The Uses of Ethnographic Records

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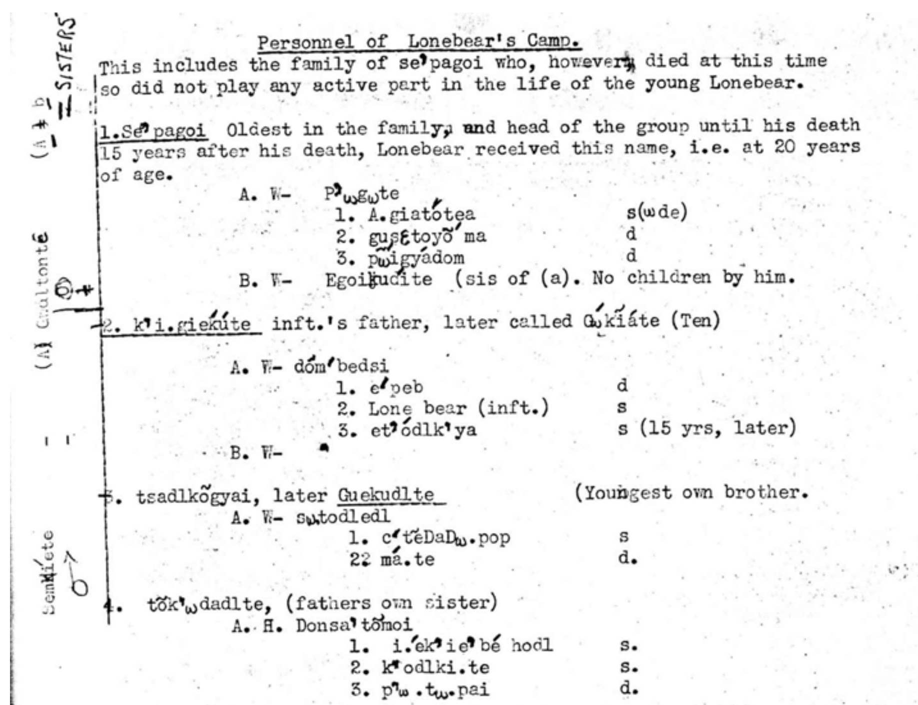
Why should anthropological records be saved? Of what use will they be in the future? In these comments we consider those questions from two perspectives. As ethnographers we have produced primary anthropological records: we know the excitement, and the responsibility, of making the first permanent records of cultural details and cultural patterns, including linguistic ones. As anthropologists with long-standing interests in culture history, ethnohistory, or anthropological history, on the one hand, and in the history of anthropology, on the other, we have used a great variety of archival materials, including records produced by other anthropologists, which we have located in many widely scattered and very different repositories. Our point of view is principally (but not solely) that of North Americanists, but what we say about native North America might easily be applied to almost any part of the world. Our focus is on ethnography and linguistics, but most of our comments are pertinent to the anthropological record as a whole.

The Nature of the Record

It is imperative to understand the "record" in the broadest terms. In the first instance, and most importantly, it includes notes recorded in the field — for ethnography and linguistics, the direct observation of speech, behavior, artifacts, and human modifications of the environment. These original field notes are the primary documents of anthropology. They include written records, images, and recordings, and they exist on paper, film, tape, and in electronic media. After producing these recordings of direct observation, the anthropologist generates another set of records in the process of publication, lecturing, and teaching. First, to field notes are added the anthropologist's rendering of data extracted from other sources, such as published items and archival and museum collections. Then there are drafts of texts prepared for publication, including those that never reach publication. There is also the broader category of materials of professional life, such as correspondence, diaries, and class notes. Documents such as these give evidence of the research activity of the investigator who collected the primary data, providing some of the context for that data and the published interpretations, and also serving as finding aids for future scholars. Anthropology differs from history in that we produce our own historical documents. As users of such evidence we see these documents, as well as those produced by non-

anthropologists, from the point of view of producers and not merely consumers of documents.

One might expect ethnographers and linguists to be especially careful about documenting and preserving their own field notes, as a matter of professional responsibility. But perhaps an awareness of our own faults and methodological lapses is an underlying reason for the all-too-common cavalier attitude towards preservation of our own primary documents. One may hope that this attitude will change in the future. The increasing awareness that all texts are inevitably biased products of historical forces and culturally constructed agendas should be accompanied by a lessening of sensitivity about the inevitable errors and omissions in our own texts. Furthermore, future researchers may well construe a failure to preserve original field notes as an implicit admission that the published reports on the field work were weakly supported by actual data.



Personnel of Lonebear's Camp.

This includes the family of se'pagoi who, however, died at this time so did not play any active part in the life of the young Lonebear.

1. Se'pagoi Oldest in the family, and head of the group until his death 15 years after his death, Lonebear received this name, i.e. at 20 years of age.

A. W- P'ωgωte
1. A.giatótea — s(ωde)
2. gusεtoyõ ma — d
3. pωigyádom — d

B. W- Egoikudite (sis of (a). No children by him.

2. k'i.giekúte inft.'s father, later called Gωkiáte (Ten)

A. W- dóm'bedsi
1. e'peb — d
2. Lone bear (inft.) — s
3. et'ódlk'ya — s (15 yrs, later)

B. W-

3. tsadlkõgyai, later Guekudlte (Youngest own brother.

A. W- sωtodledl
1. c'têDaDω.pop — s
22 má.te — d.

4. tõk'ωdadlte, (fathers own sister)

A. H. Donsa'tõmoi
1. i.'ek'ie'bé hodl — s.
2. k'odlki.te — s.
3. p'ω.tω.pai — d.

An excerpt from Notes on Kiowa Ethnography: Santa Fe Laboratory of Anthropology Expedition 1935. Papers of Raoul Weston La Barre, National Anthropological Archives.

In linguistics it is especially important to have available for future research the full field record, including documentation of the gradual improvement of the linguist's comprehension of the language under study. In order to recover as fully as possible both the original utterances and the contexts in which they were recorded, it is necessary to have evidence of the selecting and editing that the linguist always and necessarily performs. This is needed both to allow us to approach the original data and to assist us in understanding the linguist's methods and

assumptions. Such information is all the more crucial in areas like North America, where linguistics is becoming more dependent on records than on living speech, as the use of native languages declines and they become extinct. Unfortunately, the North American situation forebodes that on other continents.

Just as anthropologists need to preserve their primary data, so also should they acknowledge the use of such data — their own and others' — in their publications. Unlike historians, who usually document with care the location and extent of their sources, anthropologists seldom specify the manuscript materials they have drawn on for their writings. Anthropology's long anti-historical stance probably accounts for why, through the years, field notes have almost always been taken for granted as sources, as so basic that they do not need mention. There are exceptions; the *Handbook of North American Indians* (Sturtevant 1978-1990) objectifies and treats field notes "in [the author's] possession" on a par with any other source, published or not. Even so, the standards of the discipline might go farther and require that an institutional location be specified for unpublished evidence. We hope never to see a published anthropological paper that says, as did a recent non-anthropological paper, "for supporting data, the author may be consulted on E-mail."

Anthropological History and the Unpublished Record

As we have indicated, records need to be preserved and made accessible both for future anthropological research and for study of the history of anthropology. These aims are of course interrelated, in that the data are themselves a part of that history. We need only think of the types of materials that anthropologists have used in the past to imagine what will be critical in the future.

One of the notable trends of the last fifteen years of anthropological research has been its turn to history. This is certainly the case for North America: many North Americanist ethnographers have or will become anthropological historians or ethnohistorians, and North American linguists have increasingly adopted the techniques of philology. Yet the essential archival foundation for history and philology seems inadequately appreciated by anthropologists.

The distinctiveness of Native American cultures and languages, and their histories, will surely continue to be subjects of study even as these cultures and languages converge with and are replaced by Euro-American cultural features and the English language. This process of change will continue, even though the social distinctiveness of the Native American ethnos (and its constituent tribal ethnoses) will persist for the foreseeable future. The cultural features that mark the ethnic boundaries can be expected to be derived increasingly from the traditions shared with the larger North American ethnos as a whole. The situation of North Americanist anthropology presages that of other areas of the world. Everywhere, "the past is a foreign country" (Lowenthal 1985, citing Hartley 1953), or better, a different culture.

To appreciate the variety of historical perspectives in anthropology and the potential value of the anthropological record for such research, it is useful to consider what is meant today by anthropological history or ethnohistory. These terms have been defined in many ways (Krech 1991a). Because anthropologists are now almost as likely to conduct fieldwork in the First as the Third or Fourth Worlds, if ethnohistory is "[the study of] the history of the peoples normally studied by anthropologists" (Sturtevant 1966:6-7), then Maitland's claim that "anthropology must choose between being history and being nothing" is even more appropriate now than it was a generation ago.1

Problems of definition and of disciplinary boundaries stem not only from this increasing tendency of anthropologists to study urban Westerners but also from the recent interest of historians in history from the bottom up — the history of peoples once the exclusive focus of anthropologists. Then there is confusion over what to label the method and product: history? ethnohistory? social history? cultural history? Many self-styled ethnohistorians would probably agree that at its best, ethnohistory involves both historical and anthropological methodology in the use and the interpretation of both field and archival materials. But beyond this there is debate, sometimes fractious, over how — if at all — to delimit the field. Some anthropologists go so far as to consider historical reconstruction as "faulty" ethnohistory, as against an ethno-ethnohistory that takes account of people's own ways of culturally constructing the past.

The products of ethnohistory are diverse. They include the historical ethnography, or synchronic reconstruction of the cultural patterns of a society at some past moment; the specific history, or diachronic study that works either "upstream" from present to past or "downstream" from an earlier to a more recent period; and the study of folk history or native historiography, especially in societies that have been non-literate until recently. Where societies became extinct long before anthropology began, leaving no descendants to complain about being relegated to prehistory, and no potential for "upstreaming" or for the use of oral traditions, there may nevertheless be documents that can be used, in conjunction with archaeological evidence and comparative data from ethnology, to write historical ethnographies. The different products of ethnohistory often reflect different assumptions about culture and different theoretical perspectives drawn not only from history or anthropology but increasingly also from cultural studies, critical theory, or political economy. Some ethnohistorians seek generalizations, which others, however, eschew, investigating instead how a specific people culturally construct their past, or proclaiming their interest in "how it really was, what really happened" in a specific society.

It is little wonder that with this range in historical research and theoretical interest there might be debate over what to call both method and product. But it may also be that the current tendency to use ethnohistory for the history of certain types of peoples but not others ghettoizes those for whom it is used. It may be that anthropological history or historical anthropology would be better labels for the method that combines anthropology and history. This might also respond to

those who object to the word "prehistory" because they suppose it implies a lack of history.

One answer to the question of why we should preserve the anthropological record for future research is that no anthropologist publishes all his/her data, and there is always "more" that any anthropologist might have said about a particular case. Many ethnographers continue to write for decades after their fieldwork has ended, and many do not come close to exhaustively publishing their field-gained knowledge. But surely there is more to this issue than just "more." In fact, the potential value of the anthropological record can be intuitively understood in the demonstrated value (in anthropologists' hands) of the archival residue of explorers, missionaries, travelers, traders, governmental agents, and other observers of the "others" who most often have become the subjects of anthropological histories.

A great range of information relevant to an historical anthropology can be extracted even from the papers of untrained observers. To take one example, a nuanced and fuller assessment of an ethnographic museum collection was made possible because unpublished correspondence and other personal papers, much of which were of a quite private nature at the time they were written, were available one hundred years later (Krech 1989, 1991b). In this case, a Victorian earl's ethnographic collection from North America, donated to the British Museum in the early 1890s, was examined not simply to determine the provenance, function, and cultural meaning of specific artifacts. A broader aim was to treat the collection itself as an artifact and to understand why it took the shape it did; why, in other words, the collector took advantage of collecting opportunities at some points but not others in a year-long trip, why he collected some types of objects but not others that were surely available, and why he then gave some artifacts but not others to the Museum. Working out the taphonomy of the collection-as-artifact was dependent less on the formal parts of the collector's records than on an unpublished diary and personal correspondence. These revealed not only the exact route and pace of the collector's trip, but also — and most important — his own interests and his impressions of native people encountered. The point is that without correspondence and other personal materials, the most significant analysis would not have been possible.

The papers of explorers, missionaries, and other observers have been used for interesting analytical purposes by anthropologists with a broad variety of concerns. Some impressive examples are the analysis of extensive BaKongo texts in a Swedish missionary's archival papers (MacGaffey 1986) and the use of patrol reports for the study of first contact in the interior of the Territory of Papua (Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991).

Given the literary turn in anthropology in recent years, the interest in narrative strategy, literary genre, and text construction provides compelling reasons for the preservation of anthropological materials. At the very least, deconstruction of texts must be accompanied by criticism of sources. There is now specific interest in both historical reconstruction and in bringing fresh critical insight to older methods and

narratives. One such example is a recent analysis of the field notes of Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune in order to reconstruct the Mundugumor of the early 1930s, to unpack the Mead-Fortune methodologies and to reanalyze a kinship system (McDowell 1991).

Today there is widespread interest in the different ways that people imagine the past, in how narratives structure the telling of history, in the perspective-dependent nature of history, and in how knowledge is arrived at. One can see these trends in any number of recent analyses — such as an investigation of the mythicization of both the Zuni and Frank Cushing (Hinsley 1989) — which provide clear examples of how one might use archived papers.

Another recent example of the use to which an anthropologist's notes and manuscripts can be put is Jennifer Brown's critical work on A. Irving Hallowell's papers, which were acquired by the American Philosophical Society in 1983. Among these papers were draft chapters for a manuscript on the Berens River Ojibwa, as well as extensive information on Hallowell's key informant, Chief William Berens. Drawing on such materials as well as her own field and archival work, Brown has been able not only to recover Hallowell's additional thoughts on the Ojibwa but also to comment on his data and his collaboration with his informant, and to speak to the historicizing of anthropology. She offers extremely interesting assessments on the relationship between anthropologist and informant and on the tension between the informant's cultural framework and the anthropologist's interpretation. While always contextualizing Hallowell's intellectual inquiry, Brown brings fresh insight to the people of Berens River as well as to anthropological inquiry (Brown 1987, Hallowell 1992).

Clearly, archival materials are the basis of intellectual history and biography, the history of anthropology and of anthropologists. Growing numbers of studies have made evident how vital archived personal papers are for the history of the discipline and its figures. Written by both historians and anthropologists, these studies depend on unpublished materials from personal correspondence to lecture notes, and range from explorations of a scholar's intellectual agenda (e.g. Jackson 1986, Stocking 1984) to full biographical studies of anthropologists such as Edward Sapir (Darnell 1990a) and Ruth Benedict (Modell 1983).

Ethical and Legal Issues

In archiving as in fieldwork and publication, there are ethical concerns that need to be taken into account. One sensitive issue is what to do about information given in confidence, which might in some manner compromise those living or dead. All anthropologists confront this issue throughout their work. In one oral history project, an African-American insisted that the historicity (as he understood it) of his account of his life argued against pseudonyms and anonymity; nevertheless, when speaking about certain of his patrons, he also said that he "didn't want that in any book" (Krech 1981). In arriving at decisions on anonymity,

pseudonyms, and the excision of data, most anthropologists privilege their informants' major concerns; yet these may not be unambiguous.

These issues have been discussed by Richard Price, who after gaining the confidence of his Saramaka (Suriname) informants, managed to collect information about the era of Old-Time People, despite the restricted, guarded, and dangerous nature of this information. But he then faced a dilemma over publication of fragmented, secret information. The issues, he said, "ranged from the potential impact on the Saramaka system of knowledge of my codifying in writing these particular fragments, to the potential consequences of identifying by name the men who had shared their knowledge with me.... There is [also] the basic question of whether the publication of information that gains its symbolic power in part by being secret does not vitiate the very meaning of that information" (Price 1983:22-23). The problem for archiving anthropological papers is how to maintain positions that respect these complex issues.

Ethical issues may be further complicated by legal ones. What does one do, for example, with the records of an anthropologist whose research has not followed review prodecures for the protection of human subjects? What if the research is on such sensitive issues as illegal conduct, drug or alcohol abuse, or sexual behavior, if the respondents can be identified and thereby placed at risk? How long may the risks from disclosure outlive the identifiable actors? Many North Americanist ethnographers and linguists have been entrusted with information not revealed to others in the society of origin, sometimes with the explicit or implicit understanding that the secrets will be kept. How long should the restrictions be maintained?

An additional problem concerns unresolved legal questions that arise from recording, transcribing, and archiving information given orally, including questions of ownership of tape recordings.2 In law, the originator of ideas including speech and recorded information is their owner, but in practice these ideas can be published without obligation unless the narrator has made known a wish to control publication of certain statements. The 1976 Copyright Act gives protection to original works of authorship, but its application seems clearer for tapes than for field notes: the person whose words are on tape holds the copyright over those words (and is entitled to profit from them), either solely or jointly with the interviewer. For such reasons, oral historians may obtain releases from the people they have interviewed, transferring ownership to an oral history center subject to whatever restrictions interviewees impose. Possible charges of slander (verbal falsehood), libel (written falsehood), and defamation (statements that injure reputation) await the unwary — but only if the stakes become high. Burden of proof rests with the plaintiff, and a person who has died, who is not a public figure, and about whom malice was not intended cannot be defamed.

The major issue here is the degree to which the Copyright Act and other laws affect the archived anthropological record. Interviews can be subpoenaed, and sealing notes or restricting access may be advisable in some cases. This may all sound alarming, but in practice there has been little legal action concerning anthropological papers, and there probably will be little in the future. Legal action is costly; the results are uncertain

and in most cases unprofitable. Nevertheless, arguments in courts of law, as tribal recognition or land claims cases make painfully clear, can be heated, contentious, and manipulative of data, opinions, and authority. One might consider ways to prevent one's field notes from being used in a manner that might compromise the people among whom one worked. Archivists are experienced in these matters and can advise anthropologists about the steps to be taken under given circumstances.

The Future Record

As we have noted, there are myriad reasons for archiving the anthropological record. This record comes in multiple forms: paper, tape recording, film, video, material objects, and others. We also need to consider the increasing use of microcomputers for research, analysis, and writing, including the recording of original notes in the field or archive. These records are in many computer files and on many hard disks, and the data bank is of enormous and rapidly growing size.

One recent example of the implications of the technological change in microprocessing is the Round Lake Project, a long-term study of native people of Subarctic Canada. Data on over 6,000 people spanning a 200-year period have been collected and coded in 45 genealogical, life history, and residential fields; this represents the most extensive information base for native Canada available (Grant 1991, Black-Rogers, 1990). This is one of many projects in which anthropologists create (and then manipulate) electronic versions of ethnographic, historical, and linguistic data. Aside from the comprehensive nature of this database, what makes this case exemplary is the willingness of the researchers to share their database with others. There are, of course, many other examples of scholars who readily share their records. Sherwood Washburn, for instance, made available his personal files to Donna Haraway, despite their different orientations and Haraway's (1988) subsequent critical reading of the Washburn Era in physical anthropology.

Unfortunately, a recent effort undertaken by the American Society for Ethnohistory suggests there may be resistance to archiving electronic data. Because of the increasing number of electronic databases, the ASE endorsed the creation of a repository to retain, preserve, and disseminate machine-readable ethnohistorical data. Contrary to expectation, it was unable to generate much interest among members of the Society. The question was raised as to whether scholars with suitable data might be unaccustomed or unwilling to share them (Galloway 1991).3

It is possible that an impediment to preserving the anthropological record may be the competitive nature of the academy and the connections between fieldwork, authority, "science," and reputation. But while opening one's field notes to scrutiny before death may be deterred by notions of intellectual property rights and priority of publication, this surely does not hold posthumously. To deny access then is equivalent to destroying the record. We return, then, to advocating that individuals take on the responsibility of preserving their materials. We hope that

academic societies, university libraries, state repositories, museums, and specialty archives, singly and together, will encourage anthropologists to take this step and provide the means for preservation of the entire anthropological record.

The admonition of Margaret Mead, written over thirty years ago, should continue to guide us:

> In a science like anthropology, which by its very nature deals with historically vanishing materials, there is a special obligation to make and record all observations as accurately as possible, for they provide the irreplaceable basis for future observations, and for the construction of present and later theory (Mead 1962:116).

Summary

- The uses that anthropologists have made of unpublished records in the past underline the importance of saving such records for future scholars.

- Primary documents and other records are needed both for future research on the cultures and languages in question and for study of the history of anthropology.

- The archiving of certain materials raises ethical and legal concerns, which should be addressed as part of anthropologists' broader responsibility to preserve the record.

Notes

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1. When Evans-Pritchard (1962:190) quoted Maitland, he added: "I accept the dictum, though only if it can also be reversed — history must choose between being social anthropology or being nothing."

2. The following remarks depend heavily on an unpublished paper by Melissa Pflug (1990).

3. The ASE endorsed the establishment of an archive for machine-readable data in 1989-90, with possible institutional homes being the Human Relations Area Files, the National Anthropological Archives, and the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. In 1991, a questionnaire was sent to approximately 500 members of the ASE asking them to indicate the kind and quantity of data they would deposit; in six months, only eighteen responses were received, and the data described were primarily census-type materials. Patricia Galloway (1991), who conducted this survey, concluded that it was premature to set up any means to preserve machine-readable data.