

BY PAUL NICHOLSON

Campbell River's battling priest will be leaving this area Saturday for a year's study to increase his knowledge in the art of restoration of historic documents.

Rev. Charles Brandt, an ordained priest and hermit Monk of the Association of St. John, became well known in this area when he spoke out from his hermitage on the Oyster River against the developers at the river's mouth earlier this year.

Brandt has been invited to work and study with Dr. George Cunha at the New England Document Conservation Centre near Boston, Mass.

Brandt describes Cunha as "probably the foremost book and paper conservator in North America."

During his year there he will be employed as a book restorer at the institute and will study under Cunha.

The document conservation centre is a brand new archival restoration centre and is supported by six New England states.

Brandt is a bookbinder — a trade he learned while studying to be a Trappist Monk — and has a complete workshop on his 30-acre hermitage on the banks of the Oyster River.

His work restoring old books for universities and private collections is interrupted only by his second love — sports fishing in the Oyster River.

He joined the Vancouver Island Steelhead Society and later became secretary of that organization.

It was in this capacity that he struck out against the company trying to develop the river mouth.

Pacific Playgrounds Ltd. which runs a resort there, had applied to the provincial government for permission to dredge a 1,700 foot deep-water channel through the estuary region in order to give low-tide access to its boat basin.

Brandt, a graduate biologist in addition to his other skills, felt the channel would be detrimental to the several species of trout and a salmon that feed in the estuary as part of the important life-cycle of the fish.

Almost single-handedly at the beginning, he tackled the multi-million dollar development.

Largely through his efforts, the provincial government refused to issue the permit for either the channel or a test channel which also had been proposed, at least until Environment Canada has finished its studies there.

The federal department expects to have its preliminary report ready by the end of December.

If Environment Canada has no objection to the channel, then the provincial government has promised a public hearing on the matter of dredging the river mouth.

Brandt feels he has stirred up enough interest on the subject that he can safely leave for the year's work and study at his true vocation.

While at the centre in Massachusetts, Brandt will learn other aspects of restoration.

One of the most important things he hopes to study is the de-acidification of commercially produced pulp paper.

This includes prints, maps, broadsides — one page declarations and proclamations — manuscripts, works of art on paper and similar documentary materials of historic or archival interest.

Brandt explained most of the books printed at the turn of the century will be unusable by the end of this century.

The wood pulp process started in about 1860 and still used today is very acidic, he said.

Paper is treated with an aluminum oxide to put sizing in the paper so that it will take the print.

If it was not treated with the sizing Brandt explained it would act like blotting paper instead of producing clear print when inked.

But over a period of time the acid breaks down the fibres of the pages and binding.

There is now a great deal of concern by archivists around the world on how to prevent this deterioration.

One method is to take each book apart and wash the pages in alkaline solutions which act as a buffers for each page.

There has also been a spray developed which does not require the book to be taken apart, but this is a relatively new method, he explained.

Brandt said many of the techniques used today developed out of the tragic flooding of Florence, Italy in 1966 when one of the greatest library treasures in the world was covered in water, oil and mud.

Top bookbinders and art restorers from all over the world went to Florence to rescue the artifacts.

Brandt explained that as each book was washed, cleansed, mended, de-acidified, sewn and rebound, more and more was learned of the problems of acidification

and methods of restoration. Another problem created by modern man is the atmospheric release of sulphur dioxide.

When this comes into contact with printed paper, sulphuric acid is produced, especially in warm moist areas.

Brandt said libraries today are kept at a specific temperature and humidity to help combat this problem.

He said there is a type of non-acidic paper produced today but that it is very expensive and not used extensively.

When Brandt returns to this area in late 1974, he expects he will be the only bookbinder in the province with the special

skills required to de-acidify old books.

Charles Lynn, City Archivist of the Vancouver Archives, told Brandt recently that he had just returned from a conference of curators of provincial archives and that the most frequently asked question by the curators was where could they get this type of work done.

Lynn confessed that he did not know of anyone with these skills and Brandt feels he will be able to carry on a very important work with his newly acquired trade.

He said he was honored by the invitation to study with Cunha. But he is not worried about leaving the Oyster

River problem before it is completed.

He said there are now enough groups to make a stand for the Oyster River, and named the Sierra Club, B.C. Wildlife Association, SPEC, the Natural Historical Society and the Steelhead Society as a few of the groups concerned with future development on his beloved river.

He said he hopes to find the river unchanged on his return next year.

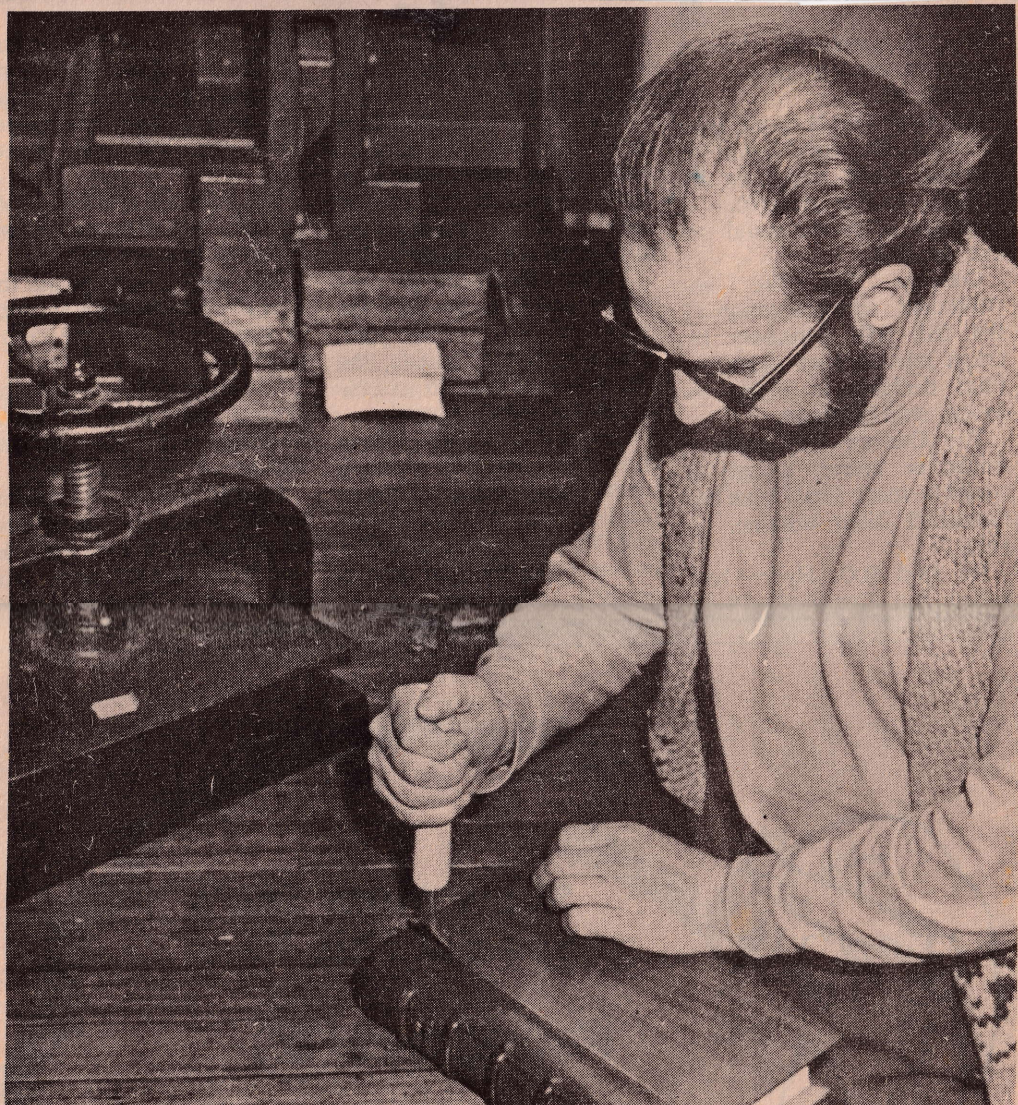
With back orders for book-binding and potential requests for his new found skill of restoration, Brandt expects he will be busy enough without having to fight the river developers.

Battling priest

leaving this area

6 The Campbell River Courier

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PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES on a rare volume of the Roman Missal, Fr. Brandt works at his bench in his hermitage on the Oyster River. He will be leaving this area for a year to further his knowledge of restoration.

Paul Nicholson photo



ADDING TO THE RECENT Man and Resources conference in Naramata, with his background in biology and knowledge of spawning fish, Father Charles Brandt discusses the future of the province's salmon rivers with fellow delegates.