

Electronic Dialogues: The ABC's of E-Mail for Historians

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For most historians, the computer is a closed system, an introspective writing tool. Increasingly, however historians are using their computers to provide very fast, low cost communication with scholars in Canada, the United States, Latin America, Asia, and throughout Europe. Articles, conference announcements, job postings, and bibliographies are regularly sent, not only to individuals, but also distributed by electronic mailing lists to the subscribers of special interest forums, including those for historians.

If you work at home on a wordprocessor you will be able to use these systems with the aid of a modem, communications software, and an account on your university mainframe.

In general, mainframe mailing systems usually consist of three parts: the software that sends messages, a NAMES file of addresses you use regularly, and a MAILBOX which holds messages that you can read, discard, save or answer. The mailing software at each university may differ, so do talk to the consultants at your university's computer center for specifics. (My examples are drawn from the common CM/VMS system.)

To send an electronic message I type "MAIL (ACCOUNT NAME of RECIPIENT) AT (NODE)". Most systems use "@" instead of "AT". After a prompt for my name and a subject I type in the message. The electronic address is automatically added to the letter. One keystroke sends it and an acknowledgement lets you know it arrived. At most universities, this service is free to faculty and students, or available at a minimal cost. My recent letter to Don Mabry, author of "Electronic Mail and Historians" in the February issue of the *AHA Perspectives*, reached him at Mississippi State in six minutes and his answer was in Ottawa at the end of the day. Such speed is why some users refer to traditional postal systems as "snail mail".

The NAMES file stores addresses and it allows you to save messages in NOTEBOOKS linked to some or all of your addresses. I use a notebook for a WordPerfect forum, another for CHA business, one for the HISTORY group and a general one for everything else. Another feature of

the NAMES file is the ability to use shorthand. Rather than typing a full name and node address each time you send a message you can assign a nickname. For example, when I type "MAIL CHA" the programme looks up the full address in NAMES and adds the university (node) address.

The MAILBOX aspect is just as straightforward. When you logon to the mainframe, you are told what messages are waiting. I type "MAIL" and a list appears, giving the date and time the messages arrived, the names and nodes of the sender, and most importantly a brief subject description. Some discussion groups generate a lot of mail, and subject headings let the recipient quickly spot the chaff and delete it. Mailbox lets you read the messages, sort them, delete them or reply immediately, or save them in a notebook.

Forwarding allows you to send an interesting item on to another person together with a message from you.

Once you have the hang of handling E-mail, you can sample some of the discussion lists of interest to historians. Each forum is based at a LISTSERVER, located at a node. Currently, the computer systems at 2700 "nodes", each a college, university, organization or research center, are linked together through electronic networks. The LISTSERVER stores the discussion group's activity logs or archives, files of common interest which can be retrieved by participants, such as bibliographies or articles, and the list of subscribers. It also automatically receives all messages for the list and then distributes them to the names on the subscription list. Anyone can send mail to a list but only the
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Archives Notes

compiled by George F. Henderson

Archives notes is an annual feature of the CHA Bulletin which draws the recent acquisitions of Canadian archives to the attention of scholars. Material for inclusion should be sent to George F. Henderson, Assistant Archivist, Queen's University Archives, Kathleen Ryan Hall, Queen's University, Kingston, ON K7L 3N6.

McMASTER UNIVERSITY (William Ready Division of Archival and Research Collections, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4L6). A recent acquisition has been the Westinghouse Canada Inc. archives. Extending to over ten linear feet of records, the collection consists of photographs, catalogues, employee magazines, invoices, contracts and general correspondence, dating from 1897 to the mid 1970s. One of the most valuable and interesting aspects of the Westinghouse archives is the extensive collection of photographs which spans the period from 1897 to 1970. There are photographs of company executives, plant workers, buildings, and the products manufactured by the company. Another important part of the collection is the *Westinghouse Employees' Magazine*. This employee magazine with monthly

issues from March, 1943 to December, 1946 provides insight into the working conditions during the Second World War and shortly after.

Another important accession has been the papers of Robert M.B. Fulford, one of Canada's top literary and cultural critics. His papers represent all aspects of his career to 1988, and are particularly rich in resources concerning his memoirs, *Best Seat in the House* (1988), and in correspondence with many persons active in literature and the arts in Canada.

A third major accession is the files of Canadian authors from the archives of the American publisher, Dodd, Mead and Co. The files contain letters written by important Canadian authors, contracts sent to these authors for their signature and revision, correspondence with other publishers, internal memoranda, sales figures, printing information and publicity material. Among the authors represented are Bliss Carman, Bronwen Davies, Philip Freund, John Murray Gibbon, Grey Owl, W.G. Hardy, Stephen Leacock and Martha Ostenso.

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members of that list see the item and the responses to it. The HISTORY discussion list is maintained by a LISTSERVER in Finland whose address or node is FINHUTC. To subscribe send a mail message to the LISTSERVER that contains on one line the command "SUBSCRIBE HISTORY [Your name]". Do not use a subject header and, no you do not type the quote marks. In a few minutes a message will come back stating that you have been added to the list. Messages will start appearing in your mailbox over the next few hours. If you are flooded with more mail than you can handle, you can leave the list by typing the same line, substituting the word SIGNOFF for SUBSCRIBE.

There are all sorts of lists available and the quality of discussion varies. In Canada there is a list sponsored by the CHA Committee on Computing that is provided by José Igartua at the Université du Québec à Montréal. To subscribe, send a message to him using the address R12270@UQAM. A well-respected forum on research tools and values is HUMANIST@BROWNNVM. WordPerfect is WP50-L@YORKVM1. There is an eighteenth century list, C18-L@PSUVM. Economic history is found at CLIOMETS@MIAMIU, and a mix of students and professional historians meet on HISTORY@FINHUTC.

This is enough to get you started. I meet specialists in my area through these lists, post conference announcements, read calls for papers, overhear debates on a wide range of historical topics, and even found out which was the best bookstore for history in a city I was going to visit. A British scholar coming to teach in the Maritimes used the list to find out about schools for her children, meeting her first Maritimer before she had even left the UK.

Remember, your usage determines the level of discussion. This form of communication has a great potential for historians. Imagine an electronic directory for CHA members, conferences, calls for papers, job postings, journal indexes, and discussion forums for the various specialties. If there is sufficient interest a second article will explore the mysteries and possibilities of file servers, file transfer protocol, and accessing distant libraries.



Conferences

Mackinac State Historic Parks will host the **Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan, September 25-29**. Over fifty anthropologists, historians, geographers, museum professionals and others will present papers on various aspects of the history of the fur trade, interaction with Native people, archaeology and interpretation. For information or to register write: Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac State Historic Parks, P.O. Box 873, Mackinaw City, Michigan, 49701, USA.

The Ninth Annual Conference on Textiles, West Lafayette, Indiana, July 19-21 is an international, interdisciplinary forum on the history, theory, practice and development of textile knowledge and the art of textile making. Invited guests include Vibeke Vestby, National College of Art and Design in Oslo, fiber artist Emily DuBois and tapestry conservator Patricia Ewer. For registration or information contact: Lisa Lee Peterson, CA Department (317-494-3062) or Cheryl Nelson, CSR Department (317-494-8613), Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, 47907, USA.

Tenth biennial conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, Boston, November 20-23. For more information contact Earl H. Fry, Program Chair, ACSUS '91, One Dupont Circle, Suite 620, Washington, DC, 20036, USA; 202-887-6375, FAX 202-296-8379.

The Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada presents **Architecture on the Edge, Baddeck, N.S., May 30-June 2**. The themes include preservation and reconstruction architecture, architecture of industrialization, women in architecture... For information write: Richard McKinnon or Jim St. Clair, University College of Cape Breton, Development Studies and Applied Arts, P.O. Box 5300, Sydney, N.S., B1P 6L2; 902-539-5300.

Canadian Nautical Research Society 1991 Conference and Annual Meeting has the theme **Ships, Men and Governments: The Connection Between Government Policies and Naval and Mercantile Shipping, Ottawa, May 31-June 1**. For information write Garth S. Wilson, Curator, Marine Transportation, National Museum of Science and Technology, P.O. Box 9724, Ottawa Terminal, Ottawa, ON, K1G 5A3.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation announces that its proposed conference on **Cultural Diversity and Heritage Conservation has been cancelled** due to difficulties concerning timing and site. Those who have expressed an interest in the conference will be informed of further developments.

The Plains Indian Museum of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center will sponsor a weekend seminar on **Indian Art of the Canadian Prairies, Cody, Wyoming, October 4-6**. For more information write Lillian Turner, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, P.O. Box 1000, Cody, Wyoming, 82414, USA.

Association of Ancient Historians Annual Meeting, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, May 17-19. Contact George Houston, Department of Classics, University of North Carolina, CB #3145, 212 Murphy Hall, Chapel Hill, N.C., 27599-3145, USA.

Global Restructuring: Canada in the 1990s, Kingston, June 2-4 is sponsored by the Association for Canadian Studies and the International Council for Canadian Studies. For information contact Susan Hoeltken, ACS, P.O. Box 8888, Station A, Montréal, QC, H3C 3P8; 514-987-7784, FAX 514-987-8210.

The National Institute of Demographic Studies will hold the conference **Historical Demography, Paris, October 21-25 and October 28-29**. For more information contact the Secretariat of Dr. Biralsen, Room 421, I.N.E.D., 27, rue du Commandeur, 75675, Paris, Cédex 14.

The Jesuits and the Baroque Civilization (1540-1640), Chantilly, France, June 17-20 at the Centre culturel des Fontaines. For more information contact Les Fontaines, Sessions, P.O. 219, 60631, Chantilly, Cédex.