

Commercial and Industrial Archives in Denmark

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THE title of this essay may cause eyebrows to rise in some quarters, but the term business records, used in the U.S.A. for the materials here considered, is generally too narrow. So is the Danish word *erhverv*, used as the name of Denmark's unique state-owned institution in Aarhus (Jylland)—the subject of this article. Any institution in functional contact with its human environment, even an educational institution, accumulates some of the records kept by any enterprise, whether it manufactures, manipulates, ameliorates, or utilizes in any way raw materials or others' goods to transform them into products of its own making, or whether it acquires such products only to resell them. In many cases the producer sells his own product; certainly in his case one may not speak of business records alone, in the sense of those of a merely distributive trade. The German word *Wirtschaft* and the Swedish term *näringsliv* are similarly limited, though they probably have a little more scope than the Danish and English terms mentioned. There is good reason to work towards unequivocal terminology in all areas of scholarship and science; the "idealist" will continue the trend toward such purification for esthetic and ethical reasons, as of old; the rest of us will have to yield to the demands of the computers, who perhaps know not beauty and goodness, but certainly know the truth.

There is, of course, always good reason to compare notes with men anywhere doing the same thing; and there are, in our jet age, many more opportunities to do this, almost from day to day. Which explains the sketch presented here to typify a relatively new and rather underdeveloped area—industrial and commercial archives. The writer undertook to expose himself, incidental to his attendance at the archival convention in Brussels during August 1964, to some of the institutions in Northern Europe dedicated to (1) the collection and interpretation of the materials originating as byproducts of human effort in all sorts of individual, corporate, and collective ventures to transform the physical world and (2) making a living or

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gain by doing so. He attempted to be a purely empirical observer and is painfully aware of his shortcomings in employing his five senses or whatever number are available for doing an honest job.

THE BACKGROUND IN EUROPE

In 1902 a disaster of titanic proportions struck the world of scholars, when the House of Rothschild was reported to have destroyed its ancient records in Frankfurt am Main, Naples, and Paris. Soon it was found that only a few commercial enterprises were keeping their records beyond the time required by law (usually 10 years). Of nearly a hundred banks in the Rhineland only five had retained their archives; one even had had to recover those documenting its very foundations—from a secondhand bookshop!

This state of affairs, eventually, led to the realization that the only way to stop further losses was to create institutions expressly designed for collecting and interpreting these valuable sources of our common heritage. Commerce, industry, and historians cooperated in this endeavor. The first institution of this kind established was the Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftarchiv in Köln, initiated by the Handelskammer in Düsseldorf in 1906. Others followed. In 1908 the Zentralstelle des Hamburgischen Kolonialinstituts was founded, out of which grew the Hamburgische Weltwirtschaftsarchiv in 1912. During that same year special divisions for industrial and commercial archives were set up in the Institut für Weltwirtschaft und Seeverkehr in Kiel and in the Saarwirtschaftsarchiv in Saarbrücken. In 1910 the Schweizerische Wirtschaftsarchiv was established, at first as a division of the municipal archives; it became an independent organization, responsible to the Swiss Department of the Interior, in 1921. Finally, the Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief became a reality in 1914, developing an economic-historical library in Amsterdam, while a 3-story building was set aside in 's Gravenhage to house an archival collection.

In many other European countries commercial and industrial records are today collected more or less systematically by public archival offices, though the tendency to establish special institutions for such records is becoming more pronounced. This trend is certainly noticeable in Scandinavia.

ERHVERVSARKIVET IN AARHUS

Perhaps the most ideal scheme so far developed anywhere is the one in Denmark, namely, the Erhvervsarkiv in Aarhus, hereafter referred to as E.A. Discussions of the problem on a national level

(involving such men as National Archivist V. A. Secher, Provincial Archivist G. M. Hornemann in København, and Archivist, later himself National Archivist of Denmark, Axel Linvald) had begun before World War I. These discussions soon materialized in the deposit of commercial and industrial archives in a number of municipal and provincial archives as well as in the National Archives. In 1922 a Committee To Investigate Danish Private Sources for Danish History was formed under Aage Friis, with the sponsorship of Videnskabernes Selskab, the Danish Academy of Science. As a result of this committee's work the quantity of archives offered for deposit soon outstripped the storage space available in the public archives. In 1933 National Archivist Axel Linvald, in his "Danish Archival System," postulated either a substantial expansion of the National Archives to cope with the problem or a special archives establishment. At various times, such locations as Kronborg Castle or the existing Handels-og Søfarts-Museum were suggested as centers.

Support for Aarhus as a location grew among the men concerned with the development of the second Danish university in that city. Viborg, originally a contender for the university, had a vigorous provincial archives establishment among its attractions; this fact, among other reasons, suggested to the protagonists for Aarhus an additional argument for pushing E.A. in that city. Aarhus won out, with its many other cultural institutions such as a museum, a reconstructed medieval town within the city limits (*Den Gamle By*), an observatory, hospitals, the National Newspaper Collection, and the State Library, which soon was to become the State and University Library. It was quite natural that the availability of archives near the university should become a powerful argument for setting up the new institution in Aarhus. It would not only furnish valuable experience for the students of history, but generally it would add depth and breadth to the atmosphere of learning and scientific investigation. With wholehearted approval of the Danish archival community and of the Committee of the Academy of Sciences a Committee for the Establishment of Commercial and Industrial Archives in Aarhus constituted itself on July 1, 1942. E. Stecher-Christensen, the mayor of Aarhus, was the first chairman; the other seven members were Docent Adam Afzelius, Profs. C. O. Bøggild-Andersen, Aage Friis, and Thorkil Kristensen, National Archivist Axel Linvald, Prof. Jørgen Pedersen, and Overbibliotekar Emanuel Sejv of the State and University Library.

The committee decided to collect archives for a trial period,

these archives to be deposited in storage facilities set aside by the city of Aarhus in the City Hall and by the State and University Library in the building housing the National Newspaper Collection.

In 1948 it was decided that the trial period had proved the feasibility of erecting an independent E.A. By that time about 350 separate archival collections had been received, representing many different commercial and industrial undertakings whose activities extended from 1670 to 1947. Commerce and industry as well as agriculture and the trades were represented; metropolitan and rural areas and conditions were reflected in these records. The reception of the project in the business community was enthusiastic. Financial support had come increasingly from the state, the city of Aarhus, foundations, and private citizens and firms, promising a certain stability.

At a meeting of the E.A. Committee on June 4, 1948, it was decided to establish an independent E.A., subject to supervision by the National Archives. The statutes provided representation of the city of Aarhus and of the university on the governing board. Vagn Dybdahl was appointed as Archivist; he had participated in the committee sessions since 1942. The three history students, who had been hired during the trial period for routine work on the deposits under supervision of the National Archives, were increased to four. (Museum inspector Helge Søggaard had acted as secretary for the committee during the trial period.)

The acquisition of collections took place in various ways, all of which have been practiced to this day: some were sent in upon distribution of a circular, others were turned over after personal contact, while still others seem to have come quite unsolicited. A single, particularly well preserved collection of the United Brethren in Christiansfeld was purchased from a dealer for 20 øre per kg.; it is practically complete for the period from 1771 to 1911. A large number of deposits came from the provincial archives, byproducts of court proceedings in connection with bankruptcies and wills. The importance of these last records is partly owing to the fact that so many small businesses and shops of earlier days are represented; their records, dating from 1730, would otherwise not have been obtained.

E.A. considers that its job is to preserve archives of economic and social importance, if not of public origin. Insofar as is possible and desirable, all archives are preserved as wholes. If a man's activities have been primarily in connection with commerce or industry, his archives belong in E.A., even if he has performed functions in other areas—in public office, for instance, or in politics. There are, as a consequence, materials in E.A. dealing with poetical, re-

ligious, literary, and many other subjects. At the time of the delivery the owner of the records determines whether access to them should be restricted and, if so, in what way. Some owners desire that each request for use be cleared with them.

It must be emphasized that Denmark as a whole is the object of the work of E.A. The country is small enough so that there is a close relationship between capital and province and between the various areas. It will be of greatest value to most investigators to have the materials collected in a central location. One of the chief characteristics of these private archives, especially of the large nationwide organizations such as the Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening and the Industriråd, is that they can furnish valuable organizational data, viewpoints, and arguments complementary to the official records deposited in the National Archives nearby.

The decade and a half following the founding of E.A. has as a whole been one of steadily greater projection of the young institution into the national cultural scene: it has proceeded on its chartered course more firmly and with continually greater approval by all segments of the society it seeks to serve. That this is so is evident from the situation in which we find it today. The progress to this point of relative affluence and security is marked by a steady display of effective performance on the part of the Archivist, who does not let himself be discouraged by meager funds, insufficient staff, and inadequate space, especially storage space.

The establishment of E.A. in June 1948 was followed by nearly 15 years of valiant effort to do a job well understood, against great odds. Slight improvements enabled the institution to show that its optimal functional frame could only be foreshadowed. The moves into other locations—in 1950 into half a dozen rooms in several stories of two separate buildings of the university and in 1957 into the municipally owned former Aarhus-Hammel Railroad Station, which was soon to be doomed in favor of a highway—were make-shifts in every way, though the use made of the premises commands the highest admiration. Each move was followed by a brief spurt of enthusiasm, expressing itself in greater acquisitions but soon to be replaced by another period of enforced retardation. A second archivist, Finn H. Lauridsen, had been appointed in 1951; clerical help and the number of student assistants were increased slightly, but the staff was never large enough to cope with the backlog. The moves consumed much time and effort; the second one, for instance, required more than 9 months for readjustment.

The annual accessions to the archival collections and the growth of the reference library since 1950 are shown in the following table,

which was constructed from the excellent reports printed every year in the valuable series entitled *Erhvervshistorisk Aarbog*, 1949 to date.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Volumes and packages deposited</i>	<i>Volumes added to Reference Collection</i>
1951	7,598	
1952	3,334	850
1953	4,790	1,596
1954	6,065	1,280
1955	2,000	475
1956	1,600	835
1957	4,000	1,193
1958	2,800	1,133
1959	4,700	961
1960	3,100	1,015
1961 }	3,754	1,455
1962 }		
1963	1,381	991
1964	8,780	2,843
<i>Totals</i>	53,902	14,627

The accession figures reflect the fluctuating storage situation from year to year. They show only the annual deposits and additions since 1950, and the totals do not represent the complete holdings. Dr. Dybdahl reported in October 1964 that E.A. had at that time deposits from 71 organizations (such as Industrirådet, Arbejdsgiverforeningen, and Landbrugsrådet) and of 2,000 to 3,000 private firms. The aggregate of all archives in E.A. at the same time was reported to be 7,500 running meters.

The reference collection resulted largely from donations made by national and international institutions, government offices, firms, and individuals. Only with the beginning of the new era in 1963-64 could additions apparently be made in a more systematic way; this development is reflected by the accessions figure for reference books, the largest so far.

This new era was ushered in with the passing of a bill by the Folketing on May 25, 1962, which was signed into law on June 16, 1962. This law designates E.A. as an archival institution of the state to pursue the goals and activities heretofore pursued. The governing board consists of two representatives of the university

and two of the commercial-industrial community. These four are appointed by the Minister of Cultural Affairs, who may appoint two more members after the board has been organized. The National Archivist is an ex officio member.

The new status coincided with and resulted in immediate relief in all directions: two more archivists were appointed to make a staff of four archival experts, and two general service men and one full-time clerk were added. For renovation of the building 577,885 DKr. was set aside, to be spent during the 2 years following the move. This work was well underway in the summer of 1964 and had already produced the following improvements: a reading room, a mailing room, a clerical office, a room for each of the four archivists, a renovated lunchroom, toilets, cloakrooms, and work space for receiving, sorting, and packing.



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