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Guide to the National Anthropological Archives

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II. Guide to the National Anthropological Archives—Belatedly (with thanks to the author, James R. Glenn, who faxed us the introduction and table of contents, we note the Guide to the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, authored by Glenn and published by the NAA in 1992, and now in the process of enlargement and revision. The first description of what are now the NAA collections (James Pilling’s "Catalogue of Linguistic Manuscripts in the Library of the Bureau of Ethnology") was published in the Bureau’s first annual report (1881:555-77). Since that list of 277 manuscripts appeared, descriptions of other portions of the archives have been published, including the Catalogue of Numbered Manuscripts at the National Anthropological Archives (G.K. Hall & Co., 1975), which includes descriptions of most of the older material. In addition, the archives has distributed copies of registers of the papers of William L. Abbott, Henry B. Collins, Neil M. Judd, and Frank H. H. Roberts, and has published (through Kraus International, Inc.) Elaine Mills’ multivolume guide to the microfilm publication of papers of J. P. Harrington. However, these various publications describe only about one-sixth of the 6500 linear feet of documents currently in the archives, and the 1992 guide offers an overview of the entire collection.

The entries in the guide describe over 600 amassments or collections, of documents, each unified mainly through provenance. They are described through relatively standard archiving elements: a number for indexing purposes; brief title; noninterpretive biographical data or administrative history; indications of types of documents; brief and general analyses of contents usually as they relate to historical data; and essential data concerning inclusive dates, quantity, arrangement, finding aids and restrictions. Where it is necessary and the information is at hand, the material is related to other holdings of NAA or to materials held by other repositories or individuals. There is some unevenness in the realization of this plan. In the case of some small collections, historical notes are brief or absent; in others, limited processing has restricted the histories or analyses to a few notes. Where fuller documentation is available, and has proved useful to researchers and staff in the past, it is included. Although the guide may sometimes lead researchers directly to material they seek, more generally it may simply lead to sources where a search may yield pertinent material—most often by reference to lower level finding aids such as registers with descriptions of individual collections to the folder-level. Most of these lower-level finding aids are available in the NAA search room, and copies are also available (by appropriate arrangement) for correspondents who request them. Although the guide incorporates a rather large index, users should keep in mind that it indexes the guide itself and not the collections; lists of correspondents are thus selective, including usually only a fraction of the total in any collection.

Visiting scholars may take advantage also of the computer catalogue SIBIS (Smithsonian Institution Bibliographic and Information System), which enables searches of the holdings of various Smithsonian Institution units, including collection-level descriptions of the entire holdings of the NAA, as well as some series- and item-level descriptions. There are also card catalogues of the numbered manuscripts in the NAA, the photographic negatives, a reference print file, a vertical file of miscellaneous materials, special lists of finding aids by subject, and a large file of obituaries.
The archives will handle by mail (usually within three weeks) inquiries that are well-defined in such terms as tribe, place, person, culture feature, event, and date. Telephone inquiries are discouraged, but inquiries by FAX will be processed along with other inquiries in the order of their receipt, and generally answered by regular mail. Charges for reproduction must be paid in advance in checks or money orders payable in US dollars; delivery may take as long as two or three months from the initial inquiry.

The archives urges anthropologists to make arrangements for the preservation of their professional material, preferably not separated, but kept intact in one repository. Although this would normally be one with which they have institutional ties, the NAA welcomes offers of donations from those without such connection, and may provide assistance in shipping material. Although donations may be made with reasonable restrictions as to use, donors may virtually be guaranteed that their accumulated documents will eventually be used by the thousands of anthropologists, other scholars, American Indians, government officials, artists, and publishers who use the National Anthropological Archives each year.

[excerpted and edited from a communication by James Glenn]

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS:

I. Individual projects

Ramachandra Guha (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) is working on an intellectual biography of Verrier Elwin, pioneering ethnographer and spokesman of India’s tribal people, which will be entitled Outsider Within.

Jean Kadel (Department of History, Northern Illinois) has begun doctoral research on the theoretical development and public role of Robert Redfield, relating his interest in the transformation of peasant peoples to the events of the 1940s and 1950s (world piece, academic freedom, "multiculturalism," etc.)

Robert Launay (Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University) is beginning a project on the "prehistory" of anthropological theory from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, which will situate anthropology within a broader comparative tradition, one by which Europeans have attempted to define themselves not only with reference to non-Europeans, but also to their own past, specifically classical antiquity.

Lynette Russell (Classics and Archaeology, University of Melbourne) is doing research for a comparative history of the cultural context of archeology in Australia and America, with reference to settler colonialism.

W.F. Veit (German Studies, Monash University) is pursuing research on the intellectual conditions of the construction of Australian Aboriginal culture by German missionaries and scientists.