

THE LIBRARIAN AS INSTITUTIONAL HISTORIAN

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ABSTRACT: Librarians in research institutions long have been involved in documenting and storing their institutions' corporate histories. This is an aspect of the librarian's bibliographic role and the captured materials form part of the "special" and "unique" character of a library's collections. Traditionally, the collection of historical materials has been limited to published materials, but more and more of the institution's unpublished records are being recognized as valuable resources. The librarian, as the resident information specialist, often must take a role in the gathering and preservation of these materials. In some institutions, the formal archive has been established (e.g., WHOI, Scripps); in others, the library has assumed the responsibility for the collection and retention of those unpublished records that document the institution's activities. A further extension of this traditional role comes when the librarian may be asked to conduct historical research about the institution.

The paper presents two case studies focusing on the adventures of librarians preparing histories of research vessels, one at a government research station and the other at a private university. The authors provide some guidance for small libraries that have archival responsibilities.

KEYWORDS: Archival resources; Special librarians; history; Velero IV (ship); Fisheries Research Board of Canada - Biological Station - Nanaimo, B.C.

Librarians, especially those in small, specialized libraries, often take on roles that differ considerably from the core responsibilities familiar to all. Editor, publisher, webmaster, database manager – these roles are becoming common additions to the librarian's resume. We present two situations in which the librarian also served as the institution's historian.

At first glance, the role of historian might seem to be a natural one for a librarian. We are very familiar and experienced with bibliographic research techniques. We are familiar with the organization of our institutions. Our libraries collect the published documents issued by our institution and maintain them as special collections. Most of us have personal interactions with the "movers and shakers" in other parts of our institutions. However, for the librarian to perform the role of historian we must be aware that the historian has additional skills and employs techniques that may not be familiar to all librarians. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding, the historian must look beyond the published document. The published literature is only one piece of a more complex historical puzzle. To understand the history of an institution, the historian needs to be able to examine correspondence and other records that were created as part of day-to-day operations of the institution. The historian becomes familiar with the life history of this type of documentation. Who created it, received it, retained it? Why was it created? Where and how long is it stored? The historian also looks for sources of information other than that generated by the institution itself. This requires examination of records of associated institutions and records of the institutions that received correspondence from the institution being studied. For more recent history the historian can use techniques of oral history and interview people who participated in the events being studied. The questions asked and answers received will provide additional pieces to the puzzle. These remarks are recorded for future use and reference.

Finally, the historian must condense and present the results of the research. This may be the greatest challenge for the academic or special librarian conducting historical research. Our training and experience requires us to find and deliver information to the user. In many cases, we do not understand the information being provided. We do not interpret the information. Only in isolated cases do we judge the value of the information. The skill required to present the evidence and stories uncovered by the historical research is critical to the ultimate success of the project. Along with the historian, we need to know when we have "enough" information to provide a clear and accurate picture.

We present two case studies describing the actions of librarians preparing histories of research vessels, one at a government research station and the other at a private university.

Pacific Biological Station

The Pacific Biological Station (PBS) is a research establishment of the Canadian federal government's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). It is the center of the Department's biological and fisheries investigations on Canada's West Coast and is the

headquarters for the Regional Director of Science. A sister establishment, the Institute of Ocean Sciences, is the focus of hydrographic and oceanographic research activities.

The Pacific Biological Station was established on Departure Bay at Nanaimo, B.C., in 1908 and over the past 9 decades has developed into one of the world's foremost fisheries research stations. The Station also has played an important, although often unrecognized, economic and educational role in the Nanaimo community. From time to time, the Station holds an open house, a weeklong series of displays, demonstrations, and interactive activities that provide school children and the community as a whole an opportunity to see what is going on at the Biological Station.

In 2001, Gord Miller began work on a project that would document the research vessels used by PBS investigations over the past ninety years. The first product of the project was to be a display panel for use at the February 2002 Open House. The project would follow the pattern of two earlier historical displays that had subsequently been converted for use on the PBS website: Reverend George W. Taylor, founder of the station (Fisheries and Oceans 2003b) and a history of the buildings on the PBS site (Fisheries and Oceans 2003a).

The first steps involved consulting the published histories of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada (a predecessor of DFO) and articles describing the early days of the Station. Then came the archival research. The challenge of all archival research is to understand what information would likely be found in records created by the day-to-day activities of the institution. For the research vessel project, the Station correspondence files provided inventories and schedules of vessel use, budget information, and information about accidents involving the Station vessels. The PBS Scientific Archives provided details about the use of particular vessels by individual investigations. The Department of Fisheries records at the National Archives of Canada provided information about the planning, construction, and maintenance of the vessels.

Early in the project it became apparent that some information could not be acquired easily from DFO resources. The Royal Canadian Navy had operated several of the research vessels, especially those conducting oceanographic research. Others had been built during World War II for the Canadian Army or Royal Canadian Air Force and then were transferred to the Station as part of the war assets disposal program. The records for these ships remain unavailable for general review. The Directorate of History and Heritage of the Department of National Defence (Directorate 2004) and the Naval and Military Museum at Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt (Welcome to CFB 2000-2003) provided valuable resources. Finally, the Ships Registry (Transport Canada 2004) files and database of Transport Canada provided information about the builder, age, size, and engines of each of the vessels.

A particular facet of this project was the need to find good photographs. In particular, it was important to find photographs that would reproduce well in monochrome (i.e., black and white) on a display panel. Some of the photographs were part of the DFO photograph

library, others were found as part of an archival collection, several were located in publications, and others were acquired from museum collections. However, it was difficult to find good photographs of the modern small inshore or freshwater boats. Finally, a general call to DFO staff provided the necessary images.

The display panel was prepared by a professional graphics designer and was presented at the 2002 Open House with a handbook noting specific details about each vessel (builder, date of construction, dimensions, tonnage, engines, anecdotes). Eventually the photographs, ship notes and an essay about these vessels will appear on the PBS website.

Allan Hancock Foundation

Captain G. Allan Hancock established the Allan Hancock Foundation at the University of Southern California in 1939. In the beginning the Foundation included the *Velero III*, a vessel presented to the University and operated by the Captain, which was used by the University for ten years for research. The Captain also donated funds for the Hancock Endowment and to build the Hancock Foundation Building (History 1999). The building was dedicated in 1941 and its interior represented a number of interests of the Captain including a performance auditorium, broadcast studios, research laboratories, stack space for specimens collected during *Velero* expeditions, a piece of the Hancock Mansion (later named the Hancock Memorial Museum), and the Hancock Library of Biology and Oceanography. With the purchase of the Boston Society of Natural History library in 1944, the Hancock Library became well known for the quality of its collections; (Halmos 1967-1969) however, it is less well known for its archival materials. One archival record that has been collected and currently resides in the University's Special Libraries and Archival Collections (SLAC) Hancock collections is the set of station data from the university's former *R/V Velero IV*. This ship was built to Captain Hancock's order and presented to the University in 1948. In working to prepare the data set for electronic access (Crampon 1999; CSCIS77b 2004), it was realized that there was no history of the ship, similar to that of the *Velero III*. (Meredith 1939) Jean Crampon began to gather information for a history of the *Velero IV*. A brief summary of the history will be included with the publication of the station data.

This historical research has involved consulting a variety of resources. These include the following:

USC Hancock Foundation Archives (Specialized Libraries 2003)

This Archive held three types of records, Station Data records, Ship Logs, and Engineering Logs. The Station Data records are approximately 98% complete. Crampon was permitted to retain the data records until the last of the data was digitized and proofread. They now are housed in the SLAC Hancock collection. In addition, portions of the ship's logs (about 20-25%) were deposited in the Hancock Library some years ago. These have all been examined for information about who was out on the ship and where the ship was when it was not out at sea. This information supplemented location and personnel information from the

Station Data records. Finally, the Engineering logs are about 95% complete and identify chief engineers and major work on the ship.

Personal papers

Crampon has reviewed the personal files of one researcher, stored at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, and a photographic collection from another researcher, who gave the materials to her. Two other personal research document collections, one from a former captain and the other from a more recent researcher also will be studied.

Government records

Official governmental reports on file from funding agencies identify personnel, intended research areas, and funding levels.

Published materials

Four major sources were consulted for information about the *Velero IV*: databases, full text electronic resources, microfilm newspapers and their indexes, and researchers' bibliographies. Database searches identified articles about the ship in journals, magazines, and newspapers where the ship was a focus. Other searches of resources in full text, (e.g. JSTOR) identified articles where the captain and crew of the ship were acknowledged by researchers when "*Velero*" was not indexed or did not appear in abstracts. Newspaper indexes provided access to other useful information. Local Los Angeles area newspapers that were not well indexed were also consulted and San Diego newspapers provided useful information about the launching of the *Velero IV*. Articles by scientists who sailed on the *Velero IV* provided useful information. In addition to providing information about the scientific staff and crew on specific cruises, the cited references and bibliographies provide links to earlier cruises. This research continues.

Interviews

So far, Crampon has done thirty interviews, including two of the six captains and one mate and twenty-seven interviews of researchers (undergraduate or graduate students, faculty, representatives of governmental agencies, or research technicians). The interviews were taped and are being transcribed. By agreement with the interviewees, the tapes are to be used only for the purpose of the history and not as an "official" oral history record. This allowed for more informal meetings and likely resulted in a more open discussion of sensitive issues.

Visual materials

These include photographs of ship operations and personnel both official and personal, film sources, and blueprints of the ship. In some cases, Crampon has received photographs and permissions directly, in others, researchers and crew donated copies of photographs.

Internet resources

The Internet has been used mainly for two purposes, to find *Velero* references in open internet resources (e.g. curriculum vitae), and to locate researchers in order to contact them for interviews. Two major resources for the latter purpose have been Internet directories and university websites.

This is definitely a work in progress. Crampon continues to identify appropriate people for interviews and to locate them, to draft sections of the proposed book, to pursue additional personal research material from retired researchers, and to follow up on two identified film and other visual resources. There is no assigned deadline for the complete history, merely one based on time available.

Conclusions

The authors believe that librarians have a unique opportunity to participate in the collection and preservation of the history of their institutions. We recommend the following brief guidelines for consideration in pursuing this role.

- It is important that institutions have an active program for identifying, retaining and preserving historical records.
- Institutions should preserve both published and unpublished documents.
- If institutions do not have formal archives, then the librarian as resident information specialist should take the lead role in the preservation of historical materials. In some institutions, such as the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the Archives are part of the Library. USC, as noted above, has preserved some of this archival material in a separate Hancock collection. The Pacific Biological Station Scientific Archives is managed by the Library and is tasked with the preservation of all records and documentary data generated by the Station's research programs.
- It is important that records from research programs, often ignored by institutional records management/archives programs, be captured. This requires good relations with the researchers involved and may be easier in smaller organizations due to the closer interactions between researchers and librarian when they share space and interact on a daily basis.
- It is important that personal research records, (i.e. lab notebooks), be collected from researchers who are retiring and leaving the institution. It is better to obtain them directly than to have to try to retrieve them through "dumpster diving" as offices get cleared out.
- It is important that historical photographs be collected, organized, and preserved properly.
- It is important that institutions make an effort to record the memories of key personnel. This is personally rewarding, as well, as most researchers are happy to share their memories and feel honored that someone cares about what they think and have experienced.

The authors hope that their experiences will encourage others to preserve the history of their institutions and find a way to share their information as a key to understanding how the institution began, grew, and came to be the way it is.

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