

# Acquisition in Industrial Archives

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IF we define the archive as a corporation's memory, the problem of acquisition becomes one of deciding what to remember. Such a seemingly simple approach is complicated by two things: (a) each corporate activity must pass a test of usefulness; and (b) the archive becomes a corporate asset and therefore a security problem.

To be useful a corporate activity must earn a profit. Increasingly, service activities, such as records management departments, are recognized not as "overhead" or "factory burden" but as inverse profit points. An inverse profit point contributes to net profit by reduced costs. For example, many large industrial firms earn 3% net after taxes. If good records management can reduce costs by \$75,000 the result for the company is the same as increased sales of \$2,500,000. One must be wary of carrying such logic to absurdity. But, properly used, it is a telling point.

While records management activities pass the usefulness test with flying colors, this is hardly true of the archive. That function, like research, requires longtime, though modest, investment before a return is evident. It is therefore nearly mandatory that the archive be part of the records management function so that it can be subsidized and can survive an occasional lean year.

This preamble on the financial facts of life is included because it emphasizes one of the principal differences between industrial archives and governmental or private archives. It clearly does not imply that the sister institutions do not suffer financial hardships or handicaps. The basic difference is that while a nonindustrial archive may face malnutrition, its industrial counterpart often faces extinction.

The industrial archive, viewed as a corporate asset, must be secure. Because of the real value of the documents retained there,

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together with the need for swift reference service to top executives, it cannot be remotely located as can a records center. Since its principal function is longterm retention of valuables, it acquires characteristics not uncommon to a bank.

By contrast, the records center is the home of documents that face a relatively early and nearly certain death. It has the characteristics of a grocery warehouse and a definite air of impermanence. This fact of personality and location contrasts explains why the vital records protection programs nearly always became connected with archives rather than records centers. It has a definite bearing on acquisitions policy.

The subject of what to acquire is not the topic of this paper; but, given a general agreement on what is important, it can be said safely that most of the archival material will be received from the executive (or general) offices. In multidivisional operations a small increment will be found in the major field headquarters. Almost without exception, however, the important papers will have been forwarded to the chief executive and his staff.

So, contrary to popular belief, the corporate records manager in a farflung organization need not scurry about the country to locate the important records. Normal business operations bring them home. The major effort must be to familiarize headquarters executives with the archive, its purpose, and its services. A close liaison with the corporate secretary's office is probably 80% of the battle. A good working relationship with the financial executives will cover another 10% of the acquisition problems. Remaining headquarters offices contribute an additional 5% or thereabouts. The remaining 5% is the troublesome portion, but four continuing sources are indicated in the experience of the Raytheon Company:

(1) *Division, plant, and regional office records.* The field organization necessitated by records management activities is a priceless, and free, asset of an archive. Trained in evaluating records, the men in the field often stumble across important records during their routine duties. They then report their finds to the assistant archivist, who can follow up with appropriate action.

(2) *Predisposal samplings of records center collections.* Twice each year the records centers receive from the records control office lists of records due for disposal. These are pulled out and given a final examination by the records manager (who doubles as archivist) and the associate secretary (who is also an attorney). At that time samples of selected groups are extracted and turned over to the assistant archivist for preservation. This procedure meets two needs. First, it provides samples of everyday records useful in understanding the basic records. Second, it is evidence of the method of recordkeeping at a given time.

(3) *Records of discontinued or largely reorganized divisions.* The many postwar changes in products and the large number of new products require constant organizational rearrangement. When this occurs records can easily become lost or, if available, virtually useless. Probably the most effective method is to arrange to impound these in a local site. Those needed by continuing or new departments can be reissued and so noted. The remainder becomes a closed record group. We find it best to hold these for about a year, then have the assistant archivist go through them to separate wheat from chaff. Disposition dates are set where applicable. Records to be retained continue as a closed group. After four years, another review is conducted.

(4) *Records of senior executives or longtime employees.* Any definition of an archive as a corporate memory is necessarily qualified by the knowledge that much of the memory is in the heads of senior executives and longtime employees. Prior to the departure of any of these persons the alert industrial archivist must bid for the records collected over a period of years. They often contain the missing series of enlightening correspondence. In this connection I wish we industrial people could do more oral history work of the type conducted by George Gibb of Harvard Business School.

The notes above on where and how to acquire business archives would be incomplete without some description of their arrangement. A record group system patterned after that pioneered by the National Archives and Records Service best suits the needs of our industry. We use a dozen open groups, listed below, and form closed groups as required.

#### OPEN GROUPS

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 4. Executive Records      | 10. Marketing and Contract Records      |
| 5. Corporate Records      | 11. Manufacturing Management            |
| 6. Accounting and Finance | 12. Personnel Management                |
| 7. Patents and Inventions | 13. International Operations            |
| 8. Engineering and R & D  | 14. General Administration              |
| 9. General Legal Records  | 15. Reference Materials and Manuscripts |

#### CLOSED GROUPS (mergers, acquisitions, discontinued units)

- |                                  |                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 491. Equipment & Systems Div.    | 496. Russell Electric Co. |
| 492. Raytheon Canada             | 497. Datamatic Operations |
| 493. Sorenson, Inc.              | 498. Submarine Signal Co. |
| 494. Machlett Laboratories, Inc. | 499. Chicago Division     |
| 495. Applied Electronics Co.     |                           |

*Note:* RCS (records control schedules) 16-490 cover specific high-volume, short-retention records kept in records centers. Examples:

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 305. Payroll Records    | 339. Purchasing Records |
| 317. Petty Cash Records | 380. Shipping Records   |

To summarize: The main problem in managing a business archive is twofold—the test of usefulness and the tendency to confuse the whole operation with security needs. Acquisition is actually much easier than for public archives. The goal of the business archive is more restricted; the input is more easily controlled since it is all company property. Perhaps the key to ease of acquisition is a good existing records management program.

### Card Game

It is very difficult to get at the origin of things, and future research may show that I am mistaken in assigning to the Abbé Rozier, a well-known French savant of the last century, the credit of being the originator of the card catalogue.

In 1775 the Paris Academy of Sciences issued a general index to their various publications from 1666 to 1770, under the editorship of the Abbé Rozier. The work was printed on one side only, with the object of providing a blank page upon which the contents of future volumes might be added from time to time. In the preface to the first volume of the index the editor explains how this was to be done, and he suggests that an index should be first made upon cards, and when a sufficient number had accumulated they were to be sorted into alphabetical order and the entries transferred to the blank pages of the printed index. He says at p. xi of his Preface—

Les cartes à jouer offrent la plus grande facilité pour ces tables, et par l'arrangement qu'on peut leur donner, elles tiennent lieu du manuscrit qu'il auroit fallu nécessairement recopier plusieurs fois. Voici la manière d'écrire les cartes et de multiplier en même tems les titres suivant que les objets l'exigent [*see below*].

Le mot TUMEUR doit être en *védet*te, et hors de ligne, de même que "A.D.S. . . . 1771." Cette manière est d'autant plus commode, que dans la distribution alphabétique elle évite la peine de lire le titre entier pour reconnoître à quelle lettre de l'alphabet chaque carte appartient. C'est dans la même vue que les signes A.D.S. [Académie des Sciences], 1771, ont été placés hors de ligne pour trouver facilement l'ordre des années. Les mots écrits en *lettres italiques* désignent les répétitions du titre qu'il est à propos de faire. Ainsi cet article fournira quatre cartes, savoir, une pour le mot TUMEUR, une pour ENGORGEMENT, une pour EPIPLOON et une pour le nom PORTAL. . . .

It is true that the Abbé is not dealing with a library of books, but with a collection of independent memoirs, and he does not regard his card index as anything but a temporary expedient. These, however, are mere details, and until an earlier claimant appears I think that the Abbé Rozier must be regarded as the pioneer [*sic*] of the card catalogue.

TUMEUR.

A.D.S. 1771.

*Obf. fur les tumeurs & engorgemens de l'epiploon, par M. PORTAL*

.....p. 541. H. p. 36.

*Facsimile of Index Card as proposed by the Abbé Rozier in 1775.*

—Richard B. Prosser, "The Origin of the Card Catalogue; a Brief Note," in *Library Association Record*, 2: 651 (Dec. 1900).