Archival Arrangement—Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels

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ARCHIVES are already arranged—supposedly. That is to say, an arrangement was given them by the agency of origin while it built them up day after day, year after year, as a systematic record of its activities and as part of its operations. This arrangement the archivist is expected to respect and maintain. Arrangement is built into archives; it is one of the inherent characteristics of "archives," differentiating them from nonarchival material.

Theoretically in the archives of an agency of government, or of any organization—and therefore in the archival depository that has custody of such archives—each document has its place, a natural place, so that its association and relation with all other documents produced or received by the creating agency remain clear. The archivist preserves and uses the arrangement given the records by the agency of origin on the theory that this arrangement had logic and meaning to the agency and that if the agency's employees could find and use the records when they were active, in connection with the multitudinous daily transactions of the agency, the archivist surely can do the same, using the contemporary registers, indexes, and other finding aids that came with the records as part of them. Thus artificial finding aids that the archival establishment must create are reduced to a minimum. The filing system used by the agency may not have been the best that could have been devised to start with, or it may not have been effectively carried out. It may even have broken down badly because of inefficient filing, sudden expansion or shifting of programs without adequate assistance in the file room, or for other reasons. Still, no major archival establishment will ever be given money to revise filing systems. It will have

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to get along with what it inherits, making minor adjustments at most.

Beyond such practical considerations as lack of time and money to create new systems, however, is the more important truth that, if the archival agency could reorganize the records, to try to do this would be unwise and undesirable. Perhaps no two archivists could agree on the arrangement concept to be built into any new system. Furthermore, what an agency has created in the past no man today can completely tear asunder. One cannot, for example, tear volumes apart. This author has seen such a process actually tried with press copy letter books, but with minute books or account books it becomes impossible. To the degree that it could be done with loose papers, the original groupings, which have meaning in themselves, would be lost; the sequences of operations and events would be difficult, or almost impossible, to reconstruct; the efficiency or inefficiency of the agency itself would be obscured; and all the registers, indexes, and other finding aids created over the years by the agency, at great cost in manpower and money, would be rendered useless. (We are here considering physical rearrangement, not rearrangement on paper, which the archivist is free to do to his heart's content if he can find time and money for it. Paper rearrangements by the archivist may usefully supplement the physical arrangement established by the agency of origin; they cannot supplant it.)

To the energetic novitiate, who usually wants to start classifying and cataloging documents all over in some schematic arrangement of his own, these observations must sound strange—like the lazy man's way out. But every professional archivist knows these things. He has learned them from experience or from archivists who have had experience. These lessons have been expounded frequently in archival literature. The classic expression of them is in the 1898 manual of the Dutch archivists, Samuel Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin, translated into English by Arthur H. Leavitt (*Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*; 1940). They are embodied also in the well-known treatises in English by Sir Hilary Jenkinson (*A Manual of Archive Administration*; rev. ed., 1937) and T. R. Schellenberg (*Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*; 1956). They have been written into the instructional material of the National Archives, notably *Staff Information Papers* nos. 15 and 18, entitled respectively *The Control of Records at the Record Group Level* and *Principles of Arrangement.*

The overall principle discussed above is, of course, what archivists call the "principle of provenance." This is signified on an

upper level by the French expression *respect des fonds* (maintaining the natural archival bodies of creating agencies or offices separately from each other) and on a lower level, that is, within the *fonds*, by the phrase *respect pour l'ordre primitif* (respect for the original order). Arrangement becomes then, for the records of any one agency, the task of determining and verifying the original order, filling and labeling of the archives containers to reflect it, and shelving of the containers in the established order.

But if this is all there is to arrangement, it would seem to be relatively easy and even somewhat routine—perhaps chiefly a physical operation. A first answer to such an observation would be that, although in theory arrangement is simple, in practice it always presents many problems. Almost the whole of the Muller, Feith, and Fruin manual is devoted to the exposition of these problems and suggested solutions to them. A second answer is that these authors treat only part of the arrangement function, the arrangement of the records of an agency—any agency—whereas archivists in the National Archives and in most State archival establishments have custody of the records of hundreds of agencies, more or less related to each other. There must be, first, overall arrangement policies involving the grouping of these agency records and, second, controls to implement the policies. In other words, there are in any large depository many decisions that must be made above the level of the *fonds*.

Much confusion that arises in discussing the arrangement function could be avoided, this author believes, if it could be recognized at the start that the term "arrangement" covers several different types of operations, of varying degrees of difficulty, depending in large part on the level at which they are being carried out. An identification of these levels and some analysis of the operations at each level, beginning at the top level and moving down—the order in which control should be established—may lead to a better understanding of this function by archivist and layman alike. In attempting this analysis, the author has had in mind as audience chiefly would-be archivists (and position classifiers), but he hopes what is written will also make sense and ring true to those who have often dirtied their hands by actually doing arrangement work.

The Levels of Arrangement

In all large archival depositories there can be distinguished, usually, at least five levels of arrangement:

1. *Arrangement at the depository level*—the breakdown of the depository's complete holdings into a few major divisions on the broadest common denomi-

nator possible and the physical placement of holdings of each such major division to best advantage in the building's stack areas. This major division of holdings is usually reflected in parallel administrative units (divisions or branches in the depository organization that are given responsibility for these major groupings).

2. *Arrangement at the record group and subgroup levels*—the breakdown of the holdings of an administrative division or branch (as these may have been established on the first level) into record groups and the physical placement of these in some logical pattern in stack areas assigned to the division or branch. This level should include the identification of natural subgroups and their allocation to established record groups.

3. *Arrangement at the series level*—the breakdown of the record group into natural series and the physical placement of each series in relation to other series in some logical pattern.

4. *Arrangement at the filing unit level*—the breakdown of the series into its filing unit components and the physical placement of each component in relation to other components in some logical sequence, a sequence usually already established by the agency so that the archivist merely verifies and accepts it.

5. *Arrangement at the document level*—the checking and arranging, within each filing unit, of the individual documents, enclosures and annexes, and individual pieces of paper that together comprise the filing unit and the physical placement of each document in relation to other documents in some accepted, consistent order.

The above five steps refer to the arrangement of the records themselves, independently of their containers. They establish the order or sequence in which records ought to be placed in containers and in which the containers ought to be labeled and shelved.

When all these steps have been completed the archival holdings of a depository may be said to be under control. This control may never be established completely (sometimes arrangement at the filing unit or document level may never be fully carried out), but it must be established to an acceptable degree before records description work is possible because finding aids have to refer to specified units in an established arrangement.

Arrangement at the Depository Level

A large archival depository, holding the records of hundreds of different agencies, each considered a record group, requires a first division of its holdings above the record group level, chiefly for administrative purposes. Each such division thus holds a number of record groups. This division may be:

(1) on a chronological basis, the breaks often coming at major changes in the organization of government (as in Latin American countries, where one

usually finds at least a colonial section and a national-period section, with sometimes an independence-period section sandwiched between);

(2) on a hierarchical basis, according to major organizational divisions of government (as in the National Archives, where administrative divisions were first organized around the records of one or two major departments along with the records of related independent agencies, although through the years these boundaries keep changing);

(3) on the basis of levels of government (as central and local); or

(4) some combination of the above.

In the National Archives there is also a tendency to consider broad subject areas as a guide at this arrangement level, but this may be more apparent than real. Government organization itself normally follows subject areas to a considerable degree. Subject areas can hardly be a controlling guide but they may be an auxiliary consideration. So also are such important matters as the size and arrangement of storage areas, the physical nature of the records themselves (often necessitating special areas in the case of technical records such as maps, pictures, and film), the reference activity of the records, the degree of security to be given them, and the number and caliber of personnel needed to work with them. Because of all these considerations, this first division of the records is usually made at the highest level of administration and embodied in issuances approved by the head of the agency. Personnel of lower grade usually have no part in the decisions and no responsibility for them. Small archival depositories may not feel the need of dividing their holdings at this level; but over the years, as transfers continue from an increasing number of agencies and offices, the need to consider such a division will almost certainly arise.

Arrangement at the Record Group Level

The basic principle of *respect des fonds* requires that the records of different creating agencies and offices be kept separate and never mixed. Under this principle an archival establishment must (1) decide what creating agencies and offices are represented by records and (2) identify all records as belonging to one agency or another. In the early years of the archival establishment concern for these matters may seem a bit academic, for the agencies represented are generally known to the staff and the identification of records with particular agencies is fairly obvious. Sooner or later, however, arguments will arise and decisions will be called for. How long an archival establishment may "get by" without carefully dividing its holdings into sharply delimited "record groups"—to use the term

coined in the National Archives in 1941—will depend on how far back in time and through how many agency reorganizations its holdings extend and on how many attics and basements filled with accumulations of these records, confused by many movings over the years, it has cleaned out.

Before the National Archives began using the term "record group" the Public Record Office in Great Britain was using the term "archive group" to designate the records of an entire agency, no matter how large, including the records of entire ministries. The British practice, we believed, if applied in the National Archives, could lead sometimes to groupings too large for administrative convenience. We thought it better to divide the records of such large "agencies" as departments into a number of separate record groups, usually reflecting the bureaus within departments and of "convenient size" for administration.

On the Continent the French term "*fonds d'archives*"—meaning the body or stock of records of a record-creating unit—was widely known in archival literature and accepted as the basis of arrangement work. (The Dutch term "*archief*" also had wide usage because of the influence of the Dutch manual.) As applied in practice, the records of any subordinate office that kept records, no matter how small the office, were considered a "*fonds*." This was going to the other extreme of "convenient size," and the "record group" principle as defined in the National Archives united the records of subordinate offices under their superior offices, usually up to the bureau level. Also the records of small though essentially independent satellite agencies were often included with the records of major agencies to which they were related. Many smaller *fonds*, such as the records of claims commissions or arbitration boards, were grouped together into what became known as "collective record groups," of which a number were established. There would otherwise be thousands of *fonds*. Thus, the National Archives, partly for administrative convenience, has aimed at the intermediate level in establishing its record groups. It established 206 such record groups in 1943 for its then existing holdings. Additional record groups have since been established and the number, considering the entire holdings of the National Archives and Records Service, now approaches 350.

Although the term "record group" has never seemed to this author a happy one for the concept, no one has suggested a better, and both the term and the concept seem to be spreading in use to other archival depositories in the United States and Canada. It is

not certain that the term is always defined exactly as it is in the National Archives, and perhaps it need not be—so long as the definition is applied consistently throughout the establishment. Some such concept is needed in all archival depositories having the care of records created by many different agencies and organizations. Once established, record groups are usually the basic units for administrative control; that is, for arrangement, description, reference service, and statistical accounting and reporting.

Inasmuch as the records of each record group are to be kept separate from those of all other record groups, any unit of records —whether bound volume, series of loose papers, single paper or map, or whatever—has to be identified as constituting a part of one record group and no other. There can be no overlapping, for records cannot be placed physically in two different places. Each new accession must be allocated to its proper record group; if none exists, a new record group must be established and a proper location in the depository found for it. So far as possible, all the contents of a record group should be kept together in one place in the stacks. Exceptions will often have to be made for technical records. Because decisions at the highest level are governed more by administrative than professional considerations, the establishment of a record group with the delimitation of its boundaries is the first real professional operation as one moves downward in the arrangement function. It is impossible to discuss here all of the many considerations governing decisions about allocation of records to one group or another. They are set forth clearly and in detail, so far as the National Archives is concerned, in its *Staff Information Paper* no. 15, *The Control of Records at the Record Group Level.*

Recommendations for the establishment of new record groups and for their delimitation are made usually by branch or division chiefs of senior archivist level and require the approval of the head of the archival agency or a specially designated assistant. Topmost officials must also decide which division or branch is to be assigned responsibility for the record group. The division or branch chief, or a higher official in some cases, must decide where in the branch areas the record group is to be physically located. The amount of use the records may have, the quantity of additional records to be expected in the record group, and other considerations may affect the decision on the area in which the record group is to be shelved. Physical limitations of stack areas and equipment may not permit an ideal arrangement to be fully carried out and compromises then must be made.

All natural subgroups should also be recognized at this level of arrangement, accounted for in the registration statement prepared for the record group, and kept separate physically as subdivisions of the record group when it is arranged in the stacks. Subgroups must be identified and their affiliation determined when the boundaries of the record group are established; otherwise, the determination of subgroups could amount to a separate level in arrangement.

In many simpler record groups, some of which may be sizable, there are no subgroups. The subgroup determination can be made quickly except in cases of collective record groups or of records of an agency that has undergone frequent reorganizations and numerous changes of field offices, for the records of each field office ought properly to be considered a subgroup. Moreover, if the records over the years have become badly disarranged, the determination of existing subgroups can be most difficult. The untangling of the records themselves may have to be postponed to the next level of arrangement, the identification and allocation of series. The identification of subgroups and recommendations for the order of their arrangement within a record group is work of middle-professional grade or higher and is approved by the chief of the division or branch that has custody of the record group.

Although many difficult problems enter into decisions with respect to record groups and the decisions are of major importance, the time spent in arrangement at the record group level is so little as to be an almost negligible part of the total time an archival agency must devote to the arrangement function.

Arrangement of Series within the Record Group

It is arrangement at the three levels within the record group that represents the time-consuming work. Record groups in the National Archives average nearly 3,000 cubic feet each (the contents of nearly 500 4-drawer file cabinets). In other archival depositories the average may be smaller. Some record groups are so large and complicated that they contain thousands of series in many subgroups. These series must be identified and arranged in some logical order in relation to each other, so that the whole record group is given an orderly sequence on the shelves.

Although through classification schemes and filing practices an agency may have given a definitive arrangement to documents and filing units within each series, it almost never established a sequential arrangement for the many different series it created. It never dictated that a certain series was to come first, a certain other series

last, and that each of the others was to have its place at some definite point in between. This larger classification sequence is what the archivist must establish for each record group. It is an operation that requires a full knowledge of the principles of archival arrangement and a knowledge of the administrative history of the agency or agencies whose records are involved. In many ways this is the heart of archival work, because the inventory and all other finding aids merely reflect this level of arrangement and are keyed into it.

The person to whom the work is assigned should be well trained and experienced and should prepare himself for his specific assignment by reading laws and regulations governing the organization and programs of the agency in question; its annual reports, special reports, and other publications; and all serious historical and analytical studies of its work and accomplishments. He must pay special attention to changes in its function and organization: these are usually reflected in the records and over a long period of years will be considerable. He must know the history of predecessor agencies whose records may have been inherited and of successor or liquidating agencies that have had custody of the records and that may have disposed of some, reorganized others, absorbed some into their own record bodies, or otherwise complicated the picture. He must study particularly the agency's way of keeping its records. If he studies also the records themselves he will learn much from them that is not in print or otherwise available. By putting together the knowledge gained from all sources, he will be in a position to identify and interpret the many series and to give them an arrangement that is not only logical but revealing of an agency's history and accomplishments. His arrangement scheme should have two dimensions. It should not only present the series maintained by the agency at any given time but through time, whether it existed 10 years or 150 years.

This arrangement process is much easier to carry out if the archivist has seen the records in the agency before they are accessioned. Ideally, records should be taken directly from an agency's file room by the archivist as soon as they become inactive enough for transfer to the archives depository. Perhaps the agency has had a central file, but certain important exceptions to centralization have been allowed. Perhaps the agency has had a number of file rooms or filing stations reflecting major functions or organizational units. Perhaps general decentralization has been the practice if not the rule. Knowing how the agency grouped its records is always helpful because the original groupings should be reflected in the final ar-

rangement. It is less possible in these days of intermediate records centers for the archivist to see this picture. Nor is it possible to any extent with respect to the older records of agencies that existed for decades before the archival depository was established. These agencies may have moved their inactive records from building to building innumerable times before relinquishing them to the archives depository, each time further confusing any arrangement the records may have had when they were active and growing files. Even so, however, the archivist's opportunity to inspect the older records in attics or other places of storage, especially if they were still in their original containers with original labels, may have taught him much about them. In this sense arrangement begins before accessioning, and knowledge gained at this stage should be reflected so far as possible in the inventory prepared at the time of accessioning. The archivist who has had a share in the accessioning process always has a head start in arrangement if he can carry through in an advisory or supervisory capacity until the records are on the shelves.

The next step is the identification of the different series that must be assigned an order. This brings us to the definition of the word "series," one of the basic technical terms in the archivist's vocabulary. Until an archivist understands this term and is able to recognize a series, he should not undertake arrangement work on this level.

A true series is composed of similar filing units arranged in a consistent pattern within which each of the filing units has it proper place. The series has a beginning and it has an end, and everything between has a certain relationship. The pattern may be a simple one—alphabetical, numerical, or chronological—or a complex one, as, for example, annual reports arranged first by years, then by States, and then by counties within States. This may be complicated further by an agency's practice of filing reports of State officials in a certain order at the State level and of county officials in a like established order under each county. Such a filing pattern may be followed year after year until the records fill several thousand feet of shelving, but no matter how complex the pattern, so long as that pattern is being repeated, we still have a single series. Another series may consist of only a few feet of reports relating to Territories in a somewhat different arrangement. The boundaries of these true series are never difficult to determine; gaps and disarrangements are easily recognized.

There will occasionally be a series made up of only one file unit. Perhaps this is more often true of book records, as when some

special record has been maintained in a single volume that has no successor. "Series" may not seem to be the proper word in such cases unless one thinks of the item as the beginning of an intended series that did not advance beyond the first unit. In a short-lived agency there may be many such series. It might seem that a number of these one-volume series could be brought together at the end of the record group, but this would be the equivalent of giving up in determining their proper location. They would not belong together unless they had a common provenance. Instead they might belong properly in widely separated parts of the record group, some of them perhaps between series of unbound papers that they might help to elucidate.

There will also be cases where no discernible pattern seems to exist for certain groupings of documents although a subject or transaction relationship is obvious. Often one really has just an accumulation or aggregation of documents relating to some matter because, apparently, the agency did not take the time to rationalize their arrangement. These accumulations can hardly be called "series" in the strict sense of the word, but arbitrarily we treat them as such—just as we are somewhat arbitrary about what constitutes a record group. They represent a block of material that has to be assigned a place in the arrangement. There is no succession of file units and therefore no obvious beginning or end, so that the special problem for this type of series is to determine its boundaries. One has to look for the common denominator in subject or provenance that separates this accumulation from other true or artificial series. Perhaps these papers or other materials were collected by some investigator because they were useful in a special matter he was handling. Perhaps they related to some special operation that came to a sudden end. Whatever their history and purpose, they must be identified by their boundaries and kept separate if they ever are to be understood and assigned their places in relation to the whole.

The different series, once they are identified, are the elements of the record group that at this level of arrangement are to be given a meaningful physical order that will later be reflected in the order of inventory entries on paper. Indeed, the entries of an inventory (which are the series) are probably at this stage on paper in the form of cards or slips that can be shuffled as the arrangement is being worked out.

Although the record groups and subgroups should have been established and their order decided upon at the second level of arrangement, the final allocation of series to subgroups (if not re-

allocation to other record groups) may have to await the detailed identification of series that comes at the third level of arrangement. Once all series are assigned to record groups and subgroups so that the boundaries of these are finally certain, the archivist looks within the group or subgroup and works out a logical arrangement sequence for the series so assigned.

It must be admitted that there is no one perfect arrangement sequence for series. Considerable variation is possible in any large record group, and no two archivists, no matter how experienced, would make the same decisions. But there are better arrangements and poorer arrangements, and the poorer one must be wrestled with until it is acceptable.

Arrangement of series is a relatively simple task if the records are the creation of a small, unified agency. Such a record group or subgroup, therefore, may be assigned to a younger archivist for training purposes. He will draw upon a few accepted principles such as the Dutch rule giving precedence to the correspondence series unless there happens to be a "backbone" series from which all else depends. Indexes and other agency-created finding aids usually precede the series they index. Facilitating and housekeeping records, if preserved, usually come last. In between, functions and the sequence of action within functions may govern the grouping of series. In larger record groups the series may be grouped according to chronological periods, by major breaks in the filing systems, or on a functional basis, and these groupings become also major divisions or breakdowns of the resulting inventory.

In most record groups of any age and size, however, there are almost certain to be many complicating factors. These may be caused by (1) changes in the organization; (2) changes in the functions; (3) changes in the filing schemes; (4) the existence of records from one or more predecessor agencies that have not been, or have been only partially, incorporated into records series created by the later agency; and (5) records that have been reclassified or otherwise reorganized for proper reasons, that have been incompletely reorganized (some ambitious scheme not carried through to completion), or that have been merely tampered with by would-be "methodizers" before being transferred to the archives depository.

The Dutch manual gives rules for dealing with these and many other complications that cannot be presented here. Although younger archivists with some experience can identify series in complicated record groups as well as they can in simpler ones, it is necessary

usually for a more experienced archivist to take over and work out a rational arrangement. A person with experience can be expected not only to do a better job but to do it faster. It is a waste of time and money to employ a worker of too low a grade for arrangement work at this level. The arrangement finally decided upon should be approved by the division or branch chief having responsibility for the record group.

Arrangement of Filing Units Within Series

Although filing units within series may be single documents or single documents with enclosures and annexes, they are more likely to be assemblages of documents relating to some transaction, person, case, or subject, depending upon the filing policy or system used by the agency. The filing policy, in turn, is likely to be conditioned by the nature of the agency's operations. In the past these filing units were usually controlled in a system of registers and indexes that tied the whole body together in intricate but orderly fashion; and efficient servicing of the records now, as then, is dependent generally upon keeping the body in the same order so that all the contemporary finding aids remain valid as guides. These registry systems continue to be used, notably in the courts and regulatory agencies and in many other agencies that operate largely upon a case or project system. In still other agencies, however, they have been superseded by classified files without registry controls or with partial registry controls. In these modern instances the registry numbers do not control the filing order. Instead the filing units are the folders established for the classes of the classification scheme. All sorts of combinations may be encountered.

Arrangement work at this level, obviously, is not original arrangement; it is rather a simple but time-consuming checking operation to verify the original order and correct obvious displacements that have taken place over the years. It is necessary for efficient and certain reference service. No archivist has control over his records without it, and delay can soon cost more time, if the records are at all active, than is required to carry it out immediately after accessioning. Moreover, it is best done in connection with boxing and labeling. This is not to say that if a record group is without immediate importance from the point of view of service, or if it is never likely to be very active, such arrangement cannot be delayed or even dispensed with: when a decision such as this is made the records are boxed and labeled without close checking. Although nothing is so lost as a misplaced file, one can delay file unit checking

until it can be seen that the records are active enough to justify the work. The highly active series in a record group should receive the more careful checking. These decisions, including the determination of priorities, should be made by branch chiefs on the basis of recommendations of their experienced professional assistants.

If the series is composed of numbered or lettered volumes, nothing is simpler than to arrange these in sequence on the shelves. It can be done by a laborer once the place for them is decided upon. Only when backstrip or other identification marks are missing, so that one must determine sequence from internal evidence, need an archivist or subprofessional employee, depending upon the complexity of the problem, be called upon. The alphabetical, numerical, or otherwise designated files (fastened together by various devices) or the folders containing loose papers are lined up and checked for order and completeness as they are placed in archives boxes, and a box list is prepared for labeling purposes. This becomes more than a routine job only if the agency's filing system is complicated or if an apparent arrangement has been disturbed intentionally or through accident or neglect. Inadvertent irregularities may call for considerable detective work in the records themselves and in outside sources to arrive at the explanation. Only when the facts are known can the archivists decide whether to allow space for what appears to be missing or whether to leave what appears to be an alien intrusion where he finds it. Some checking for irregularities can be done by the more intelligent and careful laborers and certainly by subprofessional personnel. It is more efficiently and reliably done by the latter if filing systems are complicated, for there are more elements to be watched. Perhaps three-fourths of the arrangement work on this level can be done by experienced subprofessionals; the degree of experience needed depends on the complexity of the filing system.

Frequently this level of arrangement calls for the integration of files drawn from different chronological blocks. The central files of an agency may have been accessioned in three chronological blocks —for example, 1905-10, 1911-15, and 1916-20—with so much overlapping that they cannot be serviced efficiently. Maintained originally in the agency as one series, they had been arbitrarily broken into period blocks, as the older files became less active, to facilitate interim storage in a records center. Now, permanent storage and frequent use for research call for restoring the records to their original order. As this is done certain categories that can be disposed of are dropped out; in other words, three or four tasks

can be performed simultaneously. Ideally, so that the records can be shelved to stay, everything that has to be done to a series should be done in one multiple-purpose operation before it is boxed and labeled. Nothing is more wasteful than to have to go over and over the same records because all operations were not planned and carried through at once. Such multiple-purpose arrangement projects require at least subprofessional personnel of higher grades or professional workers in the beginning grades.

In many record groups there are rats' nests of bundles, irregularly sized papers, or other groupings that appear never to have been incorporated into systematically arranged and controlled series or that have been pulled out of such series for forgotten purposes and never put back, perhaps because a file clerk did not know where they belonged. The longer the records have remained in storage in attic or basement—so that over the years they have been serviced by many different persons, most of them unfamiliar with the old filing systems—the larger the rats' nests. Yet, they are often made up of fairly important records. Going through them calls for the skill of an archivist thoroughly familiar with not only the record group in question but also related record groups. Indeed, if the responsible person does not know the record group thoroughly, he had better keep away from the rat's nest. This is time-consuming arrangement work that must be done unless disorder is to be perpetuated, but is hardly ever done properly and efficiently by anyone but an experienced archivist of at least middle grade.

A final type of operation that may be encountered in the arrangement of file units is the deliberate reorganization of these units in cases where an arrangement different from the original one would seem to serve more efficiently to meet longterm reference demands. For example, an agency often lazily allows reports to pile up year after year, keeping those for each year together in some repetitive pattern, arranged perhaps alphabetically by jurisdiction. In reference service, however, the reports will almost always be called for by jurisdiction, which means that the archivist must draw them from as many places as there may be years involved. It is a relatively simple job to reorder the reports so that all for a jurisdiction are together in sequence. This is physical rearrangement, of course, but it is the simplest sort of rearrangement and does not really violate the integrity of the files. It can be entrusted to subprofessional personnel under proper supervision.

More complicated reorganizations may be decided upon if records have been so badly disarranged that the original organization

cannot be fully restored with confidence unless excessive time is spent in research. One does not decide lightly to reorganize a series completely, for in the end the work can prove to be more difficult than expected. It is not easy to devise a new scheme; the records will not fit into any scheme of reorganization as well as they fitted into the original scheme; and they will not be the same body of records when so reordered even though all the documents have been worked into a new arrangement. In cases where an agency has allowed records to accumulate without organization, the archivist must decide whether to leave the records in this disorganized state (which he probably will do if they are not in much demand) or to devise an organization for them. Usually these are short series and the organization can be relatively simple; for example, chronological, alphabetical, or by personal name. Some organization is prerequisite if the records are to be microfilmed. The planning of such organization or reorganization must be by professional archivists of high grade and much experience. It may be carried out by middle-grade archivists working under supervision.

It is obvious that arrangement work on the level involving filing units is of various grades of difficulty and calls for the time of personnel of various grades from that of literate laborers through the subprofessional grades, and from the lower professional grades up to the middle grades. A professional archivist must supervise arrangement work performed by workers of any grade in the sense of spot checking, being present to answer questions, investigating gaps and irregularities, making decisions on whether to go ahead despite irregularities, bringing larger matters to the attention of his superiors, and the like. Planning and supervising arrangement on this level is work of considerable complexity and responsibility and should be done by middle-grade archivists and above. Finally, such projects before their inauguration should be approved by senior archivists and even division chiefs, depending on the amount of equipment and manpower involved or the lack of guiding precedent.

Arrangement of Documents Within File Units

A bound volume may contain many individual documents, but their arrangement was fixed at the time of recording; they cannot get out of order, nor can their order be altered. Loose papers are a different matter. Many ways have been tried over the years to keep related papers of a file unit together and in some kind of order, but none is entirely satisfactory. In the days before flat files, order was maintained by folding papers together. Modern ways to

preserve the order involve the use of paper clips, wire staples, or rivets—the two last in connection with cover and backing sheets—or of folders and metal fasteners of various kinds within folders. In the days of folded records—roughly before World War I—enclosures were folded within the covering letters, and enclosures often had enclosures folded within them. A letter of transmittal might cover many enclosures, some of which had their own enclosures. This was true especially of legal records, vouchers, and reports. When records such as these are flattened, considerable ingenuity, careful checking, and use of folders or envelopes are all necessary to ensure that the proper documents are kept together and their relationships thus preserved. An archivist is likely to develop considerable admiration for the old system of folded records and the revealing endorsements on the middle fold, and he is not likely to want to unfold them permanently until the physical condition of the records requires that he do so. Increased handling to find and scrutinize flattened endorsements can result in more rapid deterioration than if the records had been left unflattened.

It is partly in connection with the flattening of records, then, that one is required to ensure that proper documents and individual sheets of paper are kept together and in a consistent order.

The other major process requiring arrangement within the file unit and down to the individual document is in connection with microfilming. There is an increasing amount of this these days as (1) scholars blithely order hundreds of dollars worth of film of records they have not seen, (2) we are trying to include more and more of our best and most valuable records in microfilm publications, and (3) we are filming vast quantities of records either with a view of destroying the originals or, contrariwise, to preserve them by encouraging the use of microfilm rather than of originals. One using film instead of originals suffers under many handicaps at best, and if the records are not in perfect order and filmed in a consistent manner—so that endorsements come first, for example, and enclosures are in their proper order and all sheets of a multipaged document are in order—the film becomes unusable and therefore useless. There are many instances of film made but never used in government agencies because the records were not carefully arranged beforehand.

One does not normally go within folders or cases to arrange original documents if they are going to be retained and used in their original form. If there is disorder, one can usually see by size or color of sheets which ones belong together and can, if he is in-

terested in those particular records, puzzle out their arrangement more quickly and confidently than he could if they had been placed on microfilm in the same disorder.

Arrangement on this lowest level, then, is done chiefly in connection with flattening and microfilming (often both at once). It can be done by experienced subprofessional employees, or by lower grade—that is, less experienced—professional workers. It is usually a good task for a beginner because it familiarizes him with filing methods and the contents of files at the same time. Always a more experienced archivist should be on hand as supervisor, to answer questions and to iron out complications. Often arrangement of file units and individual documents is performed simultaneously, especially when records are being prepared for microfilming. This usually saves time and labor, but, insofar as the process becomes more complicated, a person of higher grade may be required. If the filing unit is the document, which happens in some files, arrangement on the file unit level and on the document level becomes one and the same job, usually a relatively simple one.

Boxing, Shelving, and Labeling

The five levels of arrangement described above have to do with the analysis and identification of records and with checking them to determine their proper arrangement. Presumably the decisions have been made and recorded on paper or are otherwise well understood. We have now to discuss the execution of the decisions. This can be done in relatively quick time by laborers, typists, and lower grade subprofessional personnel operating under higher grade subprofessional or professional supervision, depending on the complexity of the job. Usually the professional personnel responsible for decisions on arrangement should supervise their execution, lest time be wasted in identifying subgroups and series and determining their boundaries all over again. Checking arrangement on the file unit level and boxing the series can proceed with one crew while the supervisor works on the overall arrangement of the series. The shelving of the boxed series in the determined order is then the last operation except for typing and affixing the labels.

Boxing

Normally only loose papers are "boxed," that is, put into archival containers that afterwards are placed on shelves. In transferring a file to these containers, one tries to divide it at natural breaks (between file units if possible) and yet not to pack the box so tightly that records cannot be withdrawn or inserted without damage or

so loosely that papers slump and bend and space is wasted. One checks the arrangement of the file units placed in the box and writes down the necessary data, usually the beginning and ending file numbers, for the label. Efforts are made to end a series in one box, without a waste of space, and to begin a new series in a new box. Unless the order of series has been worked out ahead of time with finality and the series are boxed in order, these boxed series will, of course, be given only temporary positions on the shelves. Only with smaller and simpler record groups or accessions is it likely that everything can be ready for shelving at once. Boxing can be the work of high-grade laborers or subprofessional employees. Professional personnel is rarely needed unless complicated arrangement work is being done at the same time and is really the controlling operation, of which the boxing is an inconsequential part.

Shelving

Both boxes containing loose papers and bound volumes must be shelved. When the arrangement of their contents has been finished, the boxes can be shelved by laborers in locations and in the order, so far as series are concerned, that professional archivists have determined. This is largely a physical operation. The shelving of volumes, especially if they are of all sizes, is more complicated. Although it will be done with the aid of laborers, it will have to be closely supervised by professionals or experienced subprofessionals unless there are long runs of volumes, well labeled and of uniform size, to be set on the shelves. The supervisor should decide whether volumes are too large or too poorly bound to stand vertically on shelves. He must watch the order very closely if there are many series of a few volumes or of one volume each. He must approve any shelving of volumes out of order, deciding when enough space can be saved thereby to warrant it, or when the condition of the volumes demands it, or perhaps when the leaving of indexes and registers out of sequence so that they can be placed near desks or made available to searchers in a searchroom is desirable to save time or to permit a degree of self-service. These irregularities in the established order should be signaled by cross-references in the proper places.

Labeling

Labeling is of two kinds: (1) of the containers and (2) of row ends in the stack areas after the shelving has been completed. The container labeling usually comes first. Lists of box contents should have been made up at the time of boxing. A container label must

show the name and number of the record group, the name of any subgroup, the name of the series, and the particular contents of the box. It should also bear a number to show the place of the box in the record group or subgroup or at least in the series sequence. The first two or three elements, if they extend over a hundred containers or more, should be typed on stencils so that the labels can be processed in sheets; if this is done, only the contents of the individual boxes will need to be typed on individual labels. Sometimes there will be no subgroup. If a subgroup is well known, there need be shown only the number of the record group of which it is a part. Row-end labels must be typed in full, since each one varies so much in wording. Labels can be worked out by lower grade professional personnel or higher grade subprofessional personnel, but they should be reviewed by higher grade professionals before time is wasted in processing and typing. The affixing of the labels can be done by literate and careful laborers if work is reviewed by high-grade subprofessionals or low-grade professionals. The assignment of the lower or higher grade worker is determined by the complexity of the job.

There are of course reboxing, and reshelving, and relabeling jobs that follow after the internal disposal of accessioned material in order to consolidate the space gained by such disposal. They can be handled by the same grades of personnel that handled the original jobs of this nature. Occasionally there are major reshiftings of holdings as a record group or several of them are assigned to different areas. Such shiftings afford the opportunity to improve arrangement and correct any errors that may have been made originally. The planning of such a shift in order to get the most out of the available space in the new areas is usually work of professional level, but the execution can be by laborers and supervision by experienced subprofessional personnel.

Reporting Arrangement Results in Writing

For each level of arrangement except the lowest, there is likely to result some kind of archival instrument:

1. Depository level—an administrative issuance.

2. Record group level—a record group registration statement or summary for each established record group.

3. Series level—an inventory of the record group in which each series appears as a numbered entry.

4. Filing unit level—checklists of filing units for important series. These checklists are sometimes, for very long and important series, offered as separate

documents, but more often they are presented as appendixes to inventories of the record groups. Very short series and series of lesser importance are deemed sufficiently accounted for in the inventory itself.

On the document level a written statement is not normally produced to reflect arrangement.

Most of these archival instruments serve a double purpose in that, although really produced as control documents to account for the holdings and show their arangement, they serve also as finding aids. In one sense the depository-level document might be said to tell a searcher which way to turn when he enters the depository, the record group statement tells him which threshold to cross, the inventory tells him in which part of the room to look, and the filing-unit list tells him which unit to take off the shelf as likely to contain the document or documents he wishes to see. The searcher will not take these steps except in imagination as he consults the finding-aid documents, but some member of the archives staff must take them physically if the documents are to be made available to the searcher in a central searchroom.

It will be seen that with respect to finding-aid documents that reflect arrangement, which we may designate as primary finding aids, the real work involved is determining the arrangement. Presenting that arrangement in writing afterwards is a subsidiary activity. There are, of course, archival finding aids that do not follow the arrangement pattern of the records but cut across these patterns in index fashion. These may be designated as secondary finding aids. They must come later because established units of arrangement with fixed designations must first exist to which units of entry in secondary finding aids can refer. Thus, arrangement is the basic internal activity of an archival establishment. All other internal activities depend upon its proper accomplishment.