

A GUIDE TO HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION IN ARGENTINA

*Colloquium of Visiting Scholars**

Buenos Aires

I. INTRODUCTION

Preservation of written testimony is essential to the writing of history. Yet, in Latin America, historical documents, though copiously produced, have been sadly neglected and too often destroyed. What remains, then, assumes inestimable value for all historians—humanists or social scientists—for only on its basis can this hemisphere's past be reconstructed. A knowledge of the exact location and condition of material is necessary for the formulation of a reasonable historical research project; it is obviously essential to the research itself.

In 1972 a group of Argentine and non-Argentine scholars doing historical research, informally organized as the Colloquium of Visiting Scholars, recognized the value of knowledge they were necessarily acquiring while locating documentary sources for their research. As a result, the Colloquium decided to publish a guide to the sources of historical information in Argentina, to be accessible to Argentine as well as foreign scholars.¹ The project's obvious merits gained the immediate support and participation of other Argentine historians and archivists, including Guillermo Furlong Cardiff, S.J., Dr. Aurelio Z. Tanodi, and Dr. César A. García Belsunce.² This broader participation prompted a conscious effort to define the project in terms of the Argentine scholarly community and its objectives.

The evolution of the Guide project has revealed other aspects of its inherent value to the scholarly community. The Guide will encourage an integrated historical view of Argentina, where lack of research funds currently combines with deficient inter-regional intellectual communication to render nation-wide research a truly formidable task.

By providing information on the documents and research tools available in regions of Argentina other than Buenos Aires, the Guide will facilitate historical projects studying nation-wide phenomena, and thus contribute to the demise of insular concepts of history currently influential in Argentine historiography. Furthermore, the Guide, while enabling all researchers to utilize their time more efficiently, will be of particular value to the Argentine scholar whose funds and time are generally limited. On an international level, the Guide could serve as a model project for other countries which also lack a highly developed research infrastructure. In addition, the completed Guide will demonstrate the value of international intellectual cooperation in attaining mutually beneficial goals.

*Editor's Note: The Colloquium, as explained in this Report, is a group of young scholars whose precise membership changes. They maintain an office at Sarmiento 683, 8^o piso, Buenos Aires.

II. OBJECTIVES

The project envisions a completed Guide, published in Spanish, and consisting of two major parts. The first will provide factual material describing the sources for research in Argentine history and will be published in three volumes: Archives, Libraries, and Bibliographies. Volumes I and II will detail each institution's contents and list the materials facilitating the researcher's utilization of that institution. Volume III will contain bibliographical information on Argentine historical bibliographies, periodicals, and research projects, as well as information on research centers (particularly universities) and book dealers specializing in historical publications. The second part, Volume IV, will consist of a series of essays discussing specific research areas and problems, methods, and utilization of different types of documentation, thus adding an interpretive complement to the first three volumes.

The scope of the entire Guide project and the financial and man-power limitations within which it is currently functioning have imposed very strict working priorities. The critical importance of primary documentation to any research project suggested that the first objective be publication of the guide to archives. Thus, during 1975, we will prepare Volume I for publication and simultaneously, but secondarily, accomplish whatever possible toward the fulfillment of our broader objectives.

The specific aims, scope, and organization of the archival guide have reached precise definition. The contents of public as well as private archives will be described, along with the research aids—indices, catalogs, existing guides, published and unpublished articles and bibliographies—facilitating consultation of its documents. Indices will enable the reader to locate information alphabetically (name of archive) and topically (type of documentation held). An exclusive description of archives located in Argentina, though of primary importance, would hardly satisfy all the aims of this volume; thus, reports from archives holding documentation important to Argentine history but located in bordering or other historically related countries must also appear. Entries in the main body of the volume will be made by name of archive, but organized primarily by geographical location, secondarily by position in government hierarchy, and finally, alphabetically.

Each entry, corresponding to one archive, will begin with general information: Location, hours and months open for consultation, restrictions and requirements limiting its use (Section I), and a short institutional history (Section II). The third section will consist of a listing of the documentary collections located in the archive and their organization, while Section IV will indicate the existence of catalogs and indices. Finally, any archival publications will be listed in Section V.

Continually changing archival holdings and methodological advances in the field of history impose two further conditions on this phase of the Guide project: The archival information must be kept up-to-date and it must allow for the reorganization of data required by new research methods. Current plans call for the information in Volume I to be stored on magnetic computer tape, thus allowing for necessary insertions and deletions while facilitating periodic published supplements. Furthermore, photocopies of the complete reference archive used in compiling the archival guide (our questionnaires and reports as well as corresponding unpublished catalogs and guides) will be donated to several Argentine universities and one or two non-Argentine institutions. The availability of this information will provide for further reference consultation and enable

future scholars to prepare specialized guides to demographic, economic, and social documentation, *i.e.*, the documentary series necessary for quantitative history. Thus, the archival guide will surpass the static connotations of its name and become, rather, a flexible tool responding to the changing necessities of today's historian.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

The evolution of the Guide project from an imprecise plan for sharing heuristic data to the concrete objectives described above has necessitated parallel administrative changes. In March 1973 the Colloquium of Visiting Scholars requested that Rolando A. Pérez act as Editor-Director; George Heaps-Nelson was subsequently appointed Associate Editor. The two editors have since shared administrative duties with an informal committee of Argentine historians and archivists (Guillermo Furlong Cardiff, S.J., Dr. Aurelio Z. Tanodi, Dr. César A. García Belsunce, and Professor Ernesto Maeder)³ while relying on the Colloquium for general support, counsel, and individual contributions of data and essays.

Intellectually, the Guide project has been well received among Argentine and non-Argentine scholars. Individuals as well as Argentine national institutions have indicated formal approval of the project; many have collaborated more directly by facilitating institutional information or data from personal research files.

Financial support, on the other hand, has been neither so generally accorded nor so readily obtained. By soliciting individual contributions from Argentine and multinational companies and from the Fulbright Commission, the project has obtained approximately \$12,500 (US), enough to maintain a minimum operating level during the past year. However, since *ad hoc* solutions to emergency situations hardly provide the framework required for careful planning and efficient working patterns, it has become imperative that the Guide project seek complementary funding from private foundations and government sources. The administrative committee, aware that the project's legal status influences its ability to achieve financial stability, has taken preliminary steps to incorporate the project into a legal non-profit organization to be called the Centro para Investigaciones Históricas en la Argentina.⁴

Despite funding and personnel limitations, the Guide project has made substantial progress during the past year, particularly on the guide to archives. After compiling a list of all major archives and libraries in Argentina, we established which should be included in the Guide, set priorities for obtaining the necessary reports, and organized a list as it will appear in the published volume. As a result of our researchers' visits and the cooperation of archival functionaries, we have obtained information on more than one-hundred archives and finished reports on more than fifty of these. Two current projects in the Archivo General de la Nación in Buenos Aires deserve special mention. Three Argentine scholars are reviewing all census manuscripts and preparing reports on their location, condition, coverage, and the nature of their data. At the same time, a North American scholar is identifying series of economic documentation which have been cataloged and stored separately by Archive employees. Finally, several publishing houses have indicated an interest in the guide to archives.

Although the substantial number of completed questionnaires and reports

currently on hand represents an important part of the planned reference archive, the project's funding limitations during the past year have severely hindered efforts to locate and photocopy unpublished catalogs from all regions of Argentina. The present lack of any centralized archival resource of this nature demands that a project such as the Guide make the necessary investment in personnel, travel expenses, and photocopies. Thus, we must place a very high priority not only on the publication of the guide to archives, but also on completion of its reference archive.

Progress on the guide to archives has not precluded all work on the Guide project's broader objectives. The list of libraries to be included in Volume II has been compiled and evaluated, and several collaborators have submitted reports on important libraries, including the Biblioteca Nacional, the Biblioteca Tornquist, and the central library at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata. Our bibliographical reference file for Volume III now contains over two thousand entries of historiographical and bibliographical works; and our working agreement with the Instituto Bibliográfico Antonio Zinny, whose director, Jorge Bohdziewicz, will co-edit this volume, will, in effect, unify our bibliographical resources with those of the Instituto. Basic bibliographical information on twentieth-century Argentine periodicals important to Argentine history has been compiled, as well as the list of Argentine book dealers specializing in historical works. Furthermore, our working agreement with the Centro de Cultura Popular will facilitate bibliographical information on Peronism, while our relationship with the Centro Universitario de Documentación e Información, of the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, will contribute to the bibliography of history theses and dissertations presented to Argentine universities. Finally, for Volume IV, the Guide project has obtained commitments from ten scholars for essays dealing with areas, methods, and special problems in Argentine history.

IV. CONCLUSION

That the Guide project acquired the widely-accorded and dedicated support necessary to survive and progress during its first year is testimony to its crucial role in the development of Argentine historiography. Coping with the current lack of a generalized research infrastructure in Argentina has made scholars value the Guide's potential usefulness, not only as a model project or for its contribution to Argentine integration, but also for its effect on individual research projects. Many researchers have already benefitted from the Guide's as-yet unprocessed files. Furthermore, the realization that this mutually beneficial research tool could be constructed on the basis of individual contributions reflecting the historical research experience of each scholar has prompted the cooperative effort characterizing the project.

Changing concepts of the historian's scholarly responsibility demand that the goals of this international effort be defined in terms of the Argentine scholarly community and its objectives. Over a decade ago the French historian Pierre Chaunu pointed out that while the traditional predominance of non-Latin American historians engaged in serious research in Latin American history indicated the region's underdevelopment, Latin Americans were rapidly beginning to dominate their historiography with the cooperation of their foreign peers.⁵ The Guide project's philosophy goes a step further:⁶ Historians from the wealthy nations

must do more than study Latin America, research in Latin America, publish on (but rarely *in*) Latin America, and send the appropriate thank you letters to the societies furthering their academic careers. Each scholar's responsibility demands that he not only make his research results available in his host country but that he also contribute concretely to the development of his profession there. Thus, the Guide's policy to seek maximum Argentine intellectual and financial aid to publish the Guide in Spanish in a subsidized edition within a budget of even the poorest history student in Argentine universities is not the result of arbitrary editorial decision. Rather, it is a conscious attempt to strengthen Argentine historiography through international cooperation.

In an attempt to allow Argentine initiative in financial as well as intellectual support, the Guide project relied almost entirely on funding originating in Argentina during 1973. However, local resources which do not suffice for on-going history research can hardly be expected to provide complete funding for a large one-time investment in the research infrastructure. The unfulfilled Law of Archives is evidence that they cannot. Of the Guide's total budget through 1974, local funding was expected to provide one-third; if the project is to succeed, international funding must provide the remaining \$40,000 (US).

Although in Argentine terms the Guide is a very expensive project, its subsequent contribution to Argentine scholarship will prove it an investment well worthwhile. The per-person cost of the guide to archives, considering only the potential number of Argentine *student* users (2,500), is less than a round-trip economy bus ticket between Buenos Aires and Mendoza. With the guide, that trip can be made not to look for documents, but to consult them. Likewise, access to the Guide prior to leaving for research in the field could save American and European scholars with fellowships of limited duration inestimable effort upon their arrival. Thus, the time and money invested in producing the Guide will not only enable the unfunded Argentine scholar to participate in reconstructing his national past but will also facilitate the funded researcher's task in Argentina. Ultimately, however, the project will do more than benefit the Argentine, American, British, and Japanese scholars utilizing the Guide; it will contribute to a better-documented, more profound understanding of Argentina's past.

NOTES

1. A similar project should have resulted from Argentina's Law N^o. 15,930, Article 2, Section f, "Ley Nacional de Archivos," passed in 1961, but no action has been taken to date.

Publications of similar intent but different coverage not only reinforced the Colloquium's assessment of the importance of a guide but also helped define its scope, content, and organization. These were: Aurelio Z. Tanodi, *Guía de los Archivos de Córdoba* (Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 1968); Carl Herbold and Steve Stein, *Guía Bibliográfica para la Historia Social y Política del Perú en el Siglo XX (1895-1960)* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1971); Robert Levine, ed., *Brasil: Field Research Guide in the Social Sciences* (New York: Columbia University, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1966); Lino Gómez Canedo, *Archivos de la Historia de América*. 2 vols. (México, D.F.: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1961).

Two other precedents for Latin American cultural development were influential in the initiation of the Guide project: The Organization of American States' Instituto

Panamericano de Geografía e Historia and the Regional Program for Cultural Development, and the UNESCO Microfilm Project, 1956–59.

Precedents in Argentina, in addition to the above mentioned law, include the resolutions calling for such a guide approved repeatedly at national conferences during the last fifteen years (Primera Reunión Argentina de Historia Social y Económica, Córdoba, 1963; Segundas Jornadas de Archiveros de Argentina, Córdoba, 1969; Terceras Jornadas de Archiveros de Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1971).

This Guide project, therefore, sets out to implement a task earlier called for by others.

2. Dr. Furlong, S.J., was Professor of History at the Universidad del Salvador; member, Academia Nacional de la Historia; President, Instituto Bibliográfico Antonio Zinny; a bibliographer of reknown as well as a prolific author.

Dr. Tanodi is Professor of History at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba; founder and Director, Escuela de Archiveros, also at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (the only school of archivists recognized and subsidized by the Organization of American States); Representative for Latin America, Conseil International des Archives, UNESCO; member, Academia Nacional de la Historia; and, without a doubt, Argentina's leading archivist and pioneer in bringing Argentina's historians and archivists together.

Dr. García Balsunce is Professor of History at Instituto del Profesorado "Sagrado Corazón" in Buenos Aires; Director, Equipos de Investigación Histórica, an active historical research center whose members are using quantitative methods and a team approach; and member, Instituto de la Historia del Derecho.

3. Professor Ernesto J. Maeder is Director, Instituto de Historia, Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, Resistencia; member, Academia Nacional de la Historia; and member, Comisión de Historia, Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Presidencia de la Nación.
4. The Guide currently functions within the financial structure of Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericanas, Buenos Aires.
5. Pierre Chaunu, *Las Grandes Lineas de la Producción Histórica en América Latina (1950–1962)* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Facultad de Humanidades y Educación, Escuela de Historia, 1965), pp. 9, 23–24.
6. This philosophy is shared by other academic programs in Latin America; for example, the Foreign Area Fellowship Program administered by the Social Science Research Council now requires its fellows to be affiliated with and participate in host country research institutions.