seldom preserved, often these institutional records are the sole avenue for investigation of immigrant life. Archivists might well find within existing collections material pertaining to the history of immigration, though the general subject theme of a collection might indicate otherwise. Locating and acquiring material relating to immigration in America is important primarily as a tool for the study of the past. However, the migrations of the period 1820–1920 have had a lingering impact on the character of American society to the present day. Many immigrant neighborhoods persist. Many immigrant institutions remain active.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many intelligent observers of America assumed that immigrants would gradually lose the cultural trappings of their native lands and become fully assimilated into the mainstream of American life. The melting pot seemed to historians and sociologists an appropriate metaphor for the anticipated breaking down of cultural pluralism and the achievement of cultural homogeneity through time—a truly integrated society.[13]

In more recent decades, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have taken a second look at the melting pot and have discovered that after five to six generations, Americans retain a certain identity with earlier immigrant generations and remain identified largely along ethnic lines. Many of the old immigrant institutions have vanished or changed. But ethnic identity remains strong. An individual may eat less pasta than his father, but he remains conscious that he is an Italo-American, and others also identify him as such though he may not always be sure why.[14]

The thrust of recent studies points to the persistence of ethnicity in American life. Ethnicity forms one of the important bases for the organization and structure of American society. Thus the archivist must be conscious of recent institutions which reflect persisting ethnic consciousness—ethnic fairs, ethnic debutante balls, and, more significantly, the rhetoric of the so-called new ethnicity.[15] The idea of the melting pot is generally questioned as many Americans continue to identify themselves, their neighborhoods, and their backgrounds in hyphenated terms.

In documenting the history of immigration and ethnicity in America, archivists

[12] Higham, *Strangers*; Michael Guignard, "Maine's Corporation Sole Controversy" in *Maine Historical Society Newsletter*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Winter 1973): 11–30.

[13] The work of Frederick Jackson Turner suggests the frontier as a melting pot. See also Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* (New York, 1909).

[14] Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1970); Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York, 1964).

[15] Currently Michael Novak is the spokesman for the new ethnicity. See his *Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (New York, 1975).

must think through the various dimensions of the process of settlement by individual immigrants. Archivists should be conscious of the institutions which helped to define and in some cases isolate the immigrant experience. An awareness of the significance and complexity of immigration and ethnicity in America is a necessary first step in finding, defining, and improving document collections in this field of study.

If ethnicity does indeed persist, then it is important that source material on the history and development of ethnic groups be gathered and preserved. The personal papers of immigrants, the records of their institutions, and the copies of their publications form the research materials from which scholars may re-create the early experiences of ethnic groups and accurately assess the nature and extent of their accommodations and contributions to American culture. It is important, too, that the individual members of an ethnic group be kept aware of the sources relating to their group's experience and institutions. As each generation gets further removed from the migrating generation, archival and printed sources will become the sole avenue for people to understand the nature and origins of ethnicity in America.

These historical materials are now preserved by a few institutions, but mostly by the descendants of the immigrants. The old ethnic communities are no longer as cohesive as they once were. The evolving ethnic consciousness of present generations has markedly changed from that of the foreign-born stock who wished to maintain the transplanted old-world traditions. Indeed, in some cases, it has so diminished that ethnic communities find it almost impossible to re-create even facsimiles of age-old customs and traditions. As a result, ethnic Americans face a peculiar problem. Ethnicity in America persists. Yet, since the nature of ethnicity is taking on new forms, ethnic groups are progressively losing touch with the sources of group tradition. For individual members of ethnic groups, this means a persistence in ethnic identity with an increasing inability to locate or understand the origins and nature of that identity. Most archives and library institutions have generally chosen not to collect ethnic materials. In some cases such materials have been destroyed or sent back to country of group origin for lack of space, funds, interest, or awareness of the significance of ethnic-related materials. To avert a total loss of these materials, some ethnic groups have moved to preserve the records of their history and progress before the records disappear. There is, however, a general feeling among ethnic groups that major archival institutions are not interested in preserving the records of their history.

Indeed few archival institutions consciously work to improve collecting in areas which might have an ethnic dimension and to publicize the relevance of their holdings to research on the migrations and the question of ethnicity. Much the exception are institutions such as the Western Reserve Historical Society, the Ohio Historical Society, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the Minnesota Historical Society, which have active programs for collecting material relating to ethnic groups. Most notable, of course, are two archives devoted exclusively to collecting and research in this area. The Immigration History Research Center of the University of Minnesota, founded in 1964, has a very active program for collecting manuscript and printed sources. Under the direction of Rudolph Vecoli, the center has built collections relating to nearly every group of European origin which has come to American shores. The center's purpose has been to facilitate and encourage research on the immigrations from Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe and the Middle East, and on ethnic communities which originated in those immi-

grations. Important too, is the Balch Institute of Philadelphia, which strives to document, preserve, and interpret the American ethnic experience. With over three hundred manuscript collections and an impressive collection of printed materials the Balch Institute is an important research center for individuals interested in the activities of ethnic groups on the East Coast. Directed by Howard Applegate, the institute has an active program in preserving documents and artifacts of the great migration. Both the Immigration History Research Center and the Balch Institute have active publication programs to inform scholars and other interested individuals about their collections and specially funded research and collecting programs.

Equally important are the efforts of organizations which have opened communication links among individuals and institutions in the field. The Immigration History Society through its newsletter publishes news of visiting scholars, research in progress, special projects, and new publications.[16] The Center for Research Libraries has organized a consortium of libraries interested in preserving on film immigrant newspapers. For the U.S.A. the task of searching and collecting documents relating to ethnic groups is indeed an enormous one. An intelligent division of the task should work to the mutual benefit of all institutions if the results can be shared and if duplication of efforts can be avoided. Such cooperation could be achieved by dividing the country into specific regions of responsibility for individual institutions, or institutions might choose to focus on specific groups, thus dividing the task along linguistic lines. The number and variety of ethnic groups in America today provide ample source base for any institution seriously interested in the ethnic dimension of whatever their collecting theme might be.

Since the immigration phenomenon is truly an international one, sources for the study of the process exist both in the country immigrated into as well as the country emigrated from. At the Bentley Library of the University of Michigan, it was hypothesized that a substantial amount of the material germane to the ethnic experience in Michigan and the United States would be extant only in Europe, in the form of letters and records sent back by immigrants to chronicle their lives in the New World and to entice others to follow. Seeking to validate this hypothesis, Robert M. Warner, director of the library, obtained a modest grant from the University of Michigan in 1972 to visit Scandinavia in order to contact archival institutions and libraries concerning emigration materials.[17]

This trip was planned a year in advance. Historians and archivists, particularly at the University of Michigan, were consulted for possible visit sites. The suggested locations in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland were contacted and their

[16] Addresses of principal institutions are: Immigration History Society, c/o Minnesota Historical Society, 690 Cedar St., St. Paul, Minnesota 55101; The Balch Institute, 18 South Seventh St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106; Immigration History Research Center, 826 Berry St., St. Paul, Minnesota 55114.

[17] This thesis certainly did not originate in the Bentley Library. Marcus Hansen, a son of immigrants, decided to make the American immigration experience the focus of his lifelong scholarly efforts. This led to his Ph.D. from Harvard and professorship at the University of Illinois. He saw that to do his work he had to search out sources in Europe, and therefore in 1925 he undertook a two-year examination of European archives, looking for immigration materials. "Painstakingly he untied bundles of records untouched since they had been bound up a hundred years earlier; and he worked his way through scores of newspaper files." Hansen's fine work was ended by his premature death in 1938, and, while historians have continued to devote interest and work to the great migrations, it has only been in relatively recent years that the archival profession in this country has given more than perfunctory attention to the international significance of this topic. See Handlin, Introduction to Hansen, *Atlantic Migration*, p. xv. Another distinguished early researcher who utilized immigrant letters was Theodore C. Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America, 1825-1860* (Northfield, Minn., 1931-40).

responses in turn suggested other sites. The result was the compiling of a detailed itinerary with specific confirmed appointments with archivists and historians in these nations. With but few modifications, this schedule was met.

Having thus carefully prepared the way, Warner found a great willingness among the archivists to cooperate in this search. These foreign archivists were unfailingly helpful and friendly. The visits fully confirmed the initial supposition that important and substantial materials essential to the history of Michigan Scandinavians (the particular focus of this investigation) survived only in Europe. The visits also confirmed the fact that European research and archival projects devoted to immigration history were well advanced. To be sure, these developments were known to dedicated immigration historians in the United States, but not to the archival profession generally.

Located in Växjö, the capital city of Småland province, is the Emigrantinstitutet, devoted to documenting Swedish emigration. Housed in a modern building constructed in 1968 is an attractive museum which seeks to tell the story of the Swedish emigrants: who they were, where they went, and why they left. For the American archivist, of most significance was the small but rich archives on emigration to America. The congenial director of the Emigrantinstitutet, Ulf Beijbom, author of an important study regarding the Swedish immigrant experience in Chicago, showed his extensive collection of microfilmed records of Swedish-American churches.[18] Also here was a collection of Swedish-American newspapers. But of particular interest was the institute's collection of more than seven thousand America letters. This material was exactly what the Bentley Library sought. An added pleasant surprise was the fact that the letters had been cataloged by the name of the town in the United States from where they had been sent. As might be expected, Minnesota and Wisconsin predominated, but there were more than two hundred letters from Michigan, the earliest dated 1869. Not all were originals; some were typescripts or photoduplicates. One unexpected discovery was a letter written by Johan G. R. Baner whose papers had already been deposited in the Bentley Library. The institute generously agreed to copy all of the Michigan letters. Two years later, the Bentley Library was able to reciprocate by permitting the microfilming of its Baner collection by the institute.

Time did not permit extensive examination of other Swedish archives; however, two of special interest were successfully sampled. In Karlstad, the Emigrantregistret for Värmland had a small but growing archives of interest to immigration historians. Among its holdings were the papers of a long-tenured Swedish consul in the United States, which contained good information on this country and its institutions viewed through the eyes of this observant and intelligent Swedish official. The curator found no Michigan letters, but later in the year he discovered four letters, copies of which with translations were given to the Bentley Library.

In Stockholm, at the Kungliga Biblioteket (Royal Library), were files of thirteen Swedish language newspapers published in Michigan, the earliest dating from 1887. None of these papers are extant in Michigan. The Royal Library was willing to film these publications, but as yet funds for this purpose have not been found. Undoubtedly other local archives would have turned up America letters, shipping lists, and similar materials, but time did not permit further Swedish archival explorations.

[18] Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago*. Upsala University has been an international leader in immigration history studies stressing the use of quantitative data.

Because Michigan has had the most Finnish immigrants of any American state, the library was especially anxious to explore archives in Finland. Again in our own preliminary correspondence, the Institute for General History at the University of Turku was universally suggested as the place to visit. This center fully lived up to its high recommendations. The host for our visit, Reino Kero, is a scholar of immigration studies. His study regarding Finnish migrations from 1860 to 1914 carefully analyzed Finnish emigration to this country and Canada.[19] The institute has assembled a truly extensive archival collection relating to Finnish emigration, primarily to Canada and the United States but also to South America and Australia. Included among its microfilm holdings are minutes and other records of temperance societies, churches, fraternal organizations, and labor groups. Also present is a good oral history collection, a fine body of America letters, and extensive printed material. The institute, under the direction of Vilho Niitemaa, has, in its decade-long history, carried on an extensive field program both in Finland and abroad—South America, Australia, and many states and provinces in the United States and Canada. Though one would have liked more extensive finding aids (not possible because of a shortage of personnel), one could not fail to be impressed with the success of the field program. Few American archives could match its success in building a major archival collection around a specific theme in so short a time.

Though no arrangements for copying material were made at this time, the contacts proved of great importance. The institute and the library undertook a joint microfilm project aimed at copying the excellent body of Finnish-American materials gathered at Suomi College in Houghton, Michigan. This led to the year-long exchange visit of a member of the institute's staff, Keijo Virtanen, to the Bentley Library. A fine scholar and a congenial colleague, Virtanen accomplished much that was very useful, including a detailed catalog in English of the Suomi collection. He also arranged for obtaining copies of twelve thousand America letters from his institute and, during his stay, prepared a detailed catalog of this collection. The catalog listed the American towns from which the letters were sent.[20] This institute has also had productive exchanges with Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center. In 1974 the two organizations sponsored a conference on Finnish immigration and jointly published the proceedings.[21] Virtanen also arranged through his colleagues at the University of Helsinki to secure ninety-one reels of microfilm of four Michigan Finnish-language newspapers.

Building on these foundations, the Bentley, with the generous assistance of several University of Michigan faculty members interested in the history of immigration and American ethnic groups, has been able slowly but steadily to build its collection in these areas. Marion Marzolf of the Journalism Department discovered important materials while searching the Danish Emigrant Archives at Aalborg, Denmark. While not so well developed as the programs at Växjö and Turku, the archives has achieved a good beginning for the study of Danish emigration. Marzolf discovered letters and other material from Michigan Danes, including letters from Danish Lutheran pastors in such Michigan towns as Greenville and Muskegon. These manuscripts were microfilmed and are now in the Bentley Library.

[19] Kero, *Migration from Finland.*

[20] Keijo Virtanen, *Letters to Finland,* Bulletin #26 of the Michigan Historical Collections (Ann Arbor, 1976).

[21] Michael G. Karni, Matti E. Kaups and Douglas J. Ollila, eds., *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives* (Vammala, 1975).

Other assistance came from William Lockwood of the Anthropology Department who discovered a small but useful collection relating to Hungarian ethnic groups while doing research in an Austrian town. Similarly, a University of Michigan graduate student, Robert Donia, while on a Fulbright grant to Yugoslavia, was able to provide the Bentley Library with a preliminary survey of Slavic emigrant materials in that country and in southern Poland.

These productive ventures are pleasant to record, but to be objective we should also record a nonproductive exploration. Knowing that Cornwall, England, was an important source of settlers for Michigan's Upper Peninsula, we sought contacts in that region of Great Britain. Among other approaches, we placed notices in Cornish newspapers outlining our interest in obtaining immigrant letters and journals or copies of them. We listed both our Ann Arbor address and the address of a friend of our library then living in England. Though this notice ran for some time, we received not a single response. The Cornish project was not a total loss, however. Through correspondence we located the papers of Arthur C. Todd, Cornish immigration scholar.[22] As there were no convenient microfilm facilities available, our contact in Britain flew the collection to Ann Arbor on one of his frequent trips. We then filmed it here and flew it back to Britain.

Over the past ten years a number of institutions have made significant progress in collecting and providing documentation for the history of the great migrations and of ethnicity in America. Of course, more could be done. Institutions interested in this area of collecting should first become aware of the historical and current problems of immigration and ethnicity. Familiarity with a field makes for greater ease in searching and locating potential collections. Archivists with an awareness of the field will be better able to analyze their own collections and assess their research potential in the area of migration studies.

Our years of active overseas collecting of material relating to Michigan ethnic groups have led us to several general conclusions. Overseas collecting requires careful preparation, long before any visits are made. Actual visits are almost essential to the success of any program, both for making contact and for actually seeking out the desired materials. Frequently the existing catalogs are not adequate for the investigator's purposes, and only a personal search of the material produces results. Whenever possible it is better to work with an existing archival agency in the country under investigation than to attempt direct field work. In this respect the European emigrant archives centers have major advantages: they have no language problems and they have many contacts and national loyalties they can draw upon in the United States. A further word about the language problem. From the standpoint of archives in the United States it is serious. Language skills in most American archives are quite limited. To acquire materials and turn them over to archivists or manuscript curators who do not know the language leads only to staff frustration and a program of limited effectiveness. The language problem is not insurmountable, however. One of the best solutions is an exchange program bringing archivists or historians from abroad to process and catalog. Our library found that these exchange programs substantially aided our general program as well. Another solution is to utilize the linguistic resources of American colleges and universities

Collecting a single state's immigrant materials has both advantages and disad-

[22] Arthur C. Todd, *The Cornish Mines in America* (Glendale, 1967).

vantages. Boundaries of American states or Canadian provinces are usually of slight importance to Europeans. The European archivist will seldom catalog by states. On this continent, too, boundaries are frequently not significant variables for immigration historians. Our experience, however, has shown that seeking materials on a single state has one major advantage. Foreign institutions were willing to assist and cooperate in securing copies of their materials relating to a specific state, while they were hesitant to permit extensive reproduction of their total collections of American-related material.

Though not a major problem in western European nations, nationalism is possibly a problem in other countries. Some nations are reluctant to study the loss of large numbers of their citizens. Also, some countries may seek to limit use of their archival materials to their own scholars only. Helpful in overcoming these problems and, in fact, most useful even if they do not exist, is to be able to offer reciprocal services to the foreign archives. The reciprocity may take the form of exchanging materials, assisting the foreign archives in its American collecting program, or exchanging other archival services.

Undoubtedly the greatest problem in collecting ethnic and immigrant archives is cost. Expenses for this type of collecting are unusually high. Overseas travel is expensive, microfilming is expensive, shipping is expensive, and cataloging when it necessitates translators or overseas consultants is extremely expensive. What this means is that there will have to emerge a cooperative program for overseas collecting and this program will require financial support beyond the current level of resources available to institutions collecting in this area.

As a beginning, the Bentley Historical Library applied for and received a substantial grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to continue its immigration archives program. This program primarily seeks to locate and identify useful sources to document immigration. In the United States it will survey collections relating to Michigan ethnic groups, in Michigan and in other American institutions. Four scholars will travel to four countries overseas: Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Poland. There they will visit archives and search out manuscript materials relating to migrants from these countries to the United States. The results of both surveys together with a methodological essay will be published. A state board with representatives of a variety of institutions and interests advises the project. One hoped-for result will be a plan for a cooperative project among a half dozen or more archival agencies throughout the nation to survey other nations and develop a systematic program to microfilm material in these countries.

The ultimate aim of collecting overseas is to provide interested archival institutions and programs with comprehensive sources for documenting the great migrations and the phenomenon of ethnicity in America. The experiences of the Bentley Library indicate that there is a good deal of documentary evidence both in this country and abroad which ought to be accessible to individuals interested in the study of migration and ethnicity. The international dimension of collecting such materials should foster cooperative scholarly ventures with foreign archives, ventures which will enrich the study of American social history. There are many practical problems, of course, such as language, costs, and bulk. There are also many conceptual problems such as definition of field strategy and definition of what documents are indeed related to migration studies. Inherent in the variety of problems lies the challenge of the field. If the problems can be surmounted, archivists will have an opportunity to provide important documentary sources for understanding a persistent and unique characteristic of American society.