

HSTC Bulletin

Journal of the History of Canadian Science, Technology and Medicine
Revue d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine au Canada

hstc
bulletin

News

Donald J. C. Phillipson and A. W. Tickner

Volume 1, Number 3 (3), May 1977

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082469ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082469ar>

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Publisher(s)

HSTC Publications

ISSN

0228-0086 (print)

1918-7742 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Phillipson, D. J. C. & Tickner, A. W. (1977). News. *HSTC Bulletin*, 1(3), 2–9.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1082469ar>

HSTC CONTRIBUTIONS

The editors would like to thank the following for their generous contributions. We do need more to remain solvent, however, so please dig!

Gordon Bennett	Donald Phillipson	Marsha Snyder
Norman Ball	Alan Richardson	Canadian Society
The Hannah Foundation	Arnold Roos	for History and
Christopher Smart	A. W. Tickner	Philosophy of Science
Ron B. Thomson	Marilyn Miller	

THE HANNAH INSTITUTE

The Hannah Institute for the History of Medical and Related Sciences, founded by Associated Medical Services in 1971, provides support for the study of the history of medicine and related sciences, particularly for Canadian history of medicine. Through the establishment of the Jason A. Hannah Chairs for the History of Medical and Related Sciences at five Ontario Universities, the Institute has sought to encourage that study. Scholars should be aware of other programmes offered by the Institute:

Scholarships are available to graduate students in the area. Fellowships for holders of an M.D. or Ph.D. are available for post-graduate work. Publications Assistance may be obtained for authors of works in their areas of study. Grants for research projects are also available. In addition, the Institute also sponsors symposia, visiting scholar arrangements, and lectures. For further information contact:

Dr. G. R. Paterson, Executive Director,
Hannah Institute for the History of Medical
and Related Sciences
50 Prince Arthur Avenue, Suite 105
Toronto, Ontario, M5R 1B5

NEWS

Engineering History Project. The Canadian Society of Mechanical Engineering (CSME) has launched a project to collect materials relating to the history of mechanical invention in Canada. The project hopes to collect information first about actual mechanical devices, and later, about engineering developments, e.g. patents and inventions; jurisdictional problems, unique Canadian engineering and performance requirements, the motives and personalities of engineers, the contributions of Canadians to world-wide engineering research etc. The CSME project is now in the planning stages and, as the Bulletin understands, the CSME is looking for engineers rather than historians to involve themselves. Further information can be obtained from Mr. Andrew Wilson, Chairman, CSME Mechanical Engineering History Committee, c/o Science Council of Canada, 150 Kent Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5P4.

Historical and Archival Activities of the National Research Council

The National Research Council of Canada began in 1975 to review its archival holdings and policies; this activity has now been formalized by the appointment, in June, 1976, of Dr. A. W. Tickner to the new post of Senior Archival Officer. His responsibilities include:

- review of records disposal policies of the NRC (a Schedule B federal government agency),
- supervision of NRC projects such as the collection of oral histories and other historical material from NRC staff and associates,
- promotion of and assistance to historical work by or on behalf of the NRC,
- liaison with federal government collections in the history of science such as the Public Archives of Canada, National Museums of Canada, etc.
- liaison with historians of science.

Earlier NRC historical projects were of two kinds: several volumes of official history (by Wilfred Eggleston and Mel W. Thistle), and a variety of museum-related activities between about 1935 and 1970. None of these projects included special attention to archives policies.

The current work began early in 1975 when the Biological Sciences Division commissioned a new history of NRC biological research for the years 1918-1949 (by Dr. Norman T. Gridgeman). As an experiment, "oral history" interviews with all surviving researchers of the period were also undertaken, by Donald J. C. Phillipson. The experiment was successful in two respects: personal reminiscences placed on record, for the first time, valuable explanatory material about the social and personal environment of research in Canada (at a time when the whole scientific community was very small, so that personal relations were genuinely functional); and the field work also brought to light uncollected documents of considerable value (e.g. the NRC Chairman's confidential correspondence file of 1918-1928 and an unpublished "social history" of the Dominion Rust Research Laboratory in Winnipeg.

The interviews were extended to deal with physics when another history, for 1929-1952, was commissioned (from Dr. W. E. Knowles Middleton) and the continued work brought to light some defects of the NRC records system and Canadian scientific archives in general.

Some NRC project files which had been destroyed as valueless were later sought by both historians and working scientists. The diary of an NRC scientist, offered to the NRC after his death, had been declined and was therefore destroyed by his widow; (20th century diaries are rare, particularly among scientists: only three have been found in interviews with about 100 NRC staff and associates). Liaison with museums was defective; for example, the first magnetron brought to North America by the Tizard Committee in 1940 had been given by the NRC to the National Museum of Science and Technology, but was not identified as a memorable object; it was simply stored in a box of miscellaneous electronic components. There is often no simple method of declassifying restricted or secret documents (so that, for example, some records of war research now declassified in the United States and Britain remain unavailable to historians in Ottawa, except by special arrangement).

Scientific archives have been neglected in Canada to date: this history of science is studied at few universities, and the history of science in Canada at only some of even those few. Possibly because Canada's history is relatively short and its scientific activity only a small percentage of the world's historians and scientists alike, up to the present, have considered this neglect no serious loss. But this attitude has begun to change, particularly among scientists reaching retirement age who look back over their careers and realize that practically the whole of their discipline (e.g. genetics, biochemistry, or atomic physics) has been created in their own lifetimes -- and that, in some cases, Canadians have made a notable contribution or that the discipline has had a distinctive effect upon Canadian life. Many of these scientists feel that Canadian non-scientists (whether scholars or laymen) now know significantly less about how science and research affect everyday life than did earlier generations, such as during the Depression or the postwar industrial boom. Like the Symons Commission they feel that the lack of attention to the history of science in Canada is, at least potentially, a serious cultural loss to everyone.

While it is not the NRC's responsibility to criticize, let alone reform, historians, it can at least encourage them by ensuring that a genuinely coherent and comprehensive archive of scientific and other relevant records of its own history is preserved. It is believed this collection will be of wider national value because, since the NRC was created in 1916, its activities (as the government's first grants agency and national research laboratory) have been coextensive with most scientific activity in Canada.

For the time being, access to the NRC's in-house holdings or to NRC material in the Public Archives of Canada requires the approval of the National Research Council. In fact this has not been denied to any of the few inquirers who used the collections in 1975-76.

The expectation is that, except for a small amount of personal or classified scientific information, the restrictions on access will be removed, in order to stimulate historians' work.

Donald J. C. Phillipson

A. W. Tickner

National Research Council of Canada

Ottawa Meeting on the History of Canadian Science and Technology

Note: the following is a personal report of the 15 April 1977 meeting by Mr. D. J. C. Phillipson, the keynote speaker. It represents his own views of the meeting. --Ed.

REPORT:

I convened the meeting to see whether there was any agreement with assessment of the general situation in Canadian studies of the history of science (including medicine and technology) and whether there might be any consensus about what should be done to stimulate more work on Canadian topics.

There wasn't much of either. However, most of those present expressed interest in a second meeting, specifically on scientific archives, to be held in Ottawa in September. With the help of Norman Ball (Public Archives) and A. W. Tickner (NRC Sr. Archival Officer) such a meeting will be convened, to which a number of archivists will be invited, as well as all those invited in April.

The planned date for the archives meeting is Friday 16th September, at 4:00 p.m. at the NRC (Sussex Drive), Ottawa. Though subject to change, this date will be announced at annual meetings of the Society for the History and Philosophy of Science and the Association of Canadian Archivists, in case other people wish to attend.

Attendance at the April meeting was 23 people. All were invited as individuals, rather than as spokesmen for their employers, professions, or institutions.

The theme talk was much the same as published in the Canadian Historical Association Newsletter (Winter, 1977) viz:

1. Canadian studies in the history of science are neglected by Canadian universities for various reasons, including the sparseness of the published literature, the lack of familiarity or interest of the teaching staff in Canadian topics, and their desire to direct their students to "where the action is" in the world of (English-language) scholarship. Thus Canadian studies is not a "going concern."
2. This low level of activity has important social consequences throughout Canadian scholarly and popular culture.
3. University scholars are almost completely out of touch with the many aging scientists currently at work on the history of their own disciplines or organizations, or simply concerned about Canadian studies in the history of science.
4. Canada lacks the infrastructure which supports the history of science in other countries (e.g. organized and useful archives, specialist journals, social networks such as the Royal Society, Cosmos Club, etc.)
5. Government agencies are willing to act (e.g. NRC) and have been told to act (c.f. Symons Report) but want to be told by a respectable body (e.g. CSHPS) precisely what should be done. Something should be done to plug the community of "amateur" historians of science (chiefly retired scientists) into the "professional" university activity (of teaching and publishing research results).

General discussion followed with two main characteristics: (remember, this is a subjective report!):

(a) There was no significant agreement with the keynote talk. Most participants thought that Canadian studies in the history of science are as good and as numerous as could be expected, that they are gaining increasing scholarly attention, and that no new "infrastructure" is needed.

(b) Although people present were about equally divided between "professional" historians of science (e.g. recent graduates of the Toronto or Montreal institutes, aged under 40) and "amateurs" (active or retired scientists, aged 50 to 70) the former group had far more to say than the latter..

Dr. W. A. B. Douglas (DND director of history) pointed out that original historical research in new fields is extraordinarily expensive. e.g. DND has maintained historians for 30 years, which is very laudable, but universities are largely uninterested in military history.

Jean-Claude Guédon (U. Montreal Institute) said career problems are paramount in graduate students' choices of thesis topics. Secondly, he challenged that the history of science is all that long-established in other countries; it's a recent interest in the U.S.A.; and it still suffers from the lack of mature analytical techniques.

Don Thomson (author of Men and Meridian) said that a clearing-house for history and historians is needed. He cited that interest in his topic (history of land surveys) is lively at prairie universities but he has never been asked to speak on it in his home town of Ottawa.

Norman Ball (Public Archives) spoke strongly against any new institutional apparatus or specialist journal for Canadian studies in the history of science (bound either to fail totally, he said, or at best survive as a haven for sloppy work rejected by respectable publications). Participants at meetings like this should stop talking and get writing.

Asst. Dean Beales (Queen's Engineering school) said the NRC and the Canada Council should seriously promote interdisciplinary studies such as the history of science. He and C.E.S. Franks were both familiar with the practical difficulties of coordinating the different departments concerned.

Agreeing that no new infrastructure is needed, Franks pointed out that two activities are at issue:

- (a) History of ideas (including scientific and philosophical ideas).
- (b) Role of science and technology in Canadian history.

Chris Smart (a graduate of the U. Sussex program) said that, by contrast with the U.K., Canadian studies (at least in English Canada) have not yet attained critical size. e.g. there is nothing here yet like the archives of British Men of Science. (---Despite, as J.D. Babbit (NRC ret'd.) mentioned, the huge literature of "science policy.")

Guédon said that the Montreal Institute is comprehensive in scope (viz. world topics as well as science in Quebec). Canada needs no new historical journal; but there is need for:

- (a) a detailed census of existing scientific archives, and
- (b) a first-class acquisition system for new archives.

Ball pointed out that that was why he was recently appointed to the Public Archives. He plans to take a personal inventory of existing collections. Because the PAC is open round the clock and 365 days a year, it is ready to house other collections' materials on temporary loan, if this makes them more accessible to scholars (with limited time and money for their stay in Ottawa).

T.H.G. Michael (Chemical Institute) observed that when he approached the PAC a couple of years ago, to take delivery of CIC materials, he got a warm welcome but nothing ever got actually done. Since so much of science and its history is within living memory, efforts such as the NRC's to record data before it is lost should be encouraged.

Dr. Douglas repeated that, because of the costs, government must subsidize both archives and historical narratives. Franks said the best incentive (considering how students choose their grad. thesis topics) would be special scholarships for special topics (e.g. military or scientific history).

Public ARchives policy was discussed. Ball works in the Manuscript Div. and cannot yet predict what influence he may have on the Public Records Div. The best theoretical policy is no good unless its administrators are determined to make it work. Past acquisition policy has been totally passive, but it's no good crying over spilt milk. Arthur Dunn (pre-Confederation ironworks) cited the 1966 order giving the PAC powers to take government documents. Phillipson said this is no good so long as departments are free to destroy anything they feel like (which is forbidden in the U.S. governmental system.)

It was resolved to hold a special meeting on scientific archives in September, to which archivists and representatives of the NRC and Canada Council should be invited.

The Library of the National Museum of Science and Technology

Address: 1867 St Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M8

Librarian: Mrs. H. Jacob. Tel: (613) 998-9520

Holdings: Approx. 16,000 vols. including periodicals.

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