

# **The Records of Applied Anthropology**

John van Willigen

Applied anthropology faces many of the same problems of losing much of the record of its history as general anthropology. However, there are important additional problems for applied anthropologists deriving from the nature of work in this subfield.

I use "applied anthropology" in a generic and inclusive sense, as the knowledge and practices of anthropologists that involve action directed at some practical goal other than gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Applied anthropology exists in many forms, including advocacy anthropology, action anthropology, research-and-development anthropology, action research, and cultural brokerage, as well as various kinds of policy research such as evaluation, social impact assessment, needs assessment, and cultural appraisal. (For an overview of applied anthropology practice, see van Willigen 1986 and Chambers 1985.)

There are several problems associated with the use of the term "applied anthropology." First, there is the distinction often made between anthropological practice and applied anthropology. Employment circumstances seem to be the most important factor in defining this contrast: applied anthropologists are thought to be primarily academically employed, while practicing anthropologists are those working outside of academia. Second, a number of subfields of general anthropology, such as development anthropology, have major applied aspects. Anthropologists in such subfields may think of themselves as (for example) development anthropologists rather than applied anthropologists. Third, because applied anthropology has a legacy of low prestige, there may be some reluctance to use the term in self-identification. In any case, I use it to cover the great variety of situations in which anthropologists use their skills and knowledge to solve practical problems.

## **Problems of Documentation and Preservation**

In general anthropology, preservation and documentation efforts are directed primarily at unpublished personal papers and primary-data records such as field notes. While such documents are of concern in applied anthropology, there is also significant risk of losing the publications themselves because of their fugitive nature. The fugitive-literature materials published in applied anthropology are not usually under bibliographic control, are printed in limited numbers, and may

have very restricted dissemination. In this regard, applied anthropology faces problems very similar to those of cultural resource management archaeology. These conditions do not apply universally to applied work as some agencies, such as the World Bank and the Agency for International Development, have good programs of documentation and dissemination. In addition, publication of technical reports and disposition of primary-data records may be influenced by the proprietary interests of the client. It is not unusual for applied anthropologists to be denied the opportunity to publish freely from data following their collection and primary use. This issue represents an important ethical concern.

The situation is further complicated by applied anthropologists' limited access to publication outlets. The written materials produced as a direct result of the applied process may be inappropriate to many existing publication outlets. Most space in journals of anthropology is allocated to nonapplied materials; the only journal exclusively dedicated to publishing applied anthropology is *Practicing Anthropology*. In addition, applied anthropologists may have limited incentive or time to prepare materials for publication. Rarely are their salary increments and promotions tied to this activity.

Documentation in applied anthropology is made more difficult by the fissioning of anthropology. Applied anthropologists tend to be drawn away from disciplinary discourse, as the content of many applied anthropologists' work is shaped increasingly by their participation in multidisciplinary networks of academics and practitioners defined by interest in a set of policy problems. Such content areas include aging, agricultural development, health care, refugee studies, child abuse, and environmental planning.

These conditions have had a number of effects. First, applied anthropology has terrible memory lapses concerning its earlier accomplishments. The history of applied anthropology has been characterized by much rediscovery of basic principles and ignoring of individual achievements. Second, the contribution of applied anthropology to the development of the discipline of anthropology is not well understood and is often misrepresented. Disciplinary conceptions of the history of anthropology are structured largely by its academics. From an applied perspective, however, some of the early anthropology departments, such as that at Cambridge University, were really applied-anthropology training programs. Third, while half of current Ph.D.s in anthropology become practicing or applied anthropologists, only a minuscule portion of the published record of the discipline is of an applied nature. This raises questions about the usefulness of anthropology publications for preparing students for the jobs they are likely to assume.

### **Ethical and Legal Issues**

The ethical considerations of publication in applied anthropology are complicated by the addition of another interested party. In general anthropology, publication involves the author, the research subjects, and

the disciplinary readership. In applied anthropology, to this cluster of interests are added those of the client. For the most part, the client is the person or agency that paid for the work by "direct hire" or contract. The employment situation of the applied anthropologist confounds the control of data and the nature of subsequent publication.

In 1983 the Ethics Committee of the Society for Applied Anthropology was charged with revising the ethics statement of that organization. In this process the committee was asked specifically to address the needs of "practitioners." Issues of data ownership were the most important concern of the practitioners on the committee, especially client restrictions on the publication of data. At that time, the ethics statement of the American Anthropological Association clearly precluded what was referred to as "clandestine" research. The meaning of "clandestine" appeared to be research done for the private use of a client without possibility of public use. While we knew the term "clandestine" harkened to concerns about anthropological research that might have been done during the Vietnam War for the Department of Defense or the Central Intelligence Agency, the principle was stated broadly and caught other kinds of activity in its net. One practitioner on the SfAA committee who worked for a federal housing agency said about this principle that he could not possibly function in his job without being able to "keep secrets" about federal housing plans. He faced a perfect irony: every day, as he worked responsibly to achieve the goals of his agency, he was being unethical in terms of these standards. Premature release of "secret" information about housing projects would result in firms in the private sector reaping windfall profits, and was regarded by his coworkers as unethical. In this context the anthropologist's work for the housing agency was "clandestine" and conceptually indistinguishable, on the face of it, from work for the Department of Defense. The committee concluded that there were good secrets and bad secrets.

Ultimately, the revised Ethics Statement of the SfAA recognized both the "legitimate proprietary interests of our sponsors" and the idea that "we should not impede the flow of information about research outcomes." That is, at least from the standpoint of that statement, the disposition of the preserved records of applied anthropologists might be constrained by the interests of a client. It is quite clear that applied anthropologists need to negotiate conditions for the disposition of reports and data with the employer as a condition of employment. Freedom to publish and archive data for use by others should not be a foregone conclusion. Persons concerned with archiving applied- anthropology materials need to have sensitivity to this issue.

### **Current Efforts to Save the Record**

There are several developments that have improved documentation in applied anthropology during the last fifteen years. These developments represent remedies that should be expanded.

First, publication of applied-anthropology case studies has increased. There are now many examples of books that serve to "preserve the record" and at the same time create materials useful for training. These

include *Practicing Development Anthropology* (Green 1978); *Advocacy and Anthropology: First Encounters* (Paine 1985); *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action* (Wulff and Fiske 1987); *Collaborative Research and Social Change* (Stull and Schensul 1987); *Applied Anthropology in America: Past Contributions and Future Directions* (Eddy and Partridge 1987); and *Making Our Research Useful: Case Studies in the Utilization of Anthropological Knowledge* (van Willigen et al. 1990). Books of this type help to create a physical record of the field and teach students to carry on a developing tradition.

In addition, two archive collections focused on applied anthropology have been organized. The Applied Anthropology Documentation Project at the University of Kentucky has attempted, since its inception in 1978, to collect the so-called fugitive literature produced by anthropologists during their problem-solving work. The collection includes a wide range of types of materials: technical reports, research monographs, conference papers, practicum and internship reports, legal briefs, proposals, and other materials. This project makes no attempt to collect personal papers of applied anthropologists or project research data. The total number of items in the collection is about 1,900.

New materials are received continuously. Several organizations have contributed near-complete sets of their publications. These include the Bureau for Applied Research in Anthropology (BARA) at the University of Arizona and the Development Studies Unit, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Stockholm. Agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance have been generous contributors. For the most part, materials are submitted to the collection by individual anthropologists.<sup>1</sup>

Materials received are catalogued according to Library of Congress subject headings and are made available for study in the University library or through interlibrary loan. Cataloguing information on these materials is incorporated into the University of Kentucky Margaret I. King Library online catalog and the national cataloguing database (OCLC) used by the University. Both of these databases can be searched from other locations. The OCLC database constitutes a listing of books held at most academic libraries, and it is often used to locate interlibrary loan items. It is not possible to search the holdings of the Applied Anthropology Documentation Collection as a set through this database, but if the author or title is known the item's record can be read and used for interlibrary loan purposes. Most research libraries have access to this database. It is possible to search the University of Kentucky Library online catalog through Internet. Many university mainframes are part of the Internet system. Internet allows users to log on computers in other locations for various purposes, including browsing the online catalogs of libraries.

Many submissions to the collection are profiled in a column called "Sources" that is a regular section of *Practicing Anthropology*. Profiles are prepared by me or submitted by readers; materials produced in the past as well as current work are welcome.

The published project profiles served as the basis for a publication, *Anthropology in Use: A Source Book on Anthropological Practice* (van Willigen 1991). It is an expanded, reorganized and updated version of an earlier volume (van Willigen 1981), which included about 320 entries about projects and events, arranged chronologically. The new edition contains 530 entries and is arranged topically. The Source Book has two purposes. First, it is intended to help readers find information about cases in which anthropologists have applied their knowledge and skills to solve practical problems. Second, it serves as a chronicle of the development of applied anthropology and anthropological practice.

The Documentation Project is sponsored by the Society for Applied Anthropology, the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists, the Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada, the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, and the Society for Medical Anthropology.

A similar project, the Canadian Applied Anthropology Project (CAAP), was organized at the Library at McMaster University by Wayne Warry. Sponsored by the Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada, the collection documents the work of Canadian applied and practicing anthropologists. Warry prepares a column entitled "Discoveries" in the SAAC Newsletter, which abstracts submissions to the collection.<sup>2</sup>

Besides these archives, the Society for Applied Anthropology maintains its own organizational archives at the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. This contains organizational records and a few project documents. SFAA has an archivist as an association officer.

Finally, a number of new publication outlets suitable for applied anthropologists' work has been established. The most striking new publication is *Practicing Anthropology* (begun in 1978), which combines attributes of a journal and a newsletter. It has the added advantage of being available in an inexpensive microfilm version. A similar publication is *Proactive*, the informative publication of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there are the newsletters of the local practitioner organizations such as the *Newsletter of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology* and the *WAPA Newsletter*, which publish articles, and other outlets such as the *Newsletter of the Society for Applied Anthropology* and the newsletter of the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology appearing in the *Anthropology Newsletter*. There are now also publishers that specialize in various aspects of application in social science, such as Westview Press and Sage Publications.

These outlets have greatly increased the applied-anthropology record preserved in print. Most of these serial publications, however, are not indexed, and the paper quality may be a problem for preservation. *Practicing Anthropology* was until recently published on newsprint; fortunately, it has been indexed and is available on film.

Apart from new publication outlets suitable for practitioners, the editors of journals such as the *American Anthropologist* and *Human Organization* have been working to facilitate publication by practitioners.

## **Future Strategies**

Any program for preservation of the historic record of applied anthropology must explicitly include preservation of fugitive or "gray" literature. Adequate preservation of this literature will need to involve: (1) establishment of bibliographic control through cataloguing; (2) publication of bibliographies; (3) physical protection in archives; (4) republication of model technical reports for instructional purposes; and (5) publication of reviews of technical reports in academic journals. All of these activities are being carried out at present to a limited extent. The coordination of these activities could be included in the program of a disciplinary history center.

The further development of alternative publication outlets would contribute to meeting the preservation and documentation challenge in applied anthropology.<sup>4</sup> The needs of this field will also be served by better documentation of the general history of anthropology, because so many anthropologists spend parts of their careers as practitioners. It is likely that the formative impact of experience in application will be seen in the historically documented careers of many anthropologists.

There has been no systematic attempt to collect the primary documents of applied and practicing anthropologists for inclusion in a special centralized archives, nor is any contemplated. In my judgment, it would not be useful to encourage the development of a separate facility to preserve the papers of applied anthropologists or the "applied papers" of others. Archivists working with these papers should be sensitive to the nature of applied anthropology so that they are not tempted to treat applied materials produced by an anthropologist as somehow not of anthropological interest. Clearly, applied anthropology will benefit from increased disciplinary commitment to documentation and preservation of anthropological records. Practitioners and practitioner organizations should actively support all efforts to preserve and document the records of anthropology.

## **Summary**

- Applied anthropology represents a special set of problems for the preservation and documentation of records.
- Poor documentation and preservation have limited the development of applied practice and distorted the role of applied anthropology within the history of the discipline as a whole
- Documentation and preservation of the records of applied anthropology are improving through more suitable publication outlets and the organization of documentation centers.
- The fugitive nature of the primary literature of applied anthropology creates special problems, which must be dealt with in any program of preservation and documentation of applied anthropology.

## **Notes**

---

1. Submissions may be sent to John van Willigen, Applied Anthropology Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, King Library - North, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506.
2. CAAP can be reached c/o Wayne Warry, Department of Anthropology, McMaster University, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4L9, Canada.
3. The editor is A.M. Ervin, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0W0, Canada.
4. I think there is potential for a journal positioned between the relative informality of *Practicing Anthropology* and the *NAPA Bulletin Series* and the more research-oriented journals like *Human Organization*. Perhaps a "Journal of Anthropological Practice" would be a useful addition to the array of publication outlets available to practitioners.