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At the Meetings

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I had thought that it would be comparatively easy to persuade some of these that a study of Canadian science would be of greater relevance to their careers and hence would be a better way of satisfying the requirement. Again, there were few converts, and those who did opt for the new course were not exactly wild with enthusiasm. One problem here was that with little secondary reading material available, students will inevitably be thrown more on their own resources than is usual at this level. For science students, this merely compounds the difficulty they experience in producing written work anyway. Apart from this there may have been a general reluctance to satisfy the requirement with an experimental course instead of an old favourite, and perhaps in future years we can hope for better enrolments. But clearly the establishment of such courses is not going to be an easy task, and perhaps we should not over-estimate the potential of our field in the purely academic sphere.

AT THE MEETINGS

Archival Meeting at the National Research Council in Ottawa

Sandra Guillaume
Archivist, Ontario Multicultural History Society

Through the courtesy of Dr A. W. Tickner and the NRC, another meeting in what appears to be a continuing series relating to the history of science in Canada was held on September 16, 1977. A total of 33 persons registered for what was billed in advance as a session on scientific archives. Chaired by Dr A. Davidson Dunton of Carleton University, the panel consisted of Norman R. Ball (Public Archives), Dr C.E.S. Franks (Queen's University), Dr Jean-Claude Guedon (Universite de Montreal), Sandra Guillaume (Ontario Multicultural History Archives), and Don Thomson (author of Men and Meridians).

Thomson made a brief statement about his own researches noting the importance of archival sources as a research base. He referred to the substantial emphasis given to archives by the Symons Report. In his opinion the history of science and the archival sources on which it is based are really part of the Canadian experience and should be better conveyed via publications, etc., to the Canadian people. He envisaged an emphasis particularly on high school programmes to acquaint young people with Canadian scientific and technological achievements.

Ball spoke particularly from the point of view of the Public Archives of Canada. Since the appointment of a specialist in the field of history of science, obviously all the programmes have made significant advances. There has been considerable increase in acquisitions but there is a problem in achieving the delicate balance between acquisitions and service. Increased acquisitions lead to increased research and since many researchers come to Norman from 'straight history' and other such areas, he frequently has to give extra guidance, which in turn removed him from the acquisitions sphere.

Guillaume, formerly of both McGill and University of Toronto

archives noted that the universities did in fact frequently contain the best scientific collections. There are a considerable number of problems in the university archives field: the recent arrival of university archives on the scene, inadequate legislation which makes for an ineffective collection of materials, the lack of scientific knowledge on the part of archives staff, which tends to make them somewhat reluctant to search for and/or accept scientific material. Science archives in universities, notably at such senior universities as McGill and Toronto, have suffered extensively from fire; e.g. McGill had fires in Engineering and Medicine in the early part of the 20th century, the University of Toronto in 1890 and as recently as February 1977, when the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering's Sandford Fleming Building went up. The speaker noted that an additional hazard to the preservation of scientific archives was the frequently met and quite incredible modesty of significant scientists, coupled with the lack of appreciation of the fact that records of failed experiments can be as valuable as successful ones and that reprints or offprints are not the whole of a figure's papers. Although the matter did not bear directly upon archives as such, the speaker noted that many universities did not have a policy on the collection and preservation of artifacts which tend to be of exceedingly great importance to science research.

Professor Franks noted the comparative rarity of persons working in science and technology areas, commenting that this scarcity was probably at least in part a problem of lack of major secondary and journal literature. The history of technology is perhaps even more neglected than science, the sources of these being frequently industrial and company archives, many of which have disappeared. Franks felt that a small cross-university group to 'push' graduate work, active archival programmes not only concerned with the preservation of information but also its accessibility perhaps through the medium of union bibliographies, would be advantageous.

Guedon agreed with much of the foregoing, saying that he thought it would be useful to have a uniform classification scheme for archives, which he favoured. He too advocated bibliographical proposals and the possibility of reprography advances.

Questions were asked of speakers individually and there was some general discussion at the conclusion of the panel's presentation. One of the chief preoccupations of the meeting was the question of funding and to this end various avenues of exploration were suggested. There was general agreement that a smaller group might be able to make some concrete recommendations and the panel plus other interested members were invited to meet over lunch. The luncheon meeting concluded that an even smaller group composed of Norman Ball, J.-C. Guedon, Bruce Sinclair (of the University of Toronto), C.E.S. Franks, and A.W. Tickner should be set up as a steering committee with a view to having a conference to coincide with the learned societies meeting in May 1978.