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Archiving Anthropology

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SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

I. Archiving Anthropology

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A Wenner-Gren Symposium called "Preserving the Anthropological Record: Issues and Strategies," was held at Rancho Sante Fe, California, February 28-March 4, 1992. The symposium was organized by Sydel Silverman (Wenner-Gren Foundation) and Nancy Parezo (Univ. of Arizona), and included also as participants: George Farr (N.E.H.), Don D. Fowler (Univ. of Nevada), Douglas R. Givens (St. Louis Community College, and Chair of the Committee on the History of Archaeology of the Society for American Archaeology), Robert V. Kemper (Southern Methodist Univ.), Shepard Krech III (Brown Univ.), Mary Elizabeth Ruwell (Natl. Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Inst.), William C. Sturtevant (Smithsonian Inst.), Donald Tuzin (Univ. of California, San Diego), John Van Willigen (Univ. of Kentucky), Joan Warnow-Blewett (Center for History of Physics), Annette B. Weiner (New York Univ.), Thomas H. Wilson (Center for African Art), Nathalie F. S. Woodbury (Amherst, Mass), Bonnie L. Wright (Cedar Mill Community Library, and John Yellen (N.S.F.).

The following statement was adopted at the conclusion of the symposium, to serve as a charter and justification for the improvement of anthropological practice:

Whereas, unpublished anthropological materials contain primary information needed for understanding the cultures and histories of the world's peoples past and present;

Whereas, these materials are irreplaceable and essential for future research and education;

Whereas, these materials are unique resources for studying the history of anthropology and its contributions to the development of the sciences and the humanities; and

Whereas anthropologists have a professional responsibility to serve as stewards for these materials for use by future generations;

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. anthropologists should take steps to care for the unpublished materials in their possession and to make arrangements for the appropriate archival disposition of these materials;
2. professional organizations and institutions should adopt policies to (a) insure that their own unpublished materials be systematically preserved and (b) take the lead in implementing strategies for the documentation and preservation of the anthropological record.

The conclusions and recommendations of the symposium will be presented in a published volume. Discussions centered around two main purposes of conservation of the

anthropological record: to preserve the primary data on which anthropological research is based and will be based in the future; and to insure the continued availability of the materials needed for the future historiography of anthropology. These tasks are responsibilities of the individual anthropologists who generate the records, and of the scholarly organizations that represent and advance the profession. Individuals are particularly obligated to save their field notes (in all the sub-disciplines of anthropology) for future research uses, as well as to preserve the personal and scientific papers that will document their anthropological work and its contexts. Organizations can assist in this by suggesting models and procedures, and by sponsoring or providing catalogs, indices, union lists, and other access tools. Most anthropological societies evidently also need to institute procedures to facilitate the systematic archiving of their own organizational records.

The symposium participants focussed on the archiving of United States anthropology, but it was recognized that an international effort will ultimately be required. Some attention was devoted to mechanisms for facilitating access to these materials by scholars and others abroad, especially in the countries where the research of scholars from the United States is conducted. The variety of media in which anthropological data are recorded was also discussed, along with some of the problems and opportunities for preservation and access that are presented by rapidly changing technology, especially in electronic data storage and processing. A plan was drafted for consideration by anthropological organizations, looking towards the establishment of a discipline history center for anthropology, which might serve as an information clearing house and/or coordinate the work of archival repositories and anthropological professional societies.

The resolution quoted above, and a series of suggestions for future progress, were to have been submitted to a meeting of the Council of Presidents of anthropological societies in April, 1992.

II. Videotape Dialogues on the History of Anthropology

The University of Florida Department of Anthropology and the Human Studies Film Archives of the Smithsonian Institution announces a collection of videotapes on the history of anthropology. The series is sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and is produced by Allan Burns and H. Russell Bernard.

In these videotaped dialogues, senior anthropologists review the decisions that led them to a career in anthropology. They discuss the influences of teachers and others during their undergraduate and graduate school years, reflect on the theoretical and methodological issues important during their early years in anthropology. and offer observations about the current state of the discipline. A special set of tapes focuses on the careers of four generations of Mexican anthropologists: Daniel Rubín de Borbolla, a friend of the revolutionary president, Lázaro Cárdenas; Fernando Cámara Barbachano, a Yucatecan anthropologist who was a student of de Borbolla; Andrés Medina, the director of the National School of Anthropology during the 1970s; and Manuel Gándara, an archeologist and current director of the National School of Anthropology.