

Records and Archives of the Professions

By ROBERT G. BALLENTINE

Department of the Army

THE Committee on the Archives of the Professions, established as a working organization by the Council of the Society of American Archivists in the summer of 1962, developed as its initial objective an inquiry into the status of the records and archives of professional associations.¹ The medium chosen to acquire this information was the questionnaire. But first, three questions had to be resolved: (1) What is a professional association, *i.e.*, what limitations should be imposed on circularization of questionnaires? (2) Within the imposed limitations, to what depth should the inquiries be made? (3) What did we want to find out?

The committee defined "professional" and "learned" associations, for its purpose, as associations arising from the recognized academic disciplines and the traditional technical and scientific arts, such as engineering, architecture, and medicine. On practical grounds it set limits of at least 300 and at most 500 associations to be questioned; it also confined the questionnaire to national rather than local or regional associations and, with exceptions, to the broader disciplines or arts in contrast to the more specialized.² Excluded as far as possible were associations engaged in or fostering research or development for trade or industry, associations whose objective was primarily the motivation or fostering of social or political objectives (however worthy they might be), and small or recently established associations unless concerned with some very significant professional activity. Among the latter are, for example, the Association for Applied Solar Energy, the Society for Ethnomusicology, the Institute of Environmental Sciences, and the American Nuclear Society. The number of organizations finally

The author is staff archivist of the Records Management Division of The Adjutant General's Office, Department of the Army.

¹ The members of the committee other than the author, who is chairman of the committee, are: Warren Albert, Elizabeth B. Drewry, Philip M. Hamer, Mabel Lee, Paul Lewinson, and Leonard A. Rapport. All members of the committee have contributed their thoughts to this report, especially Paul Lewinson, the former chairman.

² *Encyclopedia of Associations*, 3d ed., vol. 1, *National Organizations of the United States* (Detroit, Gale Research Company, 1961), provided the names of associations from which to make the selections.

selected—214—was, because of these exclusions, rather less than the goal of 300 set as a preliminary goal.³

The questionnaire was developed, completed in final form, and sent out in July 1964. It was designed to develop three types of information about the documentary materials of its recipients: (1) their type and their quantity; (2) their usual forms of organization; and (3) the files management practices applied to them. More precisely, the questions were phrased to elicit information about: (1) the nature (or at least the title) of separately identifiable file series maintained; (2) the special types of file series, separately maintained, that are characteristic of professional associations; and (3) the kinds of material—whether of historical significance or of a housekeeping nature—maintained in general or subject files. These substantive inquiries were supplemented by general questions on file practices: *i.e.*, is there a plan for cutting files off for destruction or setting them aside for an archives; is there a practice of sending materials to a library or archival institution; are documentary materials transferred to other associations or institutions; has a history been written of the association or, if not, is one contemplated? And always, the archivist wants to know, has there been any loss of significant documentary materials through fire or other mishap?

From the 214 associations queried, 81 responses were received; for the most part these were completed questionnaires, in some cases letter replies. All the returns, with nine exceptions,⁴ were responsive and many were highly informative; most expressed an interest in receiving a copy of the committee's report. Surprisingly, several associations that did not want copies of the report sent in carefully completed questionnaires.

First it may be well to get some picture of the volume of materials accumulated by the professional associations, as a general orientation to the more specific data discussed below. In this connection, while there is general similarity in the types of records on hand, there is also considerable diversity in the organization of materials, and this is undoubtedly related to the volume on hand.

A considerable spread in the volume was reported, ranging from over 1,000 linear feet of records in organizations such as the Amer-

³ Using the classification of associations in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* the number selected by class were as follows: agricultural and horticultural, 8; governmental, public administration, military, and legal, 14; scientific, engineering, and technical, 96; educational and cultural, 68; social welfare, 4; and health and medical, 24.

⁴ Four questionnaires and five letters contained negligible information.

ican Institute of Biological Sciences, the American Osteopathic Association, and the American Medical Association,⁵ to less than one or two file cabinets of material in such associations as the American Farm Economic Association, the Society of Protozoologists, the Population Association of America, the Paleontological Society, the American Society of Parasitologists, the American Ethnological Society, the History of Science Society, and the Botanical Society of America. Many of the associations with few records have no permanent central headquarters. The quantitative picture is as follows: (1) slightly fewer than one-fourth of the associations had over 150 linear feet of files; (2) about one-fourth had less than 150 feet but more than 50 feet; and (3) half had less than 50 feet. To put it differently and somewhat more graphically, 25 percent of the associations had files that would require more than 25 file cabinets; 25 percent, 10 to 25 file cabinets; and 50 percent, fewer than 10 file cabinets.⁶

Insofar as relatively precise data were given, certain kinds of records were found to recur with some frequency. Briefly defined, these are: (1) board of directors' records, *i.e.*, records of the governing boards, such as a board of directors, council, executive committee, or comparable element, which may include such items as minutes of meetings and correspondence between board members and between officers of the association and the central office; (2) annual meeting records, *i.e.*, those reflecting development of agenda, recording decisions made, etc.; (3) issuances, *i.e.*, published or processed media containing instructions, guidance, or information to constituent elements (as chapters or regions) or to members (as circulars, circular letters, newsletters, bulletins, *et sim.*, not including printed or processed materials kept for distribution); (4) committee records, *i.e.*, materials reflecting the work of committees, commissions, boards, or comparable instrumentalities, including files of the committees *per se* and files of the central office reflecting its relationships with committees; (5) conference records, *i.e.*, materials reflecting participation in conferences, meetings, or any relationships with other associations (commercial, business, or governmental), including minutes of meetings, correspondence, and copies of joint reports; (6) housekeeping or administrative records, *i.e.*, materials relating to the internal operations or general management of the association (as opposed to its substantive func-

⁵ The estimated volume of file materials of the American Medical Association exceeds 10,000 linear feet and includes over 1,000 linear feet of material in an archives.

⁶ Twenty-five associations showed over 150 feet of files; 14 between 50 to 150 feet; 37 less than 50 feet.

tions), and including financial and accounting records, membership and subscribers' payments, production of the society's journal or other issuances, and employment and payment records of the staff at the central office; (7) employment records, *i.e.*, documents relating to the employment or placement in positions of persons in professions related to the professional society; and finally (8) historical records, *i.e.*, documents maintained for the specific purpose of preserving evidence of the formal establishment, development, and evolution of the association.

Of some interest to the historian and archivist may be an indication of the diversity of professional interest of societies maintaining separate historical record collections. These included such varied associations as the American Society of Planning Officials, the American Physical Therapy Association, the American Chemical Society, the American Society for Microbiology, the American Statistical Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the Society of American Archivists, the Society of American Foresters, the American Academy of Microbiology, the Society of Protozoologists, the National Speleological Society, the American Ethnological Society, the History of Science Society, the Agricultural History Society, the American Society for Horticultural Science, and the Botanical Society of America.

Table 1 reflects the frequency with which these recurring categories of records were mentioned. Excluded from the tabulation are certain housekeeping or administrative records of which two types recurred invariably: membership or periodical subscription records; and publication production records, *i.e.*, those relating to circulation and advertising, editorial work, manuscripts, galley proofs, and the like. While not always mentioned in the information submitted, one category undoubtedly recurs with frequency: accounting ledgers, vouchers, and treasurers' reports. These also are excluded from the tabulation, as are placement records, although the responses showed the latter quite frequently, particularly in the files of the larger bodies. Separately organized placement files occur in sizable volume in the records, for example, of the American Society of Planning Officials and the American Dietetic Association; and among associations with a smaller volume of files, the American Vocational Association maintains "a vocational and education personnel recruitment and placement services" file.

Generally the organization of the files, including the materials described above, follows the rule that the larger the volume of records (presumably in the larger associations) the greater the

Table 1
COMMON TYPES OF RECORDS

Types of Records	Number of Associations Reporting*		
	A	B	C
(1) Board of Directors' Records			
Records available	22	14	26
No information	3	0	11
(2) Annual Meeting Records			
Records available	21	14	25
No information	4	0	12
(3) Issuances			
Records available	21	13	20
No information	4	1	17
(4) Committee Records			
Records available	22	12	20
No information	3	2	17
(5) Conference Records			
Records available	20	10	14
No information	5	4	23
(6) Historical Records			
Records available	21	13	17
No information	4	1	20

* Categories of associations are grouped by volume of records: A, in excess of 150 linear feet; B, between 50 to 150 linear feet; C, less than 50 linear feet.

tendency to maintain an increasing number of special-purpose files, as against placing all records in general files (inclusive subject or multipurpose files) where the volume is small, presumably in the smaller organizations. Table 2 reflects this pattern in a general way.

Finally, with respect to the overall organization of the records of professional associations, the questionnaire sought to establish where these generally recurring records are maintained, *i.e.*, in general files or separately as special purpose files. The pattern reflected in Table 2 repeats again; *i.e.*, the larger the volume on hand, the greater the frequency of separate files, and conversely. Table 3, below, reflects substantially this pattern.

We proceed to a consideration of the general management and disposition of records. For this purpose the questionnaire method is not a wholly suitable device; nevertheless, the data furnished provide some basis for appraisal. The preponderance of associations (about 75 percent) indicated that they made a practice of terminating or cutting off files at regular intervals to facilitate re-

Table 2
ORGANIZATION OF RECORDS

Types of Files	Number of Associations Reporting*		
	A	B	C
Essentially General Files	6	7	19
Essentially Special Purpose Files†	12	4	10
Data Inadequate‡	7	3	8

* Categories of associations are grouped in the same manner as in Table 1.

† May include some general files, but the greater volume of records are maintained as special purpose files.

‡ About half of these bodies reported only their archives or historical materials; there was no information about the organization of their current files.

moval to storage or destruction. The evidence was, however, that this was accomplished after long intervals (10 to 20 years) or after screening of the files. Even in associations with a relatively large records accumulation, files were terminated after surprisingly long

Table 3
MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS

Types of Records	Number of Associations Reporting*		
	A	B	C
(1) Board of Directors' Records			
Separately maintained	16	5	11
Not separately maintained	6	7	11
No information	3	2	15
(2) Annual Meeting Records			
Separately maintained	11	4	10
Not separately maintained	9	8	12
No information	5	2	15
(3) Issuances			
Separately maintained	9	2	5
Not separately maintained	12	8	8
No information	4	4	24
(4) Committee Records			
Separately maintained	8	5	8
Not separately maintained	13	6	11
No information	4	3	18
(5) Conference Records			
Separately maintained	5	3	1
Not separately maintained	15	5	10
No information	5	6	26
(6) Housekeeping Records			
Separately maintained	11	7	12
Not separately maintained	9	4	8
No information	5	3	17
(7) Employment Records			
Separately maintained	8	3	1
Not separately maintained	10	2	5
No information	7	9	31
(8) Historical Records			
Separately maintained	7	4	4
Not separately maintained	13	8	12
No information	5	2	21

* Categories of associations are grouped in the same manner as in Table 1.

Slightly more than 15 percent indicated a loss of materials of significant historical interest. In general, these reports came from smaller societies with peripatetic central files although one or two large ones, surprisingly, seem also to have suffered losses. Several were not sure whether there had been losses or not; one thought them likely. Somewhat less than half reported the existence of

written histories of their organizations—usually, as indicated, in a very rudimentary or summary form; and about 15 percent reported plans for a history.⁷

A few general conclusions are warranted. We have already called attention to the difference in file patterns between the smaller and larger associations. Appraising the results from the larger bodies, we find: (1) more highly organized files and a greater frequency of specialized files; (2) evidence of file supervision and central file-room facilities; (3) some degree of attention to older files or archives, with, in some instances, librarians or archivists in charge of the records;⁸ (4) in a few instances, an organized archival activity. Thus, separately maintained archives were reported by the American Institute of Architects, the Special Libraries Association, the American Society of Microbiology, the American Pharmaceutical Association, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Library Association, the Society of American Archivists, the Mycological Society of America, and the American Society of Parasitologists.

The situation in typical smaller associations, without a permanent headquarters, gives rise to some additional comments. These bodies have no fixed repository for the files; the files may or may not move with changing presidents, secretaries, or committee chairmen. This situation must inevitably result in losses, and it requires recurring and subjective determinations of what should be passed on to incoming officers or committee chairmen.

In such cases consideration should be given to the development of a systematic plan to preserve and move the significant materials—those reflecting the history of the society—as well as those of longer range administrative utility, to some central location or official. This may not always be necessary, however, since many of the smaller bodies, as well as a few associations with larger volumes of files, felt that the published proceedings and minutes of their boards of directors, annual meetings, committee chairmen, and treasurers in their professional journals provided adequate documentation of their activities. Others seemed to feel differently.

⁷ These included some associations having summary accounts but contemplating more comprehensive histories.

⁸ For example, persons who completed the questionnaire or replied by letter to the committee's request, classified by volume of records of the association as defined in Table 1, were as follows:

Officials Replying	Number of Associations		
	A	B	C
Office manager, librarian, archivist, file supervisor	10	3	2
Director or Assistant to the Director	14	9	7
Secretary or Secretary-Treasurer	—	3	28

One, previously mentioned, for example—the American Farm Economic Association, an association with a very small volume of records—deposited its records with some regularity with the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Another society, however, reported only membership records—no others; and the Linguistic Society of America reported only a correspondence file (3 years old), membership records, and a file of back publications.

Perhaps it is in connection with the files of these smaller bodies that this committee might continue its work, in the form of further inquiry or actual on-site examination. The object would be to develop some type of useful guidance for the handling of such records—recommendations on the basic documents that should be permanently preserved and a model scheme for the planned movement of materials from outgoing to incoming officers, for example. But more information and analysis are needed first.

Since committees are essential instrumentalities in the work of any association, committee records warrant some consideration here. The tabulation (Table 1) shows that a large number of associations have such files. Internal evidence, from the responses to the questionnaires, reveals that for the most part the records actually reported are files of the central office or of the secretary that reflect relations with committee chairmen or committee members; they are not actual committee records *per se*.

Central offices should have two types of documentation about all significant committees: their objectives and program and the final results of their efforts. What can be lacking, unless there is some planned effort to move committee files periodically to the central office, are records that document an intermediate stage; how, for instance, did the committees go about accomplishing their objectives? The records of administrative committees (finances, membership, etc.) or of committees with limited objectives may be of little consequence. But with records of committees having long-range, substantive tasks, a question arises about the permanent values of these materials. We suggest that this problem may warrant further investigation and analysis.

A questionnaire is not an adequate substitute for an on-site analysis in getting precise and tangible data on the status and patterns of records and recordkeeping in bodies as diverse as the professional societies. In spite of this, the responses yielded a considerable amount of general information both about records and about recordkeeping practices and problems. More precise information and conclusions require more specialized and intensive efforts.