

Tasmania and Victoria. On Wednesday, August 23rd, there will be a second symposium - 'Exploiting the official and private archival resources of Australia' in which several papers will be given on the listing of Public Record Office microfilms, preparation of an inventory, the Guide to Pre-Federation Archives, and the publication of lists of accessions. Those contributing will be Miss. M. Lukis and Miss M. Medcalf (both of West Australia), Mr. David Bluford (N.S.W.) and Mr. G.L. Fischer (S.A.). In addition, Mr. Allan Horton will represent the section at a special session of AACOBS and Australian Libraries to be held on Tuesday, August 22nd. As this will be the rare occasion on which archivists are congregated in one place it is hoped that the annual meeting of the section can be held on Wednesday afternoon, August 23rd.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Parkside, South Australia.

The Editor,  
Archives and Manuscripts.

Dear Sir,

If anyone wishes to raise a hollow laugh in archival circles, he only has to mention the Guide to Pre-Federation Archives, a project which was suggested in 1954, and which, to date, can hardly be said to have got under way.

To recapitulate. In 1954 an Archives Management Seminar was held in Canberra. At this Seminar Dr. T.R. Schellenberg, Director of Archival Management in the National Archives and Records Service of the United States, suggested that State Archivists might consider the possibility of preparing a co-operative inventory of their holdings up to 1900. This suggestion was enthusiastically received by the State Archivists present, and a number of commitments and stipulations were made, hardly any of which have, as yet, been fulfilled.

Why did this happen? I believe that the project has been hindered, from the start, by a misapplication of effort. Archival description can proceed at any one of three main levels, (1) the group, (2) the series, or (3) the item, and finding aids resulting from these practices are usually referred to, in the same order, as (1) guides, (2) inventories, and (3) lists. The practice in the National Archives is to gain a general, overall, control by means of the guide, and then to proceed to the level of series description in the inventory. The last process, listing of specific items within a series, is only reserved for series of sufficient importance to warrant the expenditure



of staff time. Those who were present at the 1954 Seminar will remember that Dr. Schellenberg stated that the basic needs for the Pre-Federation Guide were:

'a) an outline of administrative history  
and b) a conception in general terms of the contents of the group.  
This amounted to an inventory.'

But it seems to me that a programme of description at the record group level would also go some distance towards satisfying these basic needs. Be this as it may, Australian archivists adopted as their model National Archives Staff Information Circular 14 on the Preparation of Preliminary Inventories.

My contention is that this level of description (the series level) is far too intensive for such a thing as a Guide. For an example of what a guide should consist of we must turn our attention to the National Archives Guide, a work which is compiled at the record group, not the series, level. What we need from our Guide is an overall view of our record holdings, and we need this view as soon as possible.

In other words, I believe the model for our Guide should be N.A.S.I.C. 15, The control of records at the record group level, and not N.A.S.I.C. 14. This would result in an instrument which would be nowhere near as exhaustive as a full-scale inventory but at the same time it would have the advantage of being much more within the competence of our sparsely staffed Australian repositories.

Yours etc.

A.W.B. Mortimer.

#### NEWS AND NOTES

Mr G.L. Fischer has been appointed Archivist in the Public Library of South Australia, in succession to Mr John McLellan, who resigned in October 1960.

The 35th Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Brisbane in May, provided an opportunity for University Archivists to get together. Amongst those present were Mr Bruce Shields (Australian National University) Mr Frank Strachan (Melbourne University) and Mr Ray McDonald (University of New England).

Six years have now elapsed since the Archives Section of the Library Association, meeting in Brisbane during the 1955 Library Conference, resolved that a semi-annual publication be issued under the authority of the Section. Since then, eight numbers have been issued, but unfortunately not semi-annually. The present issue represents the ninth number, and the beginning of volume II.