

International Archives Weeks

Archivists everywhere in 1979 will encourage the public to reflect upon its collective memory preserved in the global array of archives. Particularly in October and November, Canadian institutions and associations will present themselves and their work to the public in an attempt to raise the archival consciousness of everyone, even of those who are not habitués of society's most important cultural and administrative resource.

In November 1978, the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) and numerous regional groupings of archivists across the country, along with a few enterprising institutions, sponsored "Archives Day". The overwhelming majority of the events were resounding successes and revealed a greater public interest in our documentary heritage than most of us might credit. Vigorous leadership and active participation of the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ), the Archives nationales and other repositories in Quebec, have in three years propelled the offering of a solitary archives day to the presentation of a full week of archival activities to their constituencies throughout most of the province. La Semaine des archives is to be a regular event, a monument to dedication and plain hard work, and is paying substantial dividends in the forms of sharpened appreciation of historical continuity and archival affairs in Quebec, as well as in increased public support. Such activities are vitally important to the psychological health of our community and to the efficient functioning of any organization. It is especially fitting that International Archives Weeks should occur during the Year of the Child, for it may symbolize the need for the present to save the record of the past for the future. It is particularly sad that some faintness of heart at the international level saw fit to limit the celebration of archives to weeks rather than to a full year; nevertheless, we must not let this limit our sense of dedication to preserving an accurate and accessible record so that we and all others may know who we are and what we have done.

Beneath the banner of "International Archives Weeks" carried from one end of the world to another by the International Council on Archives (ICA), the Bureau of Canadian Archivists is urging members of the ACA and AAQ to declare themselves in a vocal and visible fashion. *Archivaria* salutes 1979 as an archival year to remember as we join colleagues around the world in celebrating and publicising archives. It is not an event which will happen again in the near future.

Archivists are keenly aware that keeping in touch with one another has never been easy or entirely satisfactory at the international level, let alone the national. Canada is, of course, no exception. Issues such as language, political evolution, national temperament, economic development, cultural growth—not to mention practical matters of time and mail service—conspire to make international contact difficult to initiate and especially to sustain. The ICA survives through member-country support on shoestring financing and, generally speaking, only heads of national archival agencies or very senior archives management are able to attend its policy-setting meetings such as the Round Table which took place recently in Nairobi, or to participate in the more general gatherings such as the quadriennial Congress which next meets in London in 1980. Very few front line archivists in any country attend either, and invitations to serve on international committees are rare indeed when everyone knows that travel funding will probably not be available to those who can neither control their own budgets nor make other resource commitments on the spot. The journal *Archivum*, which the Council has valiantly tried to publish annually on a regular schedule since 1951, is ever late in appearance thereby losing much of its impact despite some excellent coverage through data gathering and information sharing. Many of us would probably be astonished by how little we really know of each other's situation—or plight, which might be a more apt characterization. With no particular pretension, *Archivaria* presents this issue of

the journal in the spirit of international understanding. If the nature of the contents seems a trifle offbeat and not adequately representative to our readers, we would point out that the editors deliberately solicited contributions from countries and about situations which were likely to be far less well known in Canada than matters concerning, for example, France, Britain or the United States. The selection published is drawn from the replies of thirty institutions or individuals who were invited to submit short articles on the state, concerns and prospects of archivists and archives in their jurisdictions. We regret that certain parts of the world are not represented in any substantial fashion, thereby hindering a more balanced insight into the international archives scene. In some cases, the mails were at fault or translation difficulties could not be overcome to meet deadlines; in others, no reply was ever made to our overtures. In other instances, commitments were made, but not honoured. For such variety of reasons, certain representative items from key parts of the world were eliminated, including submissions on the ICA, China, the USSR, Brazil, Nigeria, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Greece, Iceland, Burma, Turkey, to name but a few. The editors offer this observation not so much as a criticism, but rather to provide a context for the pieces we have carried and as an illustration of the formidable barriers facing international cooperation.*

Canadian archivists will readily recognise a number of mutual problems aired in the articles such as professional education, administrative placement, multicultural and colonial documentation, and public awareness. What is not so readily apparent, perhaps, are the stupendous difficulties endured by developing countries where the struggle for even the basic necessities of life necessarily outweigh concerns for funding significant or adequate archival activity. This is an area where UNESCO has been active for many years, as Michael Cook demonstrates, and which we appreciated during our attendance at the Second Symposium of Editors of Library, Documentation, and Archives Journals in Berlin, German Democratic Republic (September 1978). Canadian archival problems dwindle almost to insignificance when compared to the burdens of raising literacy, procuring professional skills, or finding fundamental equipment such as typewriters, ink and paper. Behind the diplomatic facades and self-promotion, and the usually bland conference resolutions, there inevitably are the crushing predicaments which nothing but direct country to country assistance can really overcome. It is obvious, as well, that there is still very little such contact in archival terms, though the Public Archives of Canada has been notably well-defined in areas of records management and the purveyance of the "total archives" concept of archival organisation. If one item carried below captures in particular the international sense for Canadians at least, it should be David Quinn's emphasis upon the ways in which local and routine administrative records dovetail so crucially with those of more traditional repute, though they be oceans apart and centuries removed from our immediate perception and national experience. Finally, in a very straightforward manner, we must be impressed by the universality of our purpose as colleagues reveal the way they see themselves, or would like to be seen.

Editors

*An article by Alfred Wagner, "The ICA: Catalyst of International Archival Cooperation and Promotion" arrived after the journal had gone to press and will be carried in the next issue of *Archivaria*.