

Shorter Features

CHRISTOPHER BEAM, *Editor*

The Shorter Features department serves as a forum for sharply focused archival topics which may not require a full-length article. Members of the Society and others knowledgeable in areas of archival interest are encouraged to submit papers for consideration. Shorter Features should range from 500 to 1,000 words in length and contain no annotation. Papers should be sent to Christopher Beam, Shorter Features Editor, the *American Archivist*, National Archives and Records Service (NNFD), Washington, DC 20408.

The Vancouver Island Project: Developing a Systematic and Comprehensive Regional Research Tool

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THE PURPOSE OF THE VANCOUVER ISLAND PROJECT (VIP) of the University of Victoria in British Columbia is to prepare a machine-readable research tool for all public repositories on Vancouver Island. Because most repositories are those of local governments, the project staff will list and describe all the records held by five cities, eight district municipalities, four towns, twelve villages, thirteen school districts, six regional districts, and seventy-four improvement districts on the island. Approximately fifty other repositories, including local museums, archives, and historical societies, will

also be surveyed. The project was started in September 1982, following months of planning and preliminary survey work, with a grant of \$75,000 from the Strategic Grants Programme of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The resource tool is made up of three levels of description. The first level, "The General Guide to Repositories," contains a brief general history of the local government agency or organization; a short administrative history; and basic data such as addresses, hours of service, general physical condition of the

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archival material, adequacy of archival storage facilities, and accessibility to the records. Because the history and organization of local government in British Columbia is a new field of research, the entries in the guide will be far more detailed than those usually prepared for local repositories. So that detailed and adequate material for users can be provided, the organizers of the project have carried out their research on the development of local government on Vancouver Island as an independent but complementary project.

Records within each repository are described at both the record group and the series levels. In preparing record group and series level entries, the VIP staff is attempting not only to construct a research tool for use by anyone interested in the development of Vancouver Island but also to attain three other important goals of particular interest to the archival community. The first is to build upon the MARC format for archives and manuscript materials recently developed by the Society of American Archivists' National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF). The proposal prepared by NISTF in September 1982 has been expanded to fit the project's needs following consultation with many professional archivists and after much experimentation in the field. The format will serve the project until its completion.

The second goal of VIP is to develop annotated entries suitable for on-line searching as well as hard-copy reporting. In developing this application to the computer, VIP is building on achievements elsewhere, especially in the United States, where funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities has fostered the development of computer-based inventories and catalogs. The specific work most relevant to VIP has been carried out by the Washington State Archival Survey under John F.

Burns. In order to create a machine-readable resource tool, VIP has developed a comprehensive survey form with appropriate field definitions and a format for internal use which is also compatible with those of other institutions and projects.

The project's final objective is to develop the relationship between current methodologies in history and current recordkeeping practices. As F. M. Miller has recently argued in this journal, modern historical methods present a special challenge to archivists. VIP responds to one aspect of this challenge by systematically canvassing the records of historical societies, museums, churches, and businesses. The result will be a compilation of those sources that will provide an insight into the behavior and norms of local society.

In many respects, VIP is on the frontier of archival surveying in Canada, although the Public Archives of Canada, Archives nationales du Québec, and Provincial Archives of British Columbia have also exercised initiative in this area. At the 1982 Conference on Archives, at Kingston, Ontario, the Bureau of Canadian Archivists was requested to establish a working group, the Archival Descriptive Standards Project, to develop national standards for the arrangement and description of archival holdings. This project is currently seeking funding for its work. In all these cases, however, the efforts deal with major national or provincial repositories; only in Quebec has work progressed beyond the study stage. No other project in Canada is preparing a research tool for local repositories, which are often unorganized and in which the care of historical records is not a principal mission. In the repositories to be surveyed by VIP, historical records are usually the responsibility of one employee and frequently only of part-time or voluntary workers.

The organizers of the Vancouver

Island Project welcome inquiries and comments from those interested in local government records and comprehensive surveying projects, especially at this stage from those interested in the issues

concerning subject access to records. Inquiries or comments should be directed to one of the authors, Vancouver Island Project, University of Victoria, British Columbia, V8W 2Y2, Canada.

The Training of Archivists in West Africa: History and Trends

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THE HISTORY OF THE TRAINING of archivists in West Africa may be divided roughly into three phases. During the first phase, which lasted from the creation of archival institutions in West African countries in the colonial period to the creation of regional training centers in Senegal in 1971 and Ghana in 1975, West African archivists were trained in Europe and North America. The second phase spanned the period from the establishment of training centers for the West African region to the introduction of archives administration courses in 1976 at the Department of Library Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The third phase marked the gradual departure from the regional to the national training center concept.

The first phase in the training of West African archivists began with the establishment of archival institutions. In the absence of training centers in Africa, prospective archivists were sent to the École des Chartes in France, The London School of Library and Information Studies and Archives, and the Public Archives of Canada, to mention only a few, to acquire the skills required to handle the rapidly proliferating records. During this period expediency seemed to shape the training program: trained archivists were so urgently needed that lit-

tle attention was paid to the suitability of Western, especially European, programs to West African realities. Eventually, however, the number of West African archivists trained in Europe decreased because the attachment of European training centers to what Frank Evans has called a classical view of archives administration with courses in paleography and heraldry had little relevance for West Africans and because the cost of sending fledgling archivists abroad became prohibitive. Dissatisfaction with the existing training programs led leaders in the profession to consider the idea of regional training centers closer to home.

The upshot of this demand was the establishment of the Archives Section at the School of Librarianship, Archival Science, and Documentation at the University of Dakar, Senegal, and a similar institution at Accra, Ghana. The prime mover behind this development was the 1966 Extraordinary Congress of the International Council on Archives. This body made a commitment to grant technical assistance to developing countries, especially to centers like those at Dakar and Accra which faced chronic financial and staffing problems. The essential feature of the programs at Dakar and Accra was a curriculum that emphasized the joint concerns of ar-

chivists, librarians, and manuscript curators for the systematic organization of knowledge regardless of its origin or format.

In establishing their schools the organizers of these centers took into account several factors. The first was the realization that libraries and archives were cultural institutions designed to pass information to succeeding generations in a variety of media. The second factor was the impact of the computer with its immense capacity to handle the increasing volume of information. Third was the existence of information storage and retrieval technologies in the form of micrographics and duplication devices. Standardization of these modes of communication further strengthened the link among libraries, archives, and manuscript repositories.

The third phase in the training of archivists in West Africa was marked by a gradual departure from the regional training concept signaled by the establishment of training facilities for archivists at the Department of Library Studies at the University of Ibadan. Two factors seem to be responsible for the change from the regional to the national concept. One is nationalism. Since independence, West African countries have been anxious to control the social, political, and economic destinies of their peoples and this, it was thought, should include control over the professional development of their citizens. The second reason is that because of the high cost of training archivists overseas, many countries believe that training them at home can conserve foreign exchange.

An important objective of the library profession in West Africa is to unite the specialized services of libraries, archives, and manuscript repositories. Library educators at the Dakar, Accra, and

Ibadan library schools seek to impart a sense of both the similarities and the differences that characterize their specialties. UNESCO has been especially helpful in this regard. This organization and library educators in West Africa have spared no effort in their attempt to develop a core curriculum for these fields. Their work has resulted in a standard course of studies that covers the methods, management, and technologies of each branch of information management.

The training of archivists in West Africa still faces a number of problems, some unique to the region. The first is an acute shortage of experienced and competent staff to teach archives administration. West African universities, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, make stringent demands on their teaching staffs. Instructors are normally expected to have not only good academic backgrounds but long experience in their fields. It may be asking too much of archivists who have already reached senior positions in their professions to accept positions as junior lecturers in universities. As a result, the infant field of archives administration has not been able to attract an adequate number of young, well-motivated individuals.

There are a number of ways to resolve these problems. One is to employ experienced staff members from the archival centers as part-time teachers. Another is to initiate cooperative exchange agreements with countries like the United States, Canada, and India which have well-developed archival programs and deal mainly with modern records. An exchange of staff and information could provide the basis for cooperation in other areas of interest and would be a positive way in which the developed countries could assist the developing ones.