

DISCUSSION PAPER

PROFESSIONAL STATUS FOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION RELATED OCCUPATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Many practitioners of heritage conservation occupations have expressed repeatedly the desire to elevate the practice of heritage conservation to "professional" status.

This paper attempts to shed light to some of the issues of professionalism.

It is not claimed that the followings cover all related problems but, it is hoped that sufficient amount of information is provided here for the interested parties to induce discussions which could result the establishment of an organization for the heritage conservation professionals.

THE QUEST FOR PROFESSIONAL STATUS FOR CONSERVATORS

In the past years the desire has been expressed repeatedly for the recognition of heritage conservation as a distinct profession. This desire rooted in the followings:

- Conservators wish to ensure that the tangible remains of Humanity's heritage are treated according to the reverence they deserve;
- Conservators wish to ensure that the public is served fairly and the actions of unethical practitioners is curbed;
- Conservators wish to receive the recognition and benefits which are commensurate with the significance of their work and the skill required to perform it.

Unquestionably, conservators have the right and obligation to be recognized as "professionals", who are practicing a true "profession".

PROBLEMS OF OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF CONSERVATION AS A PROFESSION

It would be very easy for conservators to call themselves "professional conservators". Without institutionalized recognition this title would be meaningless. It would place conservationists in the same league as "PROFESSIONAL USED CAR SALESPERSON" or "PROFESSIONAL SHOE-SHINE BOY".

To gain legal recognition for the conservation profession is complicated by the fact that according to an APT Directory conservationists are practicing 60 (sixty) different skills. Out of this 60, at least 20 (twenty) are controlled by some form of legislation in the 10 Provinces and two Territories. We must face the fact that part of the conservation skills are controlled by over 200 (twohundred) different laws.

To attain legal recognition for the conservation profession we should either obtain the passing a law from the House of Commons or the same from 12 Legislative Assemblies. Obviously, one lifetime would not be sufficient to achieve this.

An other option could be to organize a strong Union of Conservationists. However, according to Canadian customs trade Unions are mostly concerned about the pay and benefit problems of the membership. Conservationists on the other hand are primarily interested in the ethical issues of conservation and compensation for their work is only a secondary issue. An other problem is that in the union movement there is a sharp division between "professions" and "trades". The conservation community certainly do not wish to divide itself in to groups of "tradesmen" and "professionals".

It is necessary to examine other alternatives, besides legislative control or trade unions.

ALTERNATIVES

To find out how others solved similar problems we have studied the organizational structure and control of a number of "free professions". We found that two types of organizations deserve further attention.

1. The Guilds.

Guilds are free associations of persons involved in the practice of an art or artizanship. Examples of such associations are:

- Screenwriters Guild;
- Actors Guild;
- Wig-makers Guild; etc.

The following are the main characteristics of most Guilds:

- Membership in Guilds is restricted to persons who can prove their competence, either by formal training or by demonstrated skill;
- Guild members must subscribe to certain self-policed regulations which ensure the quality of performance and correctness of personal conduct;
- To sustain the Guild's reputation, the members must produce high quality work, to the satisfaction of the public they serve;
- Guild members must demand just compensation for their work which is commensurate with their competence;
- Guild members may not work with others, or may not work under conditions, which are contrary to the standards of the Guild.

Usually the activities of Guilds are not regulated by legislation. However, clients and employers give preference to Guild members because of this membership ensures excellence in workmanship and high ethical standard in conduct.

In many occupations the title of "Member of the Guild" is at least as prestigious as the title of a "Professional".

2. Quality Control Organizations

Ethical entrepreneurs discovered early that the best business policy is the fair settlements of the costumers' complaints. Several self-policing organizations were set up to handle such conflicts. The most prominent are:

- Better Business Bureau;
- Construction Industry Arbitration Association.

The aim of these organizations is to arbitrate between suppliers of goods or services and their clients or costumers. Membership in these are voluntary and the only criteria is the acceptance of the impartial judgement of the organization.

Membership in B.B.B or in the Arbitration Association bestoves considerable confidence in the competence of the entrepreneur.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ICOMOS CANADA should recognize that the desire to establish an organization for the professional practitioners of heritage conservation is more than justified. It should be also recognized that ICOMOS is the most competent all-encompassing organization in the field. Consequently, ICOMOS should undertake, in consultation with other sister organizations(ICOM, IIC, APT, etc.) the establishment of a suitable association of conservationists.
2. Because of the interdependence of all skills which are involved in heritage conservation, the proposed organization should include every practitioners. There should be no distinction between trades or learned professions. The skills should include the entire range from Architects to Carpenters to Painting Restorers to Research Chemists, etc.
3. Membership in the association should be restricted to those who will perform their work according to the recognized Charters of heritage conservation.
4. Members will be asked to demonstrate their competence in their chosen field.
5. The association should act as arbitrator between members and the clients or between members.
6. In order to ensure that the significance of conservation skills is recognized the association should have an influence on the minimum compensation received by the practitioners. The issue of compensation should be considered an ethical issue and not a matter of collective agreement between the members and their clients. A model for the benefit structure should be a modified version of the fee structure of the Engineering, Architecture and Legal professions.
7. Since the mebership will include practitioners at the working and managerial level equally, the membership must influence employers to engage only persons who are mebers of the said association.

INTERPRETATION OF TERMINOLOGY

1. Who is a "professional" ?

The word "professional" has two distinctly different meanings:

- a. A "professional" is a person who does something for remuneration, usually as a full time occupation:

Professional hockey players;
Professional window cleaners;
Professional used car salespersons;
Professional escorts; etc. etc.

- b. In official lingo a "professional" is a person who is engaged in an occupation which is regulated by legislation:

Engineers;
Architects;
Accountants;
Lawyers; etc, etc.

2. Legaly regulated trades.

The practice of many trades is regulated by law, much like the practice of certain professions. Examples of such trades:

Electricians;
Elevator installers;
x-ray technicians;
Plumbers; etc. etc.

3. The reason for legal control over professions and trades.

There are two reasons for legaly regulating certain occupations:

- a. The practice of certain professions and trades have direct impact on the safety, health and welfare of the public:

Engineers;
Medical doctors;
Electricians;
Pest control technicians; etc. etc.

- b. Certain professions and trades have no direct impact on the safety of the public but the misuse of the public trust can have serious consequences:

Stockbrokers;
Real estate aprisors;
Accountants;
Surveyors; etc. etc.

4. Control of professions and trades.

In Canada the legal control over professions and trades is exercised mostly by the Provinces:

- a. The majority of the professions are not controlled directly by the provincial bureaucracy. These professions are controlled by Provincial Associations of the professionals, operating within the guidelines of the Provincial Government. Such self-governing professions are, among others:

Engineering;
Nursing;
Architecture; etc. etc.

- b. The majority of the trades are directly controlled by the different Departments of the Provinces, sometimes with the co-operation of the Trade Unions:

Plumbing;
High pressure welding;
Boiler operating; etc. etc.

Only a small number of professions and trades are controlled by the Federal Government:

Dominion Land Surveyors;
Air-traffic Controllers; etc. etc.

5. Conservation as a profession.

Certain skills of conservation can be acquired only by attending institutions of higher education, like Universities. Other skill can be acquired only by years of practice.

It is typical of the conservation professions that regardless of the method a skill was acquired every practitioner is equally valued by the fellow conservators.

The profession of conservation encompasses skills gained by practice and skills gained by university training.