

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF ARCHIVISTS

A Note on the Society

Although the Australian Society of Archivists was inaugurated at a meeting in Canberra in April 1975, and although the Society has been the publisher of this journal commencing with Volume 6, Number 6 (February 1976), no formal notification of the Society's formation or exposition of its organization has been made in these pages, and it has been thought prudent to attend to that omission, however briefly.

The inaugural meeting adopted, after making a number of amendments, a draft set of rules prepared by a representative steering committee. The Society is essentially an organization of professional archivists with provision for non-voting associate and institutional membership. In the broadest terms, its objects are to forward the interests of archives and archivists. The day to day running of the Society is the responsibility of an elected Council comprising five office bearers as an Executive with five other Council members. The Council holds office between biennial general meetings of the Society. The inaugural Council elected on 5 April 1975 was as follows:

President: Michael Saclier
Vice-President: Ian Maclean
Secretary: Patricia Quinn
Treasurer: Max Franklin
Editor: Andrew Lemon
Other members of Council:
Gerald Fischer
Lee McGregor
Peter Orlovich
Dianne Patenall
Ian Pearce

Since the Inaugural General Meeting, two Honorary Life Members of the Society have been elected, Mr Robert Sharman and Miss Phyllis Mander-Jones. In September 1976 the Society was admitted as a Category B member of the International Council on Archives.

The first Biennial General Meeting and the Conference of the Society will be held in Canberra in May 1977.

THE VIIIth CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

A report by Ian Maclean

Being lucky enough to have been invited to serve as a panelist for the first of four so-called 'plenary' sessions of the above Congress, and hence have all expenses paid by the U.S. Government Endowment for the Humanities, I was able to represent the Society (a Category B member of the Council); the Archives Office of New South Wales (to

my considerable surprise a 'Category A member' of the Council) and, by invitation of Professor Neale, the Australian Archives (of course Category A). The fact that the Archives Office of N.S.W. can be a Category A member is due to the fact that, under what pressures I know not but can guess, the Council in years past allowed countries with *federal* forms of Government to have as many States as wished gain Category A (i.e. National) status. Only Australia and Germany appear to have taken up this offer, the other Australian State Category A member being Western Australia. As the roll was called by country only and as all votes at business meetings were unanimous I am not even now certain how many votes I commanded, though, as I have faithfully reported to the Council and others, I held up both hands on all votes.

I do not propose to try and describe the content of the Congress in any detail. Certainly well before my admonitory review of the International Directory of Archives appeared in the last number of *Archives and Manuscripts*, the Editorial Committee for *Archivum* had moved to clear up the delay in production-distribution of *Archivum* and, judging by their evident energy, M. Duchein and his colleagues will have the full proceedings in members' hands with a minimum delay. In keeping with the Bicentennial occasion that brought the Congress to Washington, the theme was 'Revolution'. There was in fact less emphasis on revolution than what seemed to me to be an attempt to answer the old philosophical riddle, 'when does a difference in degree constitute a difference in kind?' The plenary sessions were titled: 'The Pre-archival Revolution', 'The Technical Revolution', 'The Revolution in Access and Use' and 'The Geo-Political Revolution'.

I want in this note primarily to highlight certain impressions, to pay a well-deserved compliment and to make what I hope will be taken not so much as criticisms as constructive suggestions for future Congresses. But first, as the Society's representative, I have to report several incidental items of business, *viz*:

- (a) The Society's fees as a Category B member have been raised from \$50 to \$100 in U.S. dollars. If it is any consolation the Australian Archives fee went from \$US419 to \$US1,142 and that of the Archives Office of N.S.W. to at least \$US150.
- (b) Australia, in the person of Professor Neale, was elected a member of the Executive Committee for the ensuing four years.
- (c) The next meeting of the Congress will be in London in 1980 and of the Round Table in Sardinia (1977), Algeria (1978) and Argentina (1979).

The highlight from the professional point of view was, in my opinion, the way that various countries are reacting to the archivists' version of future shock. Everybody is concerned about the implications of the future explosion of information from those at one end of the spectrum (among whom Alvin Toffler would find some sub-varieties of his 'Denier'), through those who always have felt that good archivists were obliged to be good and up-to-date but conventional records management specialists (or to march shoulder to shoulder with them) to the archivists of the future who believe in NATIS (the UNESCO

version of the Australian National Library's ALBIS (Australian Library Based Information System)) and regarded overseas with as much suspicion by at least the more conventional archivists as ALBIS is in Australia. But whatever one may think of the role of automation to assist in better access to archives the message of the Congress was that there can be no doubt that within a decade the archivist, at least the government or large corporation archivist, is going to have to enter (by stealth or even by force if necessary) the field of current information retrieval analyst to ensure two things:

- (a) that the procedural documents, codes, etc., relating to any data retrieval system are preserved so that in the more distant future the relevant information can be retrieved from tape, disc, C.O.M., etc., and
- (b) that banks of information, if they represent information which would be appraised as valuable in so-called hard-copy, and if, as is the presumption, they are constantly being up-dated, are adequately 'fixed' by appropriate print-out devices at appropriate points in time.

Some promising technical developments are just round the corner. There are hints of promising gaseous deacidification experiments; indeed there was actual mention of the option being open to repositories equipped with air-conditioning to use 'the air-conditioning network as a vehicle for fumigating the deposit should this become necessary (by remote control)'. This device was mentioned in the same paper as another, which could fairly be described as the 'technical invention of the year'. Madame C. Crespo of Spain in her paper 'The Technical Improvements in the Preservation and Reproduction of Archival Documents' includes the following paragraph:

For this reason we want to underline especially, as an authentic innovation, the appearance in recent years of mechanical methods for the reconstitution of lost areas—based on the principle of the manufacture of sheets of paper—using paper pulp. This method, originating in the countries of Eastern Europe, was very favorably accepted in others (Austria, Israel, Germany, United States . . .) which have developed their own machines with a similarity in design but limited in their application to the objective of reconstitution.

Recently, under the design and direction of the National Center for the Restoration of Books and Documents, a model has been built in Spain which is in current use, and is based on the same system and principle as described above. This model makes possible not only the reconstitution but *the entire restoration process* (fumigation, cleaning, elimination of stains, bleaching, neutralization, resizing-consolidation, and reconstitution). The process is made possible by mechanical means and with automatic programming, using, as circumstances may require, gases, liquids, and paper pulp.

This mechanization of the entire process, in addition to providing a truly spectacular saving of time, avoids the handling of the document; the latter need not be moved from its horizontal position in the inside of the machine while receiving all of the remedial treatment it requires. The dissemination of this process will make it possible to bridge the gap between the quantity of materials in need of restoration and the effective means of carrying it out. Thus emergency situations could be met without taking recourse to delaying tactics, such as when faced with the inability to proceed rapidly to the restoration of the material.

Now as to the running of the Congress. First I am glad to state my

view, which I know coincides with many others, that our American hosts ran a most complicated operation exceptionally well, the more so since it was closely co-ordinated with the Annual Meeting of the Society of Archivists. Indeed there was a surfeit of good things professionally, and an elegant sufficiency of things social. Yet I think some (perhaps many) went away dissatisfied to greater or less degree — not about hospitality but rather about the professional content of the Congress. It is widely recognized that in congresses and conferences it is the informal contacts that are almost more important than the formal proceedings; but I know that I, and certainly many younger archivists, came away (as I imagine others have from earlier Congresses) with the feeling that, though they were challengingly titled, the formal sessions did not afford the excitement reasonably to be expected from actual inter-changes of opinion on topical questions by the world's leading archivists. It is admittedly extremely difficult to allow for active participation for all comers from so many countries but perhaps a revised format is practicable. At present each plenary session consists of approximately three hours plus break. The first hour (allowing for the almost inevitable late start) is for writers of contributed (i.e. pre-printed) papers to summarize or up-date their papers — each has a nominal 15 minutes; the second hour is given to several (usually three) panelists, each for 5 minutes, and to panel discussion; and the third hour to contributions (each limited to 5 minutes) from the floor. This means that only about 18 to 20 people at the whole Congress get a chance to contribute at any given session. What is worse is that most contributions are pre-drafted and there is little chance to argue viewpoints. Indeed in my own session (the Pre-archival Revolution), the contributions following the main speakers' summaries were (with few exceptions — my own hopefully included) much more situation reports in various countries than commentaries on the professional matter raised by the main speakers. One wonders whether a better format would be:

- (a) Main speakers 10 minutes (at most) to up-date = 30 minutes.
- (b) Panelists (no more than three) for 10 minutes = 30 minutes.
- (c) Conference to break for one hour at least into language groups of *truly interested* members to formulate (briefly stated) questions or counter propositions to be listed in priority order and, if wished, directed to specific speakers or panelists;
- (d) The plenary session to reassemble and the chairman to distribute questions for panel discussion for again at least one hour.

This method might give more scope for younger (and keener) members to participate. After all the meetings of the *Table Ronde* are for senior archivists.

The last recommendation I would like to make is that the pre-Congress publicity should give more emphasis to the plans of the various I.C.A. Committees. To illustrate my point—at the last minute Miss Di Patenall, our new Records Administration Officer (Archives Authority of New South Wales) had received the Premier's permission to view developments overseas and to attend the Congress as an incidental. Yet it was only by a chance call on an old friend that I

found that the I.C.A. Committee on Automation was meeting concurrently — and that was the most useful thing for her to attend. Incidentally it really takes at least two in combination to cover such a Congress adequately.

My final point is that there could be a special arrangement whereby 'situation reports' from various countries (no longer than could be read in five minutes) who wish to make them could be pre-distributed and included in the proceedings without the formality of having them read to the detriment, as I suggest above, of direct discussion of professional or technical questions.

However let me repeat, I do not want to end on a critical note. Within the necessary constraints, the Congress was marvellously run; the parallel meetings of the Society of the American Archivists widened the professional and personal scope for useful discussion. In this respect my only regret was that duty prevented me attending the S.A.A. session called, if memory serves, 'Archival P.R. — the Biggest Bang for the Buck'.

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF ARCHIVISTS: BY-LAW No. 1

Regional Organization

1. In this by-law 'region' means an area in which five or more members of the Society normally reside or work and which is of such a size as to permit regular meetings of members being held and 'regional' has a corresponding meaning.

2. (1) Regions shall be designated as such by the Council of the Society.

(2) The existing regions are Adelaide, Canberra, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney.

3. Members of the Society in any region may if they wish organize themselves either as a regional group or as a regional branch:

Provided that, members of the Society residing or working in centres other than those designated as regions may elect to be regarded as members in a designated region for the purposes of this and the two succeeding clauses and may take part in the activities of the regional group or branch:

Provided further that no person may be a member of more than one regional group or branch.

4. A regional group shall consist of a Convener and the other members in the region.

5. A regional branch shall consist of a Committee and the other members in the region.

6. A regional group or branch gathered in general meeting may adopt local rules which are not inconsistent with the Rules of the Society or this by-law to regulate its own activities, operations and administration.

7. (1) The Convener of a regional group shall be elected annually at a general meeting of which due notice has been given to all members in the region.

(2) The Convener shall be a professional member of the Society and shall be elected by all classes of members attending the general meeting referred to in sub-clause (1) of this clause.

8. (1) The Committee of a regional branch shall consist of a Chairman, a Secretary/Treasurer or Secretary and Treasurer and such other members as the members of the region in general meeting shall decide.

(2) The Chairman of a regional branch shall be a professional member of the Society but both professional and associate members shall be eligible to be elected to other Committee positions.

(3) The Committee of a regional branch shall be elected annually at a general meeting of which due notice has been given to all members in the region.