Australian Experience in Record and Archives Management

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IN recent months I have had many opportunities to discuss with archivists in England, Canada, and the United States the problems of the profession in the twentieth century. Again and again the same questions were raised. What is the archivist's profession? How should he be trained? What should be the relation between the archivist and the record manager?

These questions have been discussed several times in the pages of the *American Archivist*; indeed, in the October 1958 issue, three of the four articles are quite directly concerned with them. I propose to discuss them again in this article. The first part of the discussion consists of some general observations on the profession as I have seen it during my travels, the second part describes recent developments in Australia, and the third is a hurried attempt to rewrite for American readers the theory of recordkeeping that was developed early in 1958 during a course for record managers in Commonwealth Government Departments. There is also a brief conclusion.

Archivists and Record Managers

In recent years the archival profession has ceased to be concerned, wholly or even primarily, with the preservation of records of the past for use by the present generation and has become involved with preserving the records of the present for future users. It was inevitable that very great changes in professional attitudes and techniques would follow. Some archivists refused to recognize a crisis or, at any rate, regarded twentieth-century records as a form of lower life to be dealt with by a lesser breed. Others, particularly in America, made valiant attempts to adjust their techniques to meet the problems without in any significant way adjusting their basic attitudes. Both groups, the latter more justifiably, were surprised

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and resentful when the record managers capitalized on the situation and on the experimental work already done and, with significantly different attitudes of mind, developed large-scale programs, the success of which were measured in material rather than cultural terms. With the Hoover Commission report in 1949 the new era of record management was launched, in other countries as well as in the United States; and many archivists retreated to a defensive position in which they visualized themselves as historians serving historians, making only occasional sorties into the domain of record management with respect to the appraisal of records for archival purposes.

It is 10 years since the Hoover Commission report appeared, and some at least of the tensions seem to be disappearing. The old warriors still talk of early battles; but, at least in the more junior ranks, there are promising signs of fraternization. Most particularly in the Federal field and in at least one of the States I have visited there is a deliberate policy of integration. Everett O. Alldredge's article in the October 1958 issue of the *American Archivist* illustrates this trend. (It also illustrates the importance of training, which I shall touch on later.) Finally, there are constant reminders, from both within and without the profession, of the need for cooperation by archivists and record managers.

It is not really surprising that this rapprochement should occur. The early days of record management in any one government area provide easy pickings. The initial clearances are large; the obviously ephemeral backlogs are relatively easy to identify so that substantial savings can be quickly measured and cited. Now, however, many record managers — who are more often than not the unfortunate successors to the first confident wave of record management advisers and consultants — are facing new problems. They are discovering that marginal record areas, which must be cleaned up before continuous record disposition programs can be effective, require analytical treatment that is just as time-consuming (and hence profit-reducing) as the treatment accorded to archives by archivists. They are finding too that they not only must analyze mass problems and advise on broad programs but must also train the people who will carry out the programs. It was the failure on the part of some record analysts to face up to this situation constructively that lent weight to the criticisms of many archivists and that tempted me in a facetious moment to suggest (with acknowledgment to Emmett J. Leahy and Dorothy Parker) that if all the record analysts in the world were laid end to end they would really be getting down to grass roots.

The case for regarding record managers and archivists not as belonging to related professions but as being of the same profession has been very ably stated by Morris L. Radoff in his presidential address to the Society in 1955, published in the January 1956 issue of the *American Archivist.* Within that profession there can and should be various specializations just as there are in other professions. There will be, too, those who prefer public relations work and those who prefer backroom activities, and so on. In fact, it seems to me that we have three broad classes of archivists — departmental (or agency) archivists, modern archivists, and historical archivists — and that for each of those broad classes there are many different kinds of individual, day-to-day tasks and duties.

I agree with Dr. Radoff on the question of professional relations. I do not, however, agree with him on the question of the training of new entrants to the profession. I agree that the archivist should, except in rare cases, have attained a suitable academic degree at the time he enters the profession and that he may well supplement that degree with further studies. But it seems to me to be crucial that if the archivist's profession is to be a separate profession there must be some basic professional knowledge that is, particularly, the province of the archivist. This professional study is surely the study of the characteristics of record materials, the comparative study of past and present recordkeeping systems, and the classification problems associated with them. This is the kind of knowledge that every archivist, no matter what his particular task, must have. Once the broad principles are stated, is there very much point in discussing the theory and practice of arranging and describing archives without a knowledge of the ways in which the records were originally created and classified? Is there much point in arguing the relative merits of different kinds of filing systems without a knowledge of the characteristics of record materials and of the principles of classification applied to keeping them? Let us, by all means, recruit historians, social or political or economic, but we shall also need accountants, lawyers, geographers, and men of many other disciplines for specialized jobs. Whatever a recruit's background, specialized archival training must be centered on recordkeeping practice, supplemented in particular government areas by the history of administration in the departments or agencies and the nature of the organizational structures and work methods developed by them. Furthermore the training must not only be conducted in the classroom; it must also be supplemented by practical projects designed to complement and elucidate the formal training.

Australian Experience

In Australia the Commonwealth Government archives and record management program has developed into what has been called "comprehensive public records administration." It has two main features. The first is an integrated archives and record center organization, and the second is a definite policy of appointing in each Government department a specially chosen and trained record management specialist, called a departmental registrar, with responsibilities for developing a continuous and consistent record management program involving current record systems, disposition scheduling, special departmental reference and information services, and related activities. It does not include paperwork management activities, which are handled by the Organization and Method staffs as part of the wider management field.

Before I go on to describe these features in more detail it would be advisable for me to give American readers some information about the latest form of registry system that is becoming prevalent in Australian Government departments.

The Australian Registry System

The registry system as it now exists in Commonwealth Government departments is very different from the nineteenth-century registry system, which most Americans have in mind. All incoming papers, regardless of type and importance, are *not* entered in a volume in chronological order of receipt and thereafter kept in that order. Nor are copies of outgoing letters bound into volumes in chronological order. All mail, however, with some minor exceptions, comes in the first instance to the registry, which is also the mail room. There, recognized classes of routine operating records are directed straight to action desks; and the rest of the general correspondence, perhaps only 5 or 10 percent in many departments, is subjected to registry processes before it goes to action desks. If the paper is urgent it gets specially accelerated treatment and is on the appropriate desk in a matter of minutes. The rest of the mail is or should be on action desks before lunch time. Each paper leaves the registry as a part of a file — either as the first paper in it or as a "follow-on" paper. The procedure is as follows.

The papers are first divided into two groups — those that have specific reference to previous papers and those that are apparently new papers. Those in the former group are sent straight to the file attachment officer if an actual file number is quoted, or via the subject or name indexer if no number is quoted. Provided the attachment officer is satisfied in each case that the paper is a genuine "follow-on" paper, it is then either fastened to the file if it is in registry or sent for attachment to the action section that is using the file. If the attachment officer is not satisfied with the paper's "follow-on" character, it is sent back for the full treatment described in the next paragraphs.

The second group — of new papers — is handed to the classifier, who is the key man in the registry. He decides what the file title will be (a very important matter, as we shall see later) and to whom the file will be directed for action (by consulting his maildex); and he indicates under what subject headings it will be indexed (by consulting the list of authorized index headings and writing the code numbers of the chosen headings on the paper).

The paper then goes to the registration clerk, who makes up the new file by fastening the paper inside a manila folder, numbering the folder, and writing on it the title and the routing direction. He then enters the file against the appropriate number in the Numerical Register (cards on the backs of which the file numbers are repeated to allow the movements of the files to be recorded). In some systems of numbering the files are classified according to a subject breakdown; but the system most favored is a year and single number system, each file receiving the next available number irrespective of subject, — for example, 58/2346, 58/2347, and so on. The file is then passed to the subject and name indexers, who make the appropriate entry on the card or cards under the headings suggested by the classifier. The file is then passed out for action by messenger service.

The movement of files around the various action sections is recorded on the back of the register card (which becomes, after 10 registration entries have been made, part of the Movement Register). Either the files are cleared through the registry or, if the file is passed direct from officer to officer, a transit slip is forwarded to the registry.

Whenever a file is returned to the registry after action is complete or because action is temporarily suspended (in which case it is marked for resubmission on a particular date) it is reviewed by the postexaminer, who directs the making of any additional index entries required, checks to see that all action is complete, and by consulting the disposition schedule "sentences" the file for destruction or transfer to archival custody at a certain date in the future.

To Americans this may seem a cumbersome procedure, but it is not really so. Several things should be borne in mind. First, the size of the registry tends to be geared to the size of the organizational unit; and, if necessary, decentralization occurs. Second, not *all* papers that arrive in the department have to be on action desks within half an hour. The action officer cannot deal with them all at a time; and, if arrangements are made to get urgent papers to the desk quickly, reasonable requirements are met. Third, the organization of the registry is now based on work-flow patterns that have been carefully devised and that can be continuously checked and adjusted for bottlenecks or mistakes. Fourth, by allocating the work suitably it is possible to pay reasonably attractive salaries to the key personnel who have to make classification judgments while the more routine work is done by lower paid staff. Finally, provided the files have been properly constructed and the disposition schedule soundly developed, there is an automatic disposition program proceeding continuously as part of the normal recordkeeping routine.

There are, of course, variations in practice and some registries are a great deal more efficient than others, but the organization I have described is officially prescribed and working in enough departments to have proved its worth.

The Commonwealth Archives System

A detailed description of the Commonwealth archives system up to about 1956 is contained in an article by H. L. White, Librarian of the Commonwealth National Library, entitled "The Development of the Commonwealth Archives Programme," which appeared in the December 1956 issue of *Public Administration*, the journal of the Royal Institute of Public Administration of Australia. Reprints can be obtained by writing to the author. In this article I shall amplify such selected aspects as seem necessary for this discussion and describe some of the developments since 1956.

The Commonwealth Government archives program is entirely distinct from the programs of the State governments; but the Commonwealth maintains repositories in all the State capital cities, except Hobart in Tasmania, to provide archival services for departmental offices located in those cities.

The Commonwealth archives program was launched during World War II. From the outset its two main objectives were, on the one hand, to provide facilities for preserving and making available Commonwealth archives and, on the other, to draw up, in cooperation with departments, lists of records that were *not* to be included in the Commonwealth archives. It will not surprise American readers that under postwar conditions almost all the relatively limited resources available were given over to the work of surveying, scheduling, and appraising records and developing departmental disposition programs. The more traditional archival activities of preserving, arranging, and describing records were conducted on record center lines and the archives repositories were developed chiefly as an adjunct to the governmentwide disposition program. Only in the last 2 years or so has any concentrated attention been given to the problems of finally arranging and describing the archives in groups. Hence it may be said that the Archives Division of the Commonwealth National Library,[1] although always conscious of the underlying archival objectives, was more nearly a record management division in the American sense.

The planning of the archives system was begun in 1942. The first appointment of an archives officer to the Library (myself) was made late in 1944, and until 1949 the slowly expanding staff was absorbed almost wholly in surveying agencies at their request, preparing schedules, and installing a very simple repository organization and an elementary accessioning system. When the Hoover Commission report was published in 1949 the Commonwealth Government took swift action; and during 1950 a series of surveys was made jointly by a representative of the Commonwealth Public Service Board and the Archives Division in almost every office of the civil departments and several military establishments in the State capital cities. The surveys cleared a good deal of floor space and gave a breathing spell that permitted the development in later years of more comprehensive and continuous disposition programs. These programs depended on the repository and reference services provided by the Archives Division in each city in the wake of the survey.

After the surveys the staff of the Archives Division concentrated on two main areas of activity. The first preoccupation was to develop the techniques of disposition scheduling and to cooperate with departmental offices in introducing comprehensive disposition programs based on schedules. The second concern was to develop an accessioning system that not only would be adequate to cope with increased holdings and growing reference requirements of the depositing offices but also would provide the basic framework for advanced archival arrangement and description. One of the main conditioning factors in both aspects of the work was the fact that, while the central office of the Division was in Canberra, the regional repositories were widely dispersed. Nor were the holdings of these offices merely field records. In at least two of the branch repositories

[1] The Commonwealth National Library is the institution designated as the provisional Archival Authority for the Commonwealth Government. The Archives Division is one of the divisions of the library and is concerned only with government archives. Private archives are managed by another division.

large quantities of central office records were being accessioned because only about half of the Commonwealth Government central offices have been transferred to Canberra from Melbourne, and, particularly during the war, central office functions were also located in Sydney.

Although in practice it is difficult and not necessarily desirable to make clear-cut distinctions between the work of record management liaison with departments on the one hand and the work of providing repository services on the other, I propose in the following paragraphs to describe the two programs separately.

The preparation of schedules to cover the series of records that were found outside the registry — the series of case files and of forms and similar records — was not a particularly difficult task technically, however difficult the appraisal may have been in some cases. The main difficulty was to find a method of ensuring an efficient and continuous disposition of files from within the registry that not only would be safe in terms of continuing values but would avoid the necessity of having one or more senior departmental officers as well as one or more archivists examine each file individually. Many experiments were made, of which some were more successful than others; but increasingly the final solution seemed to depend on adjustments in current recordkeeping methods.

About the same time that the drive for more efficient disposition was launched an organization and method study was made by senior members of the Public Service Board on registry organization and procedure. The results, which produced the registry methods described earlier in this article, were highly significant and have greatly affected the later development in the whole field of public record management.

By the time seminar discussions were held in Canberra in 1954 under T. R. Schellenberg's direction, the stage was set for discussions of record characteristics, classification, subject relations in record work, and related matters that were among the most significant questions discussed by the archivists and record officers present. Those discussions identified and defined the problems that were to be investigated over the next 2 or 3 years.

All along there had been an increasing pressure for improvements in the quality and status of record personnel. The Commonwealth Archives Committee (which advises the Prime Minister) had, as early as 1947, represented the need of a definite campaign for improvement. The special surveys of 1950-51, the departmental disposition activities, and particularly the registry organizational and procedural developments — all contributed to raising the status of record personnel. In 1953 the Public Service Board sponsored a Registry Officers Conference, which met monthly to assign topics for study by working committees and to consider the completed reports. Constructive suggestions were made by this conference for the specialized training of senior record officers, and in these suggestions the managerial aspects of the work were emphasized. In the meantime the National Librarian had represented to departments the need for each of them to have a full-time officer of reasonable training and experience to act as archives liaison officer and in particular to analyze records in, or being transferred to, archival custody in order to help the department decide what access should be granted to nongovernment research workers. These and other suggestions were considered by the Public Service Board and various schemes were discussed with interested organizations. Finally the registrar scheme was announced early in 1957, and the machinery was set in motion for creating special positions, advertising vacancies, interviewing applicants, promoting appointees, and so on.

While these preparations were being made, a Training Committee for the registrars' course was established. The Committee was made up of a member of the Public Service Board Training Section as chairman and three technical members — the Chief Archivist of the Commonwealth National Library, the Departmental Archives Officer (now Registrar) of the Department of the Navy, and the Officer in Charge of the Registry (now Registrar) of the Department of Labour and National Service. The Committee developed a comprehensive syllabus of training and then, working almost full-time in the later months, prepared the training materials for a course that, combining both formal group training and practical project training, ran for approximately 4 months — from March to July 1958.

The responsibilities of a registrar were defined by the Public Service Board substantially as follows:

Advise management on all aspects of the organization and use of records in the department.

Oversee all record holdings both inside and outside the registries.

Review continuously the systems and procedures in use.

Promote a systematic program to reduce current holdings and to maintain the records of the department at an efficient minimum.

Exercise technical direction over all record units in the department.

Organize essential secondary reference services within the department and advise on conditions under which departmental records in the custody of the Archives Division may be used for nongovernmental research and historical purposes.

Develop and direct the department's archival work, including disposals, and maintain liaison with the Archives Division.

To carry out these responsibilities the registrar requires a comprehensive knowledge of the technical aspects of the work and particularly of:

(1) the relations between records and administrative activities;
(2) the principles and standard practices involved in the various classification and indexing processes;
(3) the theory and practice of organization and method as they affect registry and other recordkeeping sections;
(4) standards for evaluating records for preservation and the objects of archives administration.

Training Course for Registrars

To prepare registrars for all aspects of this work a 10-part course was devised with the following detailed aims:

Part 1: Group Training, 2 weeks.

To provide a perspective of service administration within which the registrar will work.

To emphasize the interdependence of all phases of recordmaking and recordkeeping.

To introduce the basic theories to be developed in later sessions.

Part 2: Departmental Assignments, 2 weeks.

Practical assignment: a census of nonregistry sets [series] in the student's own departments.

To provide experience in fact-finding inquiries.

To give experience of the nature and scope of nonregistry records in the departments and the method of making and keeping these records.

To give experience in the preparation and use of census sheets.

Part 3: Group Training, 4 weeks.

Instruction in the techniques of recordkeeping, with emphasis on correspondence files.

Examination of the key registry processes and the construction of appropriate classification systems.

Part 4: Departmental Assignment, 2 weeks.

Practical assignment: analysis of the classing used in registering and indexing files; identification and description of classes of files for disposal and other purposes.

To consolidate instruction and give the registrar practical knowledge of the nature of files in his department.

To provide information for the improvement of registry methods.

Part 5: Group Training, 1 week.

To demonstrate the extent of disposal problems.

To prepare the registrar for the task of developing an efficient disposal program.

Part 6: Group Training, 4 days.
To discuss the objectives and procedures of intermediate record and archives administration and the services available from the Archives Division.
Part 7: Group Training, 4 days.
To discuss methods for using information for departmental research and reference purposes and problems of granting access for nondepartmental research purposes.
Part 8: Group Training, 1 week.
To define the responsibilities of the registrar as a manager.
To instruct in the techniques of method investigation and reporting.
Part 9: Departmental Assignment, 2 weeks.
Practical assignment: review and report on the efficiency of a selected area of registry operations in a Head Office registry.
To provide guided observation and practical experience in the review of registry organization and method.
Part 10: Group Training, 2 weeks.
To explain the principles of a departmental training program and its importance to management.
To demonstrate and give instruction in the methods of training for various groups concerned in record work.

The course, being a pioneering one, had its faults, and numerous changes in detail would be made for a second one; but on the whole it appears to have succeeded in its objective of preparing the registrars for their work. (It is of course too early to report on results in departments.)

There were two important features worth reemphasizing. First, a major emphasis was given to providing a comprehensive picture of the interaction of various recordmaking and recordkeeping processes and the broad principles that underly all recordkeeping activities no matter what particular variations may be found in practice from place to place or from time to time. Second, formal training and practical training were carefully interrelated so that trainees not directly acquainted with record work [2] could comprehend records in the raw and so that when registrars entered on duty in the department, they would already be started on their long and difficult task.

Before describing the theory of recordkeeping that was developed as the unifying basis of the whole course, I want to turn briefly to the other main line of development in the Commonwealth program — the adjustment of record-center accessioning to meet future archival needs.

[2] Approximately one-third of the trainees had direct record experience; the other two-thirds had backgrounds of organization and method work, administration, or research. Degrees were not required but the selection board aimed at ensuring equivalent qualifications and/or mental ability coupled with experience.

Broadly the aim of our present internal control program has been to integrate record-center and archives-management activities as far as practicable with the specific objectives of —

(1) helping to overcome the decentralized repository problem;
(2) ensuring that we gather as much pertinent information as possible about permanent records at the time of transfer when the information is still available;
(3) providing an operational chain that gives physical care, secures information, and provides reference service on records at all stages while leaving the specialist staff free to concentrate on arrangement and description and similar project work;
(4) solving the problems, particularly prevalent in the Commonwealth Government, connected with keeping the archives of interacting, constantly changing, and for the most part still continuing departments and offices.

The system involves the fairly precise identification of series or parts of continuing series at the time of accessioning and, for those that are designated as permanent, the preparation of "set identification sheets."[3] These, when completed, furnish the following information: the transferring and, if necessary, the creating office; title of the set; concise description of contents; method of arrangement; whereabouts of related registers or indexes; access requirements; history of the records before transfer; and (for later use) history of treatment after transfer. One copy of the form goes to the department as a final receipt; the second copy becomes part of the repository's accession register; the third copy is available as a classification or indexing copy for the receiving repository's use; the fourth and fifth are forwarded to the central office. There one becomes a duplicate accession register and the other is placed in the central classified register, where, when combined with other set identification sheets from the same department or office, it becomes part of a kind of expanding preliminary inventory.

This central classified preliminary inventory system is being developed to serve three main purposes —

(1) to provide the basic information for reference and research purposes;[4]
(2) to provide the basis for deciding what special arrangement and description projects can be undertaken when particular groups or sub-groups are

[3] Following the recommendations of two members of the staff of the Archives Division we are now using the word *set* instead of *series* as the generic term. From now on in this article I shall use it for this purpose but shall also use the term *series* in the narrower and more technical sense of a series of documents added to chronologically.

[4] There are also, of course, special lists prepared by the department or by the archives staff as well as original registers and indexes.

sufficiently complete (and inactive from the record-lending point of view); and

(3) to plan such inter-repository moves as may be necessary.

This is of course a simplified and somewhat idealized picture, if for no other reason than that the classified inventory system is only now being developed. Many problems remain to be solved. For example, it is obvious that much the same difficult classification problems are involved in classing set identification sheets as in arranging records. But it is much easier to class sheets of paper than record series on a preliminary or experimental basis. It seems, moreover, to be increasingly important for the archivist dealing with twentieth-century records to distinguish between operations that can be conducted on an operational or work-flow basis and those that require concentrated project work and to assign staff accordingly. (If he does this he must, of course, be able to plan projects on a priority basis.) Because the approach I have described provides automatically for day-to-day reference and servicing needs, such arrangement and description work as is done can be directed towards the full treatment of the relatively more important record groups. Most importantly it is possible to get down on paper, as an insurance against loss of staff, all the more important information that archivists acquire in working over the materials.

I have described several features of the Commonwealth archives system that seem to me significant for any discussion of the relations between archives and record management activities. I now turn to the theory of recordkeeping that was developed for purposes of the registrar training course but that, in whatever form it may ultimately take, is also the essential groundwork of archival training. I say in whatever form because I am well aware that, even if its main principles continue to stand up to professional criticism, it needs much clarification and adjustment, not only in terms of logical argument but also in the light of the practical experience of record managers and archivists.

Classification Applied to Recordkeeping

Classification is a word used very frequently by those who work with records and archives.[5] It is doubtful, however, whether it ever really means the same thing to the hearer as it does to the speaker.

In his book on modern archives, Dr. Schellenberg states that

[5] I had better make my usual statement that to me the terms "archives" and "records" are synonymous when used in the general sense but that there is a practical advantage in distinguishing between the records held in creating agencies (records) and those held in central registries (archives).

"classification as applied to public records, means the arrangement of them according to a plan designed to make them available for current use." I have commented on this definition elsewhere as follows:

As late as the beginning of the twentieth century, records were kept in a relatively simple arrangement which more or less reflected the natural order of their creation or receipt or issue. It was generally accepted that they were kept as evidence of the fact or creation, receipt or issue and as evidence of the views and information passed. Nowadays, however, it is generally accepted, as Dr. Schellenberg's statement implies, that the arrangement of records is *planned*, with the purpose of making them available for *use*. In other words, there has been a change in emphasis from "evidential status" to "use" as the raison d'etre for records, and from "natural order" to "planned arrangement" as the basis for keeping — in fact a change from "record keeping" to "records management."

It is, of course, right to attribute differences between modern archives and early archives to increased volume and complexity of business and the introduction of duplicating machines; but this should not be permitted to divert attention from the changing attitude towards the organization of records and their relationship to business method. The increasing application of "organization and method" in the work of public offices has, among other things, involved the conscious manipulation of record products as an integral part of procedural work.

Another way of indicating the change from the days of record-keeping to those of record-managing is to say that documents are usually thought of nowadays as pieces of paper containing information about *subjects* rather than as pieces of paper constituting evidence of particlar administrative actions of which they formed a part. While this change may have been rational and even correct in relation to some of the papers with which a modern office has to deal, we in Australia have tentatively concluded that it is dangerous and results in loss of recordkeeping efficiency if it is applied to the main core of correspondence received and sent by a government office. Hence we view as retrograde the emphasis on "self-indexing alphabetical systems" as a means of controlling correspondence. In many of these systems for keeping records, year and date order has almost ceased to be represented. Yet surely if the records are evidence of administrative events, chronological sequence is extremely significant. Moreover, to permit disposition, the artificial device of cut-off dates has to be used.

I hope I have said enough here and elsewhere in this article to justify a reexamination of the nature of documents and the whole approach to classifying records. I shall nevertheless refer for further support to Dr. Hardenberg, Archivist General of the Royal Netherlands Archives, who, in an article on pages 50-68 of *Overdruk int Nederlands Archievenblad*, 1957-58, analyzes critically a new classification plan for use in municipal archives, points out the deleterious effects of the "information" approach as compared with the "evidence" approach, and remarks that classification schemes need the full attention of modern archivists.

In the discussion below I shall assume the existence of a record manager in each government department or agency — an officer who is responsible for the efficiency of all aspects of recordkeeping and record disposition and in particular for the preparing of all classification schemes on which actual operations are based.

The Nature of Record Materials

A department's records are composed of the documents it has accumulated and retained in the course of doing business. These documents accumulate in various ways. They may have been sent *to* the department (or from section to section within it) as a means of commencing, carrying on, or concluding a particular piece of business. They may be copies of similar documents sent out *by* the department (or section). They may have been specially made to record the details of business conducted orally in meetings or by informal conversation. They may have been specially prepared by or at the request of the department to provide information on broad subjects, which will later provide the context for a particular administrative action or for any number of actions dealing with the same subject matter. They may have already been produced or published for other purposes and have been subsequently acquired by the department as useful information. They may be documents such as registers that are specially made for establishing the existence, characteristics, and/or whereabouts of other documents, or persons, or things; or they may be documents such as indexes that are specially made to assist in finding information contained in other documents.

The types of documents so accumulated are many and varied — originals of incoming letters, memoranda, minutes for files and minutes of meetings, copies of outgoing letters and memoranda, reports, submissions, surveys, summaries, returns, maps, plans, and a host of special forms of various kinds. They may include copies of published books and documents. These are the raw materials to be classified as records. Some are records in the first place — e. g., registers, indexes, and minutes of meetings — while others *become* records by being placed (that is to say classed) in specially established record units, which in Australia we call files.[6]

All of these documents contain information and the placing of them in record units implies that the information they contain is of further probable use *for one or both of two quite different kinds of reference requirement* — to provide evidence of an action or of actions *already* taken by the department; or to provide background information that will help in the taking of *future* actions.

The first of these is of course the more important from the recordkeeping point of view not only in itself but because the background information contained in records properly kept as evidence of action is the most useful for administrative purposes (and for research purposes.) [7] Records so kept assist the searcher to find out *why* an action was taken or whether the information is still valid. Yet many modern filing systems have failed on both counts by confusing the two purposes and making their record units (whether we call them files or folders) into subject "catch-alls," within which or between which action documents and background information documents are intermixed. Such filing systems rarely meet their primary reference commitments, particularly as the years go by; and, when the time comes for disposition, effective selection for preservation is an almost impossible task.

It is our contention that different kinds of file units should be used for action records on the one hand and background information records on the other. When a file is established in a record system it should be *either* an action file *or* a background information file, and the title should make clear which of the two it is. If there are enough of each kind to warrant it, the action files and the background information files should be kept in separate sets. But whether this is done or not *the first rule of efficient recordkeeping is that a clear line of demarcation should be drawn between files established for the two different purposes — on the one hand, of recording the sequence of action for particular pieces of business and, on the other, of gathering in one place information about particular subjects.*

If the reader should question this rule, he might remember that

[6] They may, of course, alternatively be placed in independent sets. I shall talk only about files in this article unless there is good reason for doing otherwise. But in fact there is little theoretical difference between the file in a filing system and the separate sets of records held in action sections. The difference is either one of size or one of degree of specialized use or both.

[7] See a most illuminating article by Paul Hasluck (now a Commonwealth Cabinet Minister) on "Problems of Research on Contemporary Official Records," in *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 5, no. 17, p. 1-13 (Nov. 1951), published by the University of Melbourne.

it is just as true nowadays as it was in the nineteenth century, *that letters and similar documents represent administrative actions and that, in a sense, what the record manager is classifying and the record staff are classing are actions rather than written pieces of information.* Hence the major factor in deciding how action documents should be related to each other as records is the way in which the actions that gave rise to them were related to each other in the conduct of departmental business. The combinations in which they might be *used* subsequently to provide background information of all kinds are an important but secondary consideration.[8] When the background information use is allowed to be the primary consideration it often results in the sequence of action being broken up and spread across several subject files or folders (or even separate filing systems in the United States).

In carrying out its business a department divides its work as far as possible into specific units of work, which bear such names as affairs, matters, transactions, pieces of business, tasks, assignments, jobs, and so on. Although it has its drawbacks (all words in record management seem to have them) we shall use the term "transaction file" to describe a file that contains the sequence of papers deriving from a particular piece of business. There are of course tremendous variations in the kinds of transactions in any department. Some are very small and repetitious and are handled on a single form (for example a leave application and approval) or with two documents (for example an application and a certificate). Others, though clear-cut and repetitious, involve many documents. Some are clear-cut and unique. Some are highly complex so that it is almost impossible to distinguish between one transaction and another. Some may involve subsidiary transactions, just as a major decision often involves preliminary decisions on a wide variety of lesser matters.

Although the proportion may vary, all departments have to deal with some complex transactions, which cannot be subjected to set work procedures but which arise out of complex political, economic, social, and administrative situations. These are the ones that create not only the most difficult organizational problems in the department but also the most difficult file-construction problems for

[8] Hence the insistence by one important department in England to this day that each separate in-letter should be separately controlled and jacketed with internal minutes and a copy of the reply, so that, later, temporary background reference "files" can be made up on any subject with any combination of documents. The action officer is very much to blame for the chaotic state of modern files since he has too often demanded *within the one cover* all the papers he needs in dealing with a problem. If he were using a library for his background reference he would surely not require the appropriate pages or chapters of various books to be automatically available under one cover.

the record staff. It is the departments having a high proportion of such transactions that tend to have central filing systems; and it is in such departments, I contend, contrary to general opinion, that subject classified systems are most unsuitable.

What Is Involved in Classifying Records

In an earlier section we noted the special objectives of the record manager. To carry out these objectives his classification plans should ensure:

(1) that documents are supplied to action desks in packages (that is to say, files) containing all the papers about the piece of business in hand;
(2) that the documents are maintained in an order that records the sequence of action on any significant piece of business;
(3) that incoming mail together with *appropriate* previous action papers is directed to the correct action desk;
(4) that the whereabouts of files or documents within files can be established at any time;
(5) that the existence of information in one or more departmental files on any subject that is the reasonable concern of the department can be ascertained;
(6) that files or documents can be either destroyed or transferred to archival custody as soon as their use to the department for current business purposes is exhausted.

Of these conditions (1) and (2) involve the construction of suitable file-units, (3) involves the use of a mail routing guide, (4) involves the registration of files and/or charge-out controls; and (5) involves disposition planning. All involve the use of classification schemes of one kind or another so that actual operations will be consistently, rapidly, and safely carried out. In other words there are *several separate* classification problems to be worked out in current record management, and each has to be worked out with two essential factors in mind — the nature of the materials to be classified and the purpose (or purposes) the classing operations are expected to serve.

I shall now examine each of the problems in turn.

Classing of Documents in Files or Series. We know that well into the nineteenth century the main series of records were:

(1) a series of incoming correspondence — at first kept in chronological order; then registered in chronological order and kept in registered order; then registered and numbered in chronological order and kept in numerical order.
(2) a series of copies of outgoing correspondence — at first hand-copied into ledgers, later press-copied, and later still carbon-copied — kept in chrono-

logical order and sometimes numbered for reference purposes and sometimes bound together.

(3) one or more series of minutes of boards, etc. — kept chronologically.

The main correspondence series could be and usually were subdivided (differentiated) into subseries from different sources or to different addressees.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the development of various devices for improving the efficiency of these very elementary systems. Register entries were indexed by subject in the front of yearly volumes. Jackets were put around incoming documents to take care of additional papers that might accumulate in connection with the piece of business, and on these jackets minutes and notes might be written; and copies of letters in reply, when they became available, might be placed within them. Perhaps the most significant experiments took advantage of the fact that documents could be numbered in order of registration. The physical placement of documents was used as a means of varying the purely chronological order of registration, thereby constructing a relatively mobile package of *related* papers that could be moved around the office to meet the convenience of officers who wished to consult previous papers at their desks. This convenience was made possible by marking the register to show that earlier papers were filed with a particular numbered later paper (or vice versa). In this manner papers could be filed together that belonged to a continuing case or other piece of business; or all papers representing similar business could be filed together (e. g., returns, grants of similar certificates, etc.); or all papers about a particular subject matter could be filed together.[9] Whatever the reasons, what was happening was that with-

[9] The following simplified example consisting of a number of hypothetical register entries may be useful. In it P.P. means Previous Papers and S.P. means subsequent paper. The Action column gives more information than is customary so that the reader can follow the course of certain business.

P.P.	*No.*	*S.P.*	*Subject*	*Action*
	1	3	Suggestion of visit of United States warships to Australian ports.	Reply agreeing provided suitable dates can be found.
	2	5	Monthly return — warships strength.	To X for information.
1	3	7	Suggests date for visit of United States warships and asks for suggested itinerary.	Reply agreeing to dates and suggesting itinerary.
	4		Copy of report on new type of battleship.	To Y for information.
2	5	8	Monthly return — warships strength.	To X for information.
	6		Copy of report on new type of destroyer.	To Y for information.
3	7	10	Agreement to itinerary for U. S. war-	Reply supplying informa-

in the main series tiny subseries were being formed, *each one as the need arose*, to preserve an administrative sequence of action or a serial repetition of a particular kind of paper, or a subject relation. Some documents stayed in the original chronological order, but some (and later the majority) tended to become parts of files. These files of course gradually incorporated copies of outgoing letters, the main chronological series of which dwindled in importance to become the reading files of the present day.

While this was a great advance in convenience, the process of searching remained very cumbersome (as anyone who has used the registers and yearly subject indexes will testify) and the safe but slow techniques of recordkeepers who knew what they did but not why were no match against the subject classification theories and the office equipment salesman of the early part of the twentieth century.

In the British countries the registry system continued in existence but was modified by degrees, the main changes being that:

(1) Cards (or loose leaf binders) gradually supplanted bound volumes for registration and indexing purposes;

(2) In the majority of departments, *file titles* were registered and numbered instead of individual documents; and in those that did register individual documents, some attempts were made to cut down or abolish registration for unimportant documents.

(3) Whether individual documents were registered or not in most departments, files within which documents were placed were usually given subject titles, and the subjects were classified into a subject classification scheme that was meant to provide mutually exclusive classes and to be self-indexing (except for names).

		ships and request for information about leave facilities.	tion on leave facilities and requesting that advice of departure from U. S. be cabled.
5	8	Monthly return — warships strength.	To X for information.
	9	Request for information on new type of destroyer.	To Y for answering.
7	10	Cable advising departure of visiting U. S. warships.	No reply necessary. P/A file.

Papers 1, 3, and 7 filed with paper 10, together with replies and internal minutes, would constitute a "transaction" file.

Papers 8 and 5 filed with paper 2 could form a "serial document" file.

Papers 6 and 4 could be placed with other papers in a "background information dossier" on warships.

Paper 9, if kept at all, could stand alone with its answer as a single small transaction or be listed with other requests for information in a serial transaction file.

The whole lot might be placed in one file on "warships" — in Australian slang a "subject bag" file, of which there are too many.

In American departments and agencies, although some continued to use central filing systems, which are really very similar to the modern British registry, the trend was towards more and more personalized filing services,[10] based on self-indexing subject classifications with little attempt at the numbering of file units.

It is, however, significant that in both cases the file unit ceased to be a relatively spontaneous accumulation of papers produced in the course of a particular piece of business (i. e. the *record* of *an administrative event*) and became a folder or cover into which any piece of paper might be put because it dealt with or was thought to deal with the subject on the cover (which could bear a title as vague as "Administration — Miscellaneous").

It can be seen that, in one sense, what has happened in the course of the recordkeeping revolution is that instead of a few broadly based chronological series of records we now have a tremendous number of very minute "series," which can be moved around the office and which are one of three basic kinds (see again note 9):

(1) "sequence of action" filing units, which we call in Australia "transaction files,"
(2) "repetitive document" filing units, which we call in Australia "serial document files," and
(3) "subject" filing units, which we call in Australia "dossier files."

I contend that except in certain accepted and well understood circumstances the transaction file alone should be used for action records and that the second main rule of filing is that the *principle of respect for the sequence of administrative action should be strictly observed.* I contend too that with certain exceptions the dossier file should be used only for background information records. The only exception to this is that the dossier file may be used profitably for personal or property records *if* the subject of each file is a *specific and individual* (usually named) person or thing. In such cases, provided that all the documents are to be destroyed or all are to be preserved, it is permissible to mix the records of different kinds of transactions with occasional background information records in one dossier.

There are many extensions and variations of the "transaction file" that are permissible but that we will not waste time with here — they all follow fairly logically, and this is after all a theoretical argument. The main point is that the file must be left free to develop

10 Usually controlled by the secretary of the chief of the bureau, division, branch, or section. Significantly enough, Australian departments have relatively few secretaries and rely more on typing pools. The result seems on the whole to be less efficient typing and more efficient recordkeeping.

naturally rather than to follow preconceived subject patterns if it is to perform its *record* function properly.

As we noted earlier the file unit is really a small series or a subseries. If it gets too large, it can be taken out of the filing system and treated as a separate series and charged to an action section if it pertains to that section solely, and so on. Hence the truth of Dr. Schellenberg's dictum that an act of decentralization in recordkeeping practice is an act of classification. Similarly a small series that has been kept as an office file can be incorporated into a central file system under certain circumstances. This is one of the reasons for maintaining that the keeping of a department's records is one overall classification problem (however many separate classification plans may be involved) requiring coordination by a single well-qualified officer. It is also one of the reasons why we in Australia have decided to talk about "sets" rather than "series." It is, finally, one of the reasons why the theory and practice of archives arrangement, valid for the broadly based series of the nineteenth century and earlier, needs reexamining and adjusting for twentieth-century records.[11]

So far there has been a great deal of discussion using the term "subject," but we have not defined it. It, like "classification," is used quite indiscriminately at times and can in fact have two or three different meanings in record work. Sometimes it means function or activity, sometimes the transaction that is the subject of a file, sometimes the event about which the department is taking action, sometimes the abstract subject that is the subject of documentation, and so on. It is important to keep the differences clearly in mind when planning filing systems.

It is most important that adequate file titles be devised for files when they are established. File titles are vital to indexing and disposal efficiency and greatly assist archival work at a later stage; but, most important of all, the title is the means of ensuring that any officer who may add documents to the file will keep it true to character.

Every transaction requires the department to act in respect of some administrative object on behalf of somebody. Another way of saying this is that the action-subject theme of the file consists of the following elements — Action, Object, Topic, Client. Examples are:

[11] This does not mean that I advocate tampering with the principles of provenance and original order. What does happen, however, is that these two principles sometimes come into conflict when files have been passed from one office to another, sometimes being added to and sometimes not, sometimes being incorporated into new file sets and sometimes not.

	Action	*Object*	*Topic*	*Client*
(1)	Preparation (of a)	Report	Waterfront Disputes (for the)	Minister
(2)	Decision (on the)	Application (for an)	Age Pension (by)	J. Smith

These elements must either be stated or definitely implied in the file title if the significance of the file contents is to be apparent in all the circumstances mentioned earlier. If the covering dates of the transaction are not made clear from the file number, they too should be shown because one of the purposes in file titling is to distinguish any given transaction (or series of transactions contained therein) from any other transaction. While reasonable economy of words should be sought, the contents should never be so abbreviated as to widen the possible scope of the file. For example, in (1) "Waterfront Disputes" might be an economical title but it could easily result in a "subject bag" file. On the other hand the title "Application for Age Pension — J. Smith" would be adequate for (2).

I have referred to the danger of the "subject bag" file, and the above example illustrates the importance of giving an adequate title to a file in preventing its growth. It also points to the danger of the catchword "one file — one subject" as a principle guiding the construction and titling of files. A file on "Waterfront Disputes" is indeed on one subject!

Classing of Files in Series or Sets. As I suggested earlier, the primary purpose of registering files in series or sets is to permit staff to establish the whereabouts of any given file (or document within a file). This involves, in most systems, the establishing of a file-title register and a register of file movements, and the allocating of a number that serves both as a convenient form of reference notation and as a means of establishing its correct place among other files in the storage area. Another purpose of registration is to authenticate the file as belonging to the records of the department but I need not discuss this further here.

Nowadays the file and not the individual document is the unit of registration. In earlier days, when individual documents were registered in the correspondence register, the construction of files and the titling of them could be done on any convenient basis without much concern for consistency. Nowadays care and consistency in file construction and titling have to take the place of detailed document registration or logging for accurate and detailed control of records. Registration of files requires the entry of a file title in chronological order in a register and, as most registrations are numerical registrations, the allocating of the next consecutive number to it. The number is used for identification and to establish its place among other files. The allocation of a serial number implies the existence of a class of files within which each individual file will have its place in the serial numeration. This does not mean that a class of files need have a serial numeration — it can be unnumbered or alphabetically arranged; but before we can numerically register a file it must be allocated to a class. The question each record manager has to decide is how many classes and what kind of classes.

One of the early file registration systems — the single number system — involved one class only — a class of, say, "central registry files of Department X." All the central registry files are in one single serial class, which presumably continues to grow as long as the department continues to function. From that class, however, might be broken away several smaller classes of files chosen because they were all of a particular type and were used by one particular section — staff files, applications for licences, and so on. Thus one method of classing is to decentralize one or more specific classes of records from the central registry and to allocate the responsibility for registering within the decentralized classes to the sections that hold them. Very few departments or offices in Australia still retain the single-number registration system.

Other departments establish separate serial classes for each year, a method called the "year and single number" system. This is a matter of operational convenience, and there is no difference between the types of files registered in each class except that they were registered in different years.

The significant point about both of these systems is that they rely entirely on indexes to find individual files or information in files and that the file numbers signify nothing more than the serial order of registration.

Still other departments use the multiple-number system — or (because there are usually three numbers in a file number) the three-number system. In these systems a file is registered in one of many separate serial classes (of which there may be several thousand) each of which is represented (that is, described) and differentiated from other classes by a subject heading with explanatory notes where necessary. Several of these headings are then grouped again under a broader heading. Hence the file number consists of three (or occasionally more) numbers: one representing the primary heading, one the secondary heading, and one the serial number of the file. For example, 45/3/31 might be the number for a file title

"Annual Demand 1957 for replenishment of stores for X Victualling Store," in which 45 represents the primary heading, "Stores Procurement," 3 represents "Victualling Stores," and 31 represents the 31st file registered in the serial class.

There is a good deal of argument between supporters of the year and single-number system and supporters of the multiple-number system over the relative efficiency of the two methods. The arguments hinge on the question stated earlier: How many separate registration classes should be established and on what basis should the classes be established? Most of the arguments in favor of the multiple-number system rest on the assertion that such systems solve, *wholly or in part*, the problems of classing for reference, classing for direction of mail, and classing for disposal.

No doubt both systems will continue to be used; and, provided the files are properly constructed and separated one from the other, both will serve the primary purpose of giving every file a serial number for identification and control. I personally very much favor the year and single number, whether in a central filing system or in a decentralized filing system, mainly for the following reasons:

(1) The year and single number system retains its continuity and form over long periods of years, no matter what changes may occur in subject relation.
(2) It automatically clears noncurrent away from current without leaving awkward gaps in the numerical sequences.
(3) In times of emergency and loss of trained staff it is easier to maintain in good shape than a subject classified system because without skilled staff and supervision there is a tendency in multiple number systems to treat file jackets as all-inclusive subject folders.

Classing of Information by Indexing.[12] The purpose of indexing is to point to the whereabouts of information on a particular subject or transaction or range of subjects or transactions. Every document and every file contains information of one kind or another, and the task in planning indexing is to decide what kind of information will be required by the department and to state the various information needs in terms of subject headings under which the suitable descriptive entries and file numbers can be entered to indicate the whereabouts of the specific information. There are four basic problems associated with this task:

(1) The same documentary information can be useful in different subject contexts at different times.
(2) As we saw earlier, there can be a great deal of confusion about the mean-

[12] This section is based, in part, on ideas expressed in J. Metcalfe's book entitled *Information Indexing* (Scarecrow Press, New York, 1957).

ing of "subject." Any given subject heading *that is abbreviated enough to be put in alphabetical order* can be part of a considerable variety of different action-subject themes as expressed in file titles.

(3) There are so many conceivable subjects into which particular documentary information can be fitted that the total number of subject headings in an index can be very large (even if, as should be done, the greatest care is exercised to use headings and make entries that are of really high potential use for the department concerned).

(4) Alphabetical order is the only possible order for subject headings in an index; but because of the "accident" of language closely related headings may be widely scattered through the index, unless special arrangements are made to prevent this.

There are no easy solutions to these problems — no single classing scheme that will solve the problem of supplying all reference needs economically — with a minimum of headings and a single entry under each. Nor is there any way to arrive at suitable headings short of extensive investigation, analysis, and checking. Certain steps, however, can be taken in compiling lists of authorized index headings and in making entries to render the index an efficient and relatively economical finding aid.

Problem (1) can be met by indexing the file or document under all headings that represent reference needs for which the particular information concerned is likely to be significant (*even if the actual words of the heading are not used in the title or document concerned*).

Problem (2) can be met by providing enough headings and subheadings (see below) to provide for all the different levels of subject and the various action-subject relations that are important to the department and by making the necessary entries under them.

Problem (3) can be met by confining subject headings to known reference requirements and adding others only when the need arises.

Problem (4) can be partially met by grouping subject headings that are related in a significant way for the department as subheadings under primary headings and by using indicators in the list of headings for alternative approaches so as to avoid the need to make additional entries.

There are two reasons for using subheadings in indexes:

(1) to reduce the number of entries to be scanned in a given area of search by dividing all the entries into subclasses; and

(2) to bring into relation particular subject matter that would otherwise be scattered inconveniently through the index. Such practice should be limited to recognized need and should not necessarily reduce the need for adequate entries under other headings.

Subdivisions under primary headings can be made in several ways, of which the most usual are:

(1) in terms of the action taken regarding a subject (e.g., tape-recorders/purchases — loans), a most useful method in view of the action-subject relations that mostly concern a department;
(2) in terms of type or species (e.g., Aircraft/Vickers Viscount–Lockheed Electra), a method to be used sparingly and as a rule only in relation to concrete as distinct from abstract subjects;
(3) in terms of place (e.g., by State);
(4) in terms of time (e.g., by year).

Classing for an index, then, is concerned with the classing of information rather than of files as such. It does indirectly class files according to the information they contain but only incidentally. It certainly does not try to assign each file to one particular place. The method of classifying is by denominating subject headings that stand for particular reference needs and by subdividing those classes as required. No attempt is made to fit all the primary subject-headings into a pattern, but instead reliance is placed on alphabetical order of subject (class) headings chosen at any convenient level of specificity or generality. This practice leaves the relation between headings to be worked out according to the individual needs of the inquirer except in certain cases where well-known needs are met by special subclassing methods. Methods of constructing lists of index headings are very much "trial and error" and involve:

(1) analysis of the subject matter contained in lists of file titles or in the files themselves, or of existing indexes and/or lists of registration headings, and the analysis of functional statements into various activity classes,
(2) choosing subject headings and grouping them, and
(3) checking their potential utility with action officers.

The resulting list of headings must be regarded as open to amendment as future reference needs or new classes of business develop. Even the relation between headings may need to be adjusted.

Classing for Direction of Mail. Every department is advised to have a guide to indicate to a classifier where new mail is to be directed for action. This guide, which is becoming known as a "maildex," is in fact a list of the activities dealt with by the various sections and/or officers of the department. These activities may be listed under the name of the section or officer concerned; or they may be listed in the form of functions and/or activities and sub-activities; or they may be listed under subject headings with subdivisions of those headings indicating the type of action that is taken in relation to the subject concerned. Whichever the method of presenting the information in a maildex, the result is or should be a large number of *activity classes* specifically enough defined to indicate what particular class of business is first dealt with by what particular branch, section, or officer.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that an activity class can only be accurately stated in terms of *what the action is in relation to given subject matter.* This is not to say that one section might not deal initially or entirely with all activities relating to one subject, but such an arrangement would be the exception rather than the rule.

The purpose of preparing a "maildex" is to lay down classes of activity (expressed in terms of action-subject) that will be sufficiently well defined to serve as the basis for prior approval, by departmental officers concerned, of the initial routing of mail and to give clear guidance to the registry staff, which must do the routing.

Classing for Disposition. The purpose of classing for disposition is to provide a basis for authorizing in advance the continuing disposition of records belonging to a particular class in a particular way after a particular time. This enables registry staff or other responsible officers to destroy the records concerned or transfer them to archival custody at the appropriate time without having to obtain specific authority on each occasion. Classing for disposition, like any other type of classing, involves two separate activities — establishing the classification scheme and allocating classable items into it (often called "sentencing"). The establishment of disposition classes involves three interacting processes — defining the class, evaluating, and prescribing the disposition. The result, embodied in an approved schedule, constitutes both an agreement between the department and the archival authority and a statement of disposal policy and regulations for the department, branch, or section concerned.

The problem of defining classes for disposition is very much the same as classing for mail direction. The only sound basis for definition is the kind of activity involved — that is, a combination of action and subject matter. *But, whereas the test of adequate definition for a maildex class is whether all the mail is dealt with by a particular section, the test of adequate definition for a disposition class is whether it can be given the same disposition.* This is, of course, a more difficult task since the decision on disposition involves evaluation from a number of points of view. It is in some ways a more responsible task; for, despite the possibility of spot checking sentenced files, a wrong decision to destroy is irremediable.

It will be seen that reaching agreement on satisfactory disposition classes requires, as a preliminary, the formulation of tentative classes to cover all or as many as possible of the activities of the department at all levels. These "hypotheses" can be checked against the opinions of all authorities concerned. Some, perhaps many, will need restatement to provide for different evaluations.

The sources of information from which the first tentative classes can be drawn are the following:

(1) For nonregistry records the register of departmental record sets is the basic source.[13] Each continuing nonregistry set constitutes in itself a tentative disposition class since as we saw earlier these sets are or should be related to activity classes of a relatively precise nature. This particularly applies to those that are series of forms or series of similar documents — reports and the like. Sets of case or particular-instance files can also be used for first tentative disposal classes.

(2) For registry files the activity classes used in the maildex as described above can provide tentative classes. If no maildex is available or the form is unsuitable it will be necessary to start from scratch and to examine the titles in the file register and/or the entries in the subject index and to identify the various kinds of activities of the department in relation to the various subjects encountered. The result is likely to be a very large number of very specifically stated tentative classes, several of which can eventually be grouped together under a larger class. The only limitation on such consolidation is that each larger class must be an extension of the kinds of activity reflected in the smaller classes and be (tentatively) susceptible of the same disposal treatment.

The tentative classes can then be listed in a first draft of a schedule and tested against the opinions of departmental officers and, after any necessary amendments, that of the Archival Authority, and so on. In practice, of course, liaison and consultation with action officers and archivists can and should be carried on throughout the whole procedure in order to achieve suitable classes at the earliest possible moment.

This process sounds complicated, and it is. Classification planning in always difficult and involves trial and error before a satisfactory result is reached.[14] No list of disposition classes prepared for an-

[13] The register of departmental sets is a device we have strongly recommended that each record manager should prepare and keep up-to-date. It is intended to record essential information about each significant set of records in the department and is in fact a kind of expanding classified inventory for current records similar to that maintained by the Archives Division for records in the record centers. The intention is that basic information about record holdings should be readily and continuously available to new record managers, Organization and Methods staff, archivists, and others.

[14] It is worth the trouble, however, because experience has shown that when scheduling is properly done the selection of valuable files and the elimination of useless

other department will serve, although it may be useful as an example and as a means of suggesting classes for common management and housekeeping activities. Moreover, disposition classes need constant checking to keep them up to date.

Let us consider an example and start with a tentative activity class entitled "Allocations of migrant labor from individual migrant ships." We note immediately that there are at least two tentative disposition classes involved:

(1) establishing policy and procedure (including liaison with other authorities in this regard) for the allocation of migrant labor from migrant ships, and
(2) particular instances of allocating migrant labor from migrant ships.

Class (1) may be marked, "Retain permanently, transfer to archival custody 10 years after action complete." Class (2) may be marked, "Destroy 2 years after action complete." But the action officers concerned may wish to break up class (2) as follows —

(2) Particular instances . . . arriving on ships carrying German migrants — "Destroy 5 years after action complete."
(3) Particular instances . . . arriving on ships carrying other than German migrants — "Destroy 2 years after action complete."

The Archival Authority may wish to provide for the permanent or long-term retention of all particular instances of allocating migrant labor to the sugar industry, and these items will obviously cut across classes (2) and (3) above. In such circumstances the retention of the files concerned should be achieved by providing for exceptions to the classes above and to any other classes concerned with the allocation of migrant labor.

The manner in which disposition classes and their treatment are listed in the final schedule and are related to existing registration classes is a matter for the individual record manager. He should keep in mind, however, that his description of classes has to be understandable to persons not directly familiar with the records themselves or with the language abbreviations that might otherwise be employed.

Conclusion

It now seems reasonable to sum up in the form of answers to the questions mentioned at the beginning of this article.

To the question — "What is the archivist's profession?" — I should answer that the archivist is anyone who, by reason of his

ones can be carried out as part of the day-to-day operation of the registry; and the results are so good that top departmental officers and archivists are completely satisfied.

general understanding of the theory and practice of recordkeeping and his particular expert knowledge of the systems in use in the periods with which he is concerned, is qualified to make decisions or give advice that will substantially affect the quality and safety of the records of the organization or organizations for which he is directly or indirectly responsible. He may have direct and indirect responsibilities as a government archivist, direct ones as the record manager of an agency (or a business firm), indirect ones as archivist in a private archival institution, or contractual ones as a commercial record analyst. He may have assistants of all grades and skills, some fully professional, some semiprofessional, and some nonprofessional.

To the question — "How should the archivist be trained?" — I reiterate my belief that to be an archivist in the broadest sense of the word he should be recruited with a background that will be most useful to him for the period with which he will be concerned — and that thereafter his professional training should consist of comparative theory and practice of recordkeeping and special studies of the systems most applicable in his periods. The required background will obviously be very different for the archivist who deals with medieval records and the archivist who is concerned only with the twentieth century. The archivist who wishes to deal with all periods will need to acquire the necessary background for all periods and a solid understanding of the recordkeeping methods of all periods.

To the question — "What should be the relation between archivists and record managers?" — it seems that they are or should be the same people, all with similar training but dealing according to personal inclination and aptitude with different problems and periods. It will no doubt continue to be convenient to distinguish between those who work at central repositories and take care of records after their current use is over and those whose *milieu* is in the field of current management. The names "archivist" and "record manager" will no doubt continue to have separate application, but it would be to the general advantage if the able members of both groups — of whom there are many — respected each other more, pooled their knowledge about records and ways of keeping them, and worked together to raise the overall professional standing.

Finally I should like to throw out a suggestion for what it is worth. Would it be possible, one wonders, for the United States to take the initiative, as it did in relation to the International Council on Archives, to convene a special conference to work out the basic content for training courses for modern archivists and in particular to issue a textbook on comparative recordkeeping techniques? Such a conference would, I think, be of inestimable value to the profession as a whole and of course to the participating archivists in giving them insight into the problems and techniques of other countries and therefore new ideas for application in their own. I suggest the following conditions:

(1) The conference to last about 6 weeks and to consist of seminar meetings, working committees, sessions, etc.;
(2) The members to be few enough for efficient working — say a maximum of 3 delegates from each of 6 countries, which (in view of their past and present interest) might be France, Germany, Holland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia;
(3) English to be the working language;
(4) Each delegation to supply, at least one month before the conference convenes, a description of the recordkeeping practices used in the central (and possibly State or local) government from about the eighteenth century to the present time.
(5) The conference to aim at producing an edited textbook, based on the descriptive statements, and a suggested syllabus for the training of archivists.