On Planning an Archives

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THE PLANNING OF AN ARCHIVES should—and really must—start with the archives staff. They know how they operate and what they need. They know what their workload is, the size of their collection and what both are likely to become.

Planning is more than a cumulative total of floorspace multiplied by some factor for future growth. The "square foot credit per item" method is planning in its worst form. Unfortunately, the method is easy to use for a building office preparing an architectural program. Its basic shortcoming is that it does not consider the users. Unfortunately, many architectural firms will accept this method because it is convenient to design by square foot area. Such planning is an example, which lasts a long time and affects many people, of "garbage in, garbage out."

Even though the users, in this case the archivists, have the greatest concern and, most important, the insight about what an archives should be, they cannot begin drawing floor plans. There is an important difference between drawing floor plans and expressing ideas about archival space. The former is the function of the architect; it is his job to decide how best to assemble everything into a coherent design. The archivist's function is to use the written language, simply and concisely, to express what the archives does and what its needs are. No special language or techniques are needed, only special effort to be methodical and openminded. Checklists, such as that prepared by the SAA Committee on Buildings and Technical Equipment and reprinted at the end of this article, form a basis for outlining the archival requirements. A consultant can assist by gleaning all the thinking of the staff to ensure that all activities have been considered and by organizing an appropriate system for analyzing their needs.

Ideally, there should be no references to conventional measures of planning, such as "square foot area" and "room," because these items

tend to restrict the architect's solutions. It is far better to outline the requirements of each activity (high security, visual control but audio privacy, clearance for special equipment, for example) and allow the architect the freedom to solve these requirements creatively rather than to usurp the architect's prerogative by assuming that a room with a locked door is the only solution for high security space. What the archives *ideally* should be can be developed also, giving the architect a standard against which he can evaluate the adequacy of his solutions. In brief, the archivist needs to communicate a wealth of information about the archival process to the architect, and this is easily done by preparing a written performance specification that can provide the basis from which the architectural program is developed.

At the SAA Buildings Workshop in St. Louis last fall, ideas on planning archival space were discussed in a symposium. One of the authors talked about the planning process that the archivist should go through before becoming involved with the architect. Let us explore, briefly, the planning process, to give some idea of what the archivist can do when faced with the need for planning new archival space.

Basically, what the archivist first needs to do is to list in sequential order all the discrete steps in the activities of the archives. Once the steps are on paper they are reviewed to see that the order is logical and efficient. Finally, spatial and environmental needs are noted for each step in the process. Care should be taken to differentiate between what conditions are "essential" and what are "desirable."

At the outset, it is perhaps easier to identify various activity processes and outline major items in one activity at a time, although not necessarily from the beginning (which may not be obvious at first). The steps listed may simply indicate general items or they may go into great detail on such matters as the individual operations required in processing a new collection, for example, labor-management documents. The list should show who is involved in each step and where it takes place. Since many activities occur simultaneously, the archivist will find it easier to make separate lists for each set of activities. For example, since processing of new acquisitions and servicing requests for use of archival material may be concurrent, a separate list would be made for each activity. An archivist might outline the beginning of the collection-receiving process (and include comments and ideas in notes) in the following manner.

1. Delivery person parks illegally in front of building and enters to ask receptionist for directions to receiving dock. [This occurs frequently with regular deliveries; ideas for solutions are signs, having the receiving dock visible and obvious from the street.]

2. Delivery truck goes to dock.

3. Door to dock is locked for security reasons. Receptionist locates staff member to unlock.

4. As collection is unloaded, staff member accounts for cartons.

5. Cartons placed in temporary storage areas until processing can begin.

6. Cartons are opened and contents checked against shipping list.

7. Registrar prepares list and enters in accession book.

8. Accession folder is created.

9. Donor card is created. Steps 8 and 9 establish new "branch" activities that are then outlined.

10. Decision is made whether extensive processing is necessary. (If no, next step is 13. If yes, next step is below.)

11. Supervisor completes worksheet and writes processing instructions.

12. Processor arranges, lists, and transfers into archival folders according to instructions while using processing manual.

13. Catalog and write guide description.

When an item in the list coincides with an item in another list, the coincidence should be noted. The lists can then be placed side by side and lines drawn showing where the activities meet. Since the items in the lists are sequential, a time scale can be added. Comparison of the number and complexity of work items that could occur (perhaps not regularly but on certain occasions) within a fixed period of time will remind the archivist of existing bottlenecks in the operation. The archivist may see how other bottlenecks are created by unnecessary or circuitous administrative procedures. Since existing procedures often are the result of accretion, it is not uncommon to find inefficient and elaborate processes. Once the operation is committed to paper, solutions begin to suggest themselves; items will be seen that can be consolidated and placed in a different sequence to simplify the process.

One should remember that listed activities are not equally important. Some will occur frequently, others which occur more rarely are critically important and should be noted. Lines may be drawn enclosing those activities that occur in particular areas or that are responsibilities of certain persons. Such lines will serve to show how diverse, compact, or spread out a group of activities are. It may then become obvious how improvements can be made by simply relocating or changing the order of some activities.

Relationships between activities and their spatial and temporal locations might more easily be visualized by transforming the lists into simple flow diagrams. Each item on the lists is boxed and connected to the next related item or items by lines. Arrows on the lines help to keep the direction of flow clear. Flow diagrams are expecially convenient when a process has several branches. There are various formal techniques, such as network analysis and decision trees, that use symbolic language. These techniques can be useful in analyzing complex operations if the archivist wishes to learn one of them. Often, though, a technique is used more because it is faddish than because it is necessary.

Simple use of the flow diagram is shown in figure 1 for the major elements in the archival process of the Archives of the State University of New York at Buffalo. Faced with relocating the archives to the Darwin Martin house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and with very
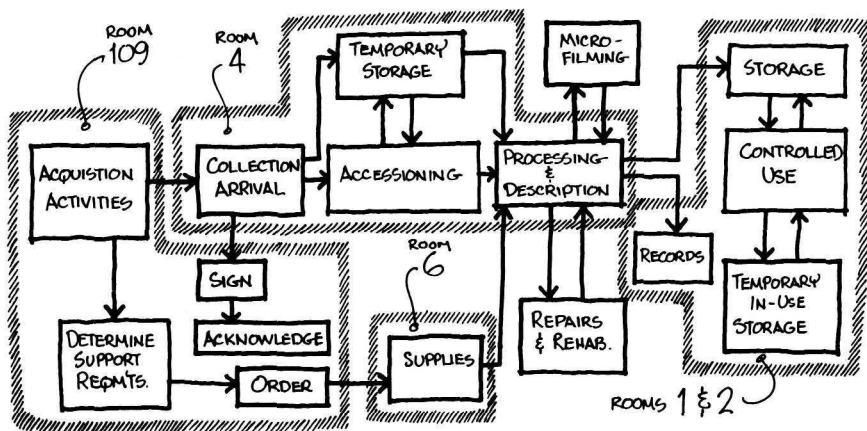
FIG. 1.   ARCHIVAL PROCESS - SUNY a BUFFALO

real budgetary limitations and restrictions on changes in the building because of its architectural value, the authors decided that only a very simple review of the archival process was warranted.   They outlined the major steps, grouped related activities, and then assigned them to various spaces in the Darwin Martin house in the same sequential relationship as that in the flow diagram.   The result was the arrangement of the archives shown in figures 2 and 3.

Planning an archives as described here is a two-part affair: the development of a "performance specification" by the archivist and the design of the archives to that specification by the architect.   The archivist can then use the performance specification to evaluate the architect's proposed solution before it is set in concrete.
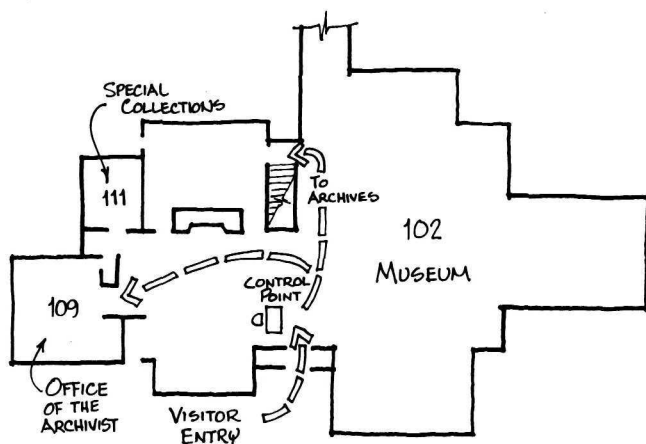
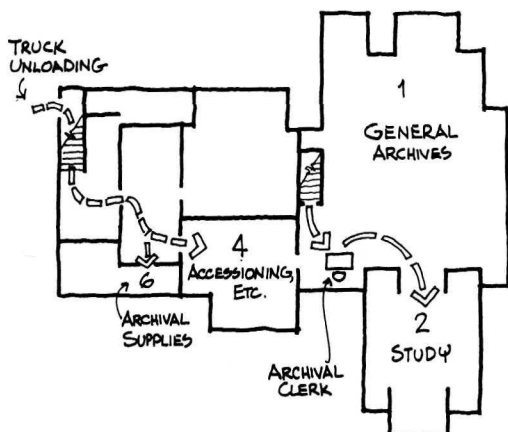FIG. 2. ARCHIVAL SPACE: MAIN FLOOR-DARWIN MARTIN HOUSE

FIG. 3. ARCHIVAL SPACE: BASEMENT - DARWIN MARTIN HOUSE

CHECKLIST OF ARCHIVAL BUILDING NEEDS

General. What is the purpose of the organization? Who are the clientele? What do they want? How do they want it? How frequently do the different groups come?

General Building. What need is there for protection against fire, flood, natural disaster, air pollution, special climatic conditions, security problems?

Receiving. What kind of material comes in? How much comes at a time? How is it shipped and packaged? Who receives it? Does it need to have security arrangements? How does material travel to processing or storage? Does it need to be fumigated prior to storage?

Processing. How many staff use this area? What kinds of materials do they process? What are their requirements with regard to space/storage, working tools, equipment, supplies, noise/privacy, lighting? Are there special processing requirements for photos, maps, tapes, microfilm, etc?

Repair. What kinds of repairs are made? How large a function is this? How many staff are involved? What kinds of equipment required/desired? What kind of storage space needed while repair in process?

Use—Reading Room. What is the average number of patrons/day? What kinds of materials used most heavily? Is there ease of access to catalogs & indexes for patrons, for staff? Is there a need for security arrangements? Is there a reference collection? Who retrieves materials? Are stacks convenient to reference staff? Is there a need for microfilm readers, audiovisual equipment? Is there need for copying (Xerox, etc.) equipment for use by clientele?

Stacks. What amount of material is stored? What types of material are stored? What is the growth pattern? What is the provision for expansion? Is there need for security arrangements? Is there need for the shelves to be fixed, mobile, record center, library, etc.? Is there need for the stacks to be environmentally controlled? Where is backlog stored?

Administrative. Which staff requires offices? What amount of privacy is required? Can offices be shared? What is accessible to other staff, donors, and patrons? Should processing supervisors have private offices in the processing area?

Other. What are the needs for meeting rooms, exhibit area, supply-storage

area, recording studio, oral history listening area, photo darkroom/studio, vault, staff lounge, smoking area?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The literature on archives buildings is somewhat limited, but the following works can serve as introductions. The *Buildings Bibliography* is rather technical, while the Metcalf book serves as an introduction to problems with buildings. The Evans volume and the Rogers article are bibliographies, and the Gondos reader consists of a series of case histories. The SAA Committee on Buildings and Technical Equipment has available some information on buildings and architects, as does the American Library Association.

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