

Ethnology preservation

The Federal Government has a program that is attempting to minimize any further loss of Canada's native heritage.

There are approximately 54 native languages which are still spoken in Canada. Of these, only three are spoken by more than 5,000 people and are therefore reasonably safe from extinction at this time. Approximately two-thirds of the remainder have fewer than 1,000 speakers, and are likely to disappear within two generations. Some, such as Comox, Delaware (Munsee dialect) and Tagish are spoken by fewer than ten people and are regarded as essentially extinct.

The National Museum of Man's Ethnology Program is utilizing sound tapes, films and photographs as well as the written word to record Indian, Inuit and Métis culture. The resulting documents, preserved under archival conditions, will provide future generations with a record of Canada's native heritage.

More than a century ago, when the present National Museums were still part of the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), the seeds of what is now the Urgent Ethnology Program were planted. The earliest GSC field workers had little or no anthropology training, but their everyday observations on native languages and cultures were valuable contributions to this body of knowledge. George Mercer Dawson, a geologist and botanist who was the third director of the GSC, was instrumental in the formation of an ethnographic survey committee which

convinced the Canadian Government to establish an Anthropology Division within the GSC. This, the first federally-sponsored anthropological research, was a major step towards the preservation of the national heritage.

Recording of folklore

The Anthropology Division, initiated by people like Edward Sapir and Diamond Jenness, produced over the next 30 years an extensive written record of a culture which was already rapidly disappearing. Primitive sound equipment was used by Marius Barbeau and others to record music and folklore on wax cylinders. Early cameras, printing on heavy glass plates, were used to produce invaluable photographic records. There were even films made by George Wilkins during the 1913-1919 Canadian Arctic Expedition, which are among the oldest movies of Inuit life ever made.

However, it was difficult to maintain this impetus with the small staff available to the National Museum of Man's Ethnology Division, which never included more than eight fulltime ethnologists and ethnographers. In 1960, a research program was established and financial support has been given for nearly 500 research projects among Indian, Inuit and Métis groups across the country. The Urgent Ethnology Program, as it is now officially called, has provided the Museum of Man with much significant data in various forms, including written reports, field notes, photographs, tapes and films.

Despite these efforts, the Museum's

Canadian Studies Report on the Program points out that there are still "too many gaps in Canada's ethnographic and ethnolinguistic record". The enormity of the problem becomes clearer when one considers the large number of relatively small groups, or bands, which comprise the 275,000 registered treaty Indians scattered over the vast geographic area of Canada. There are also groups such as the Inuit who do not appear on government band lists, and the many native people who have left the reserves and moved to urban centres or towns.

The geographic-coverage problem is complicated by the need, in a comprehensive ethnographic study, for the inclusion of hundreds of culturally relevant topics — for example, ethnobotany, music, mythology, animal relations. The scope, then, of a really comprehensive coverage of any given group is staggering.

(Article based on the Canadian Studies Report of the Canadian Ethnology Service by J. Garth Taylor.)

Participation in Niger project

Canada will contribute an additional \$210,000 for the construction of a transformer substation in Niger, under a memorandum of understanding signed recently by the Canadian and Niger governments.

The transformer substation, costing a total of \$610,000, will provide the 20,000 residents of Dosso with hydroelectric power from the Kainji-Naimey power line financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in 1975. The project will help Niger reduce both its energy expenditures and its dependence on imported oil.

Canada will provide the necessary engineering services, equipment and technical follow-up.

During meetings with Niger officials in Niamey, Martial Asselin, Minister responsible for CIDA, said the Canadian Government will assist in Niger's road construction programs to open up the landlocked country. In addition, he announced that Canada would double its aid contribution to Niger by participating in the construction of a major section of the Pan-African Telecommunications Network. Senator Asselin also pointed out that drought in the Sahel countries over the last few years has prompted Canada to support the efforts of these countries to become self-sufficient in food.



Masks reflect culture of native Canadians.