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Sources in the History of Canadian Engineering

Norman R. Ball

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Sunday, 5 November

Plenary Session: Rapporteurs' accounts of the workshops; discussion and resolutions

As spaces are limited at the conference site (Donald Gordon Centre), those interested should contact Dr. Tickner at:

National Research Council,
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0R6
(613) 993-0286

SOURCES IN THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN ENGINEERING

The Engineering Institute of Canada Collection, which is now open for use at the Public Archives of Canada, should help solve one of the major problems in researching the history of engineering in Canada, namely the scarcity of accessible basic biographical and professional information.

Formed in 1887 as the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, the EIC is Canada's first and oldest professional engineering society. At 150 linear feet (45 metres) the collection is quite large but the finding aid prepared by the author of this note makes it quite usable but not idiot-proof. The first 126 feet consists of alphabetically-arranged membership files. Applications for membership were submitted to referees and in many cases give considerable biographical and professional information. This generally includes date and place of birth, details of education, apprenticeships and other training, jobs and level of responsibility. In some cases there are references to publications or papers given. Often the date of death has been noted with perhaps the inclusion of an obituary. The finding aid indicates the alphabetical range for each box but does not give a list of every engineer. One must look in the particular box to see if the engineer in question is there. Researchers are reminded that because the collection is not stored in the main building it must be requested on weekdays only and it will take approximately half a day to retrieve material. Once in the main building it can be consulted twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The remainder of the collection consists of material such as minutes of meetings, some correspondence, scrapbooks, membership lists, employment registers, periodical lists and other similar material.

It is hoped that during the next few years collection of other professional societies, both scientific and engineering, will be added to the holdings of the Public Archives of Canada. However,

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Zoology:

Kenneth Johnstone, The Aquatic Explorers: A History of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1977).

Crafts:

Joan Mackinnon, Kingston Cabinetmakers, 1800-1867. Mercury Series 14, National Museums of Canada (Ottawa, 1976).

Social History:

Leopold Infeld and Lewis Pyenson, eds., Leopold Infeld: Why I Left Canada: Reflections on Science and Politics. Trans. Helen Infeld. Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977).

DIRECTORY OF HISTORIANS/ANNUAIRE DES HISTORIENS

Addendum

Chris De Bresson. Science Council of Canada. 1526, 7th Avenue, New Westminster, B.C. (604) 525-8136. Science policy, especially innovation and industry.

FOR SALE/A VENIE

Professor Peter R. Knights, Dept. of History, York University, Downsview, Ont., M3H 1P3 wishes to sell a lengthy run of the journal ISIS: Vol. 44 (1953) to Vol. 60 (1969)--complete, issues 135 to 204; Vol. 62 (1971). nos. 2-4 (issues 212-214); Vol. 63 (1972)--complete (issues 216-220). For further information, contact Prof. Knights at the above address.

ENGINEERING SOURCES

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there is a great deal of work involved in acquiring and preparing such collections for research use and the science and engineering programme at the Public Archives of Canada, while larger than that at any other Canadian archive, is still basically a one-man operation, abetted occasionally by those with no training or background in science, engineering, or the history of these fields.

* * *

The policies of most government cultural agencies are more often than not guided by a combination of inertia, a reflection of wide-spread or well-established interests, and a response to visible, vociferous, or well-placed outside pressures. On the subject of the allotment of the federal culture dollar, Canadian historians of science and technology are as quiet as the proverbial church mouse and hence are regarded by those outside the field as non-existent or very happy.

It is therefore likely that ill-served as Canadian historians of science and technology have been in the past by cultural institutions such as archives and museums, they will find service getting even worse in the future as the number of practitioners grows without a concomitant increase in the numbers of those who seek out and make research material available. The eventual awakening will be a rude one.

Norman R. Ball
Science and Engineering Archivist
Manuscript Division
Public Archives of Canada

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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