

Toronto's Venture Into Paperwork Control and Orderliness

By A. R. N. WOADDEN*

City of Toronto

THE municipality of Toronto has existed as a corporate body since 1834, but not until 1960 was a municipal records program formalized. The Records Unit created in that year operates under an Archivist, who is responsible to the city clerk for the following duties:

1. To supervise the personnel of the Records Unit.
2. To establish and maintain, in collaboration with other civic departments, records retention and destruction policies and procedures and to determine with respect to records: (a) where they will be kept; (b) how they will be kept; (c) if they can be destroyed; (d) when they can be destroyed; (e) how they will be destroyed; (f) who may refer to them; and (g) what procedures will be followed in issuing them from, and ensuring their return to, their repositories.
3. To maintain a complete cross-referenced index of all records maintained by the city, indicating their physical location.
4. To maintain a records storage unit or archives in which will be kept: (a) all noncurrent records not required in the operation of civic departments until they are destroyed or permanently stored; (b) records that are to be permanently stored; and (c) records of historical value.
5. To prepare, in conjunction with the Organization and Methods Division, a manual of policies, procedures, and methods of records management for distribution to all departments.

What has been done to meet this variety of requirements? A system of scheduling records has been developed after a survey of records maintained in each department. The schedule tells what records there are; it allows us to know their function in the organization; and it lets us document the location of any inactive part of them. In addition we are informed of the suggested retention periods—for current files and for inactive files—during which the department considers its records to have a functional value.

*The author was appointed City Archivist of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1960. Born and educated in England, Mr. Woadden served in the Royal Navy during World War II and after the war studied librarianship under Roy Stokes at Loughborough College. He served as deputy to the town librarian of Dover, Kent, during the reconstruction period of Dover's library services. Mr. Woadden emigrated to Canada in 1956.

Some most important considerations condition the use to which this information is put. For example, departments must have a say in the retention periods, method of disposal, and so forth; the retention committee consisting of the city solicitor, city auditor, city clerk, finance commissioner, and Archivist must relate the suggested retention periods to the needs of law, audit, city council, and history; the board of control and the city council must approve the decision of the retention committee; and the Department of Municipal Affairs of the Provincial Government of Ontario must approve the destruction of any records created by the municipality.

A classification scheme of all subjects dealt with by the city has been constructed to allow the nonphysical bringing together of similar and related materials. An indexing system has been started to provide untrained staff members with ready means to know the name of every type of record that the city produces, who produces it, and how it is classified. A most important procedure in these early, formative stages has been the regular meeting of the retention committee to process decisions on record retention periods for transmittal to the board of control, the city council, and the Provincial Department of Municipal Affairs. City departments are told how and when to transfer their records, depending upon the format of the record and the retention periods agreed upon. They are also instructed to send certain records to the archives—as distinct from records storage—even though these records may have been earmarked for destruction as functionally useless. These instructions are part of an operations manual dealing with records management practices. The manual also explains terminology of records management, reasons for certain procedures, and basic steps necessary for complete integration of a department's records into the records management program.

At this juncture it would probably be well to discuss several of the obstacles still in the way. Readers can best understand the major hurdle by realizing that not only can nothing be destroyed by a municipality without Provincial approval, but that—at present—approval will be given only to destroy records covering a specified number of years, and then only after clearance has been obtained from every Provincial department that might have an interest in them. This situation is under review by the Provincial Government, and it is anticipated that changes will permit a records retention program to become an effective operation.

The city government is also on the threshold of a move to new quarters, and equipment expenses, quite naturally, must be kept to

a minimum. Many records of inactive nature are at present under the control of individual departments and in many locations. That control and storage will be centralized in the new hall. Present location methods, crude as they seem, have to be maintained, while at the same time provision must be made for transfer to the new hall and to new locations in that hall.

Results of this limited program have thus far been encouraging in at least two ways. Departments' realization that some of their records do not need to be maintained in inactive storage for long periods of time will result in future space saving. Current files are being diminished quite appreciably in many areas with no adverse effect on efficiency of operation. Inactive records that have come under Records Unit control are speedily accessible. The time-saving factor produces two results: the time of departmental employees is put to more advantageous use, and the speedier retrieval of records and information brings with it more confidence in records management in general and the Records Unit in particular.

What is most encouraging is that the former disconcerted approach to records disposal is gradually giving way to a more logical and well-founded approach. Controlled disposal—when 100 percent program effectiveness has been reached—will mean that no more records are held than should or need be, and that archival material will flow automatically to its proper destination.

Areas for future coverage are part of long range planning, but some of our more immediate objects are:

1. To analyze use of the records held in inactive areas frequently so that retention periods can be adjusted to meet changing needs.
2. In cooperation with the Methods and Organization Division to penetrate more deeply into control of records at the source rather than control after creation.
3. To promote the use of standardized basic procedures being developed by another city division.
4. To nurture a disaster or security program for vital records. (This is the only area in which microfilm may play a part.)
5. To modernize our approach to records management to take into account the increasing incursion of automatic data processing into city administration.

It is hoped that we shall be in a position to bind materials economically that are to be stored for a fairly long period; in such a form, records need not be placed in containers, can stand alone on shelving, are more readily available, and are neater in appearance. Destruction of some materials by shredding as well as salvage of dis-

posable records on a revenue-producing basis will also be considered.

In the final analysis of our venture it can be said that we have laid the foundations and are now custom-building an operation to fit Toronto's needs—and Toronto's needs alone.

Shoot To Kill

SMALLER WAR PLANTS CORPORATION
Washington, D. C.
March 24, 1944

TO : Everybody in Smaller War Plants Corporation

FROM : Maury Maverick, Chairman & General Manager

SUBJECT: Lengthy Memoranda and Gobbledygook Language.
Be short and use Plain English

Memoranda should be as short as clearness will allow. The Naval officer who wired "Sighted Sub—Sank Same" told the whole story.

Put the real subject matter—the *point*—and even the conclusion, in the opening paragraph and the whole story on one page. Period! If a lengthy explanation, statistical matter, or such is necessary, use attachments.

Stay off gobbledygook language. It only fouls people up. For the Lord's sake, be short and say what you're talking about. Let's stop "pointing-up" programs, "finalizing" contracts that "stem from" district, regional or Washington "levels." There are no "levels"—local government is as high as Washington Government. No more patterns, effectuating, dynamics. Anyone using the words "activation" or "implementation" will be shot.

—MEMORANDUM in records of the Smaller War Plants Corporation, National Archives, Record Group 240. Kay Davidson provided us a copy of this memorandum and informed us that it is "the famous one in which Maury Maverick is supposed to have coined the word gobbledygook."