

pioneered the use of this term while doing interviews with notable persons for later research. The term has gained wide acceptance though the process is often neither oral — the finished product being a written document, the transcript — nor history. Rather, it is research from which history can subsequently be written. Although Stursberg has given us a printed document rather than an oral one — the interviews themselves could surely make a marvellous radio documentary — he has stayed as close to the oral original as the medium allowed.

Stursberg has done the job of an historian in evaluating and arranging his evidence to assemble an account of the Diefenbaker years. He does not pretend that it is a final or definitive historical assessment, having relied on only one type of evidence. Nonetheless, he has served us well on two accounts: he has produced a fascinating account of recent events in which the directness and vitality of the first-person account were allowed to survive (as much as was possible on the printed page), and has provided an invaluable resource for later historical research.

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Bear: A Novel. MARIAN ENGEL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, ©1976.
141 p. ISBN 0 7710 3080 0 \$7.95.

In the last number of *Archivaria*, a short article outlined some of the problems facing an archivist on a field appraisal. Marian Engel's novel *Bear* graphically describes a situation not considered, imagined, or as yet experienced by the author of that article. The novel brings lines from the poem "Eurynome" by Jay Macpherson to mind:

Come all old maids that are squeamish
And afraid to make mistakes,
Don't clutter your lives up with boyfriends:
The nicest girls marry snakes.

Bear demonstrates that there are other alternatives for the nicest archivists. Engel's main human character is an employee, female, of a Toronto Historical Institute who becomes professionally and personally involved with a bear, male, during a field appraisal on a Northern Ontario island.

The lady, named Lou, is a former newspaper person who has joined "the least parasitic of the narrative historical occupations." For perhaps the first time in literature, an archivist is the central figure in a novel. The reader is presented, however, with a somewhat vague and at times inaccurate picture of the archival profession. Although situated in Toronto, Lou's Institute seems more likely the type to serve a local historical society: its holdings consist mainly of Sunday school certificates, old emigration documents, envelopes of unidentified farmers' Sunday photographs and withered love letters. Yet its resources are certainly not small-town. The Institute draws upon legal and political assistance that would make most Canadian repositories envious. The very fact that the Institute is able to afford a staff member working on an appraisal out of the building for an entire summer is probably incredible to most archivists. There is little attempt by the author to establish the purpose or the size of the repository. In short, the Institute is a composite which does not really resemble an archives as it exists today.


Lou is herself a composite, a combination of archivist, librarian and museum curator. She has been sent to Cary Island to appraise the contents of a house built by Colonel Cary in the last century and to determine the suitability of the island as a research centre. The limitations of a field appraisal become apparent to Lou when she discovers an autographed

first edition of *Wacousta*. Engel writes that Lou "wished she had saleroom catalogues to ascertain its value." It should be noted that Lou resists the temptation to read this valuable book, sensibly deciding to wait until she can get another copy from Toronto. Much of Lou's time is spent listing and cataloguing. She examines the bookshelves and opens trunks from the cellar. A complete inventory of the house is prepared. Each item is noted on a separate card. Without doubt, her labours fully justify a summer on the island. It would have, nevertheless, been more efficient for the Institute to pack the contents of the house for a detailed examination at the repository. It would also have been more expedient to send two archivists, especially given the fact that the only other inhabitant on the island was a bear.

Repeatedly in *Bear*, an appalling attitude towards the preservation of archival documents is displayed by Lou and the director of her Institute. Lou's work area at the Institute is described as follows: "Her basement room . . . was close to the steam pipes and protectively lined with books, wooden filing cabinets and very old, brown, framed photographs of unlikely people." This is obviously not good enough. Within this archivally unsuitable environment, Lou and her director added further insult to the injury of their holdings. Once a week, they "fucked on Molesworths' maps and handwritten geneologies." While the exigencies of the situation might partially excuse such a lapse, there can be no excuse for the sin committed by Lou on the island. Furthermore, she thumbtacked an item from the Cary Papers to a wall. Clearly both Lou and her director should enroll in an archives course as quickly as possible.

A question for archivists to ponder while reading *Bear* is why Engel chose their profession for Lou. While on the level of plot advancement, Lou's work at the Institute supplies a cause for her summer on Cary Island, other reasons might be imagined to place a person in a similar situation. Lou's occupation is used to reveal the nature of her existence and the state of her mind. Deeply affected by a brief love affair that ended bitterly, she had become deadened to herself and to others. Engel sees the methodical cataloguing of things from the past as Lou's self-imposed barrier against present emotional commitments in her "plodding private world." At the beginning of the novel, Lou is called a mole, the blind animal which lives underground. Her summer on Cary Island is a process of liberation, bringing her to the light. The implication at the end of the book is that she will not return to the Institute. *Bear*, however, is a valid and sensitive exploration of a person's search for identity rather than a judgement upon the archival profession.

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New Brunswick

The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick

is pleased to act as host for the 1977 annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists. The meetings will be held in Fredericton during the first week of June. We look forward to welcoming a large number of delegates to what we hope will be both productive and enjoyable sessions.

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