

Archival Practices Survey

CHARLES ZIEGLER

TO DEFINE AND DEVELOP a system of archival practices for the World Bank, an investigation of these practices in some other international institutions seemed worthwhile. The paucity of literature in the field became apparent, however, and I undertook an independent survey of a number of these institutions to discover their archival establishment and administration. To this end, I developed a short questionnaire that I hoped would yield the information I sought.

My survey leaves me some impressions I would like to expound. While an archives must first serve the institution of which it forms an integral part, it has a concurrent responsibility, considering the nature of its holdings, to make them widely available. The policy of access, therefore, should be as liberal as possible in keeping with the legal and moral obligations of the institution to its members and clients. A vigorous publications program, especially of guides and descriptions, should be pursued. It is often lamented that scholars do not make maximum use of archival resources, and one reason that they do not is the difficulty of gaining access to them and of using them once access is obtained. Another means of making archival material available is the publication of key archival records series. However, none of the institutions surveyed has thus far undertaken such a program.

I believe that a Vital Records Program, to ensure that the records of the institution can be substantially reconstructed should some disaster befall them, is an urgent matter. More attention should be paid also to microfilming, not only in the context of a Vital Records Program, but also in that of making archival records more generally available and preventing unnecessary handling of originals.

None of the institutions surveyed possessed any of the modern means, such as thermoplastic lamination, for the repair of damaged records. This is not particularly surprising, as equipment for such


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repair is expensive and the archival programs of many institutions have very restricted budgets. However, it is to be hoped that these institutions would avail themselves of the services of private companies should the need for repairing damaged records arise.

There must be a greater realization by the top levels of management of the importance of the archives of an institution. Management must be made aware that the archives of any institution constitute nothing less than that institution's collective memory, a fact that becomes even more important as time goes on and staff members retire or go on to other institutions. If the archives is not well maintained, not only in matters of management and access but also in terms of physical preservation, many matters vital to the life and history of the institution are in danger of being forgotten. Archivists must always bear in mind that they are charged with the preservation of unique bodies of material of value not only to the institution served but also to scholars, researchers, and humanity in general.

I perceive two related problems in making top level management more aware of the value of archives. One is that the organizational unit charged with the care and maintenance of the archives often does not have direct access to the top decision-makers of the institution. Such organizational units are often subordinated to still larger units whose primary functions are of a "housekeeping" nature. Thus the archives often are not seen as the unique and growing body of invaluable research material which they are, but are seen rather as mere bunches of old papers whose care and preservation is a low-priority budgetary item. Many other organizational layers come between archivists and top level management, layers often peopled by individuals unaware of the value of archives.

 The related problem is the fact that so few people usually are involved in the archival functions of an institution, and those so often are immersed in necessary day-to-day operations, that there is little opportunity for them to articulate the legitimate archival requirements.

My survey should be regarded as a cursory one. In many cases I would have enjoyed following up some of the points raised and pursuing others which seemed obscure. In fact, the results of this survey posed more questions than they answered. However, with the constraints of time, distance, and budget, further elucidation was not possible.

In many respects I regard the posing of new questions as a positive attribute, for it is my hope that this survey will, by raising such questions, stimulate contact among the archival staffs of international institutions. To facilitate such contacts I have placed the name of the individual from whom a reply was received at the end of the section pertaining to each institution. I have come to hold that the initiation of interchanges of information and ideas among the archival staffs of international institutions is of far greater importance than the actual survey itself. Copies of the original survey were sent to the institutions surveyed, and if it helps in some small way to further inter-institutional contacts, I believe that it will have been well worth my efforts.

I have written in narrative form the answers to the questionnaire. Any substantive information contained in the answers is thus taken directly from the questionnaire filled out by the surveyed institution.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

The Charter establishing the present Organization of American States (OAS) dates from 1948, but the Organization's roots go back to 1890. The "OAS is guided by the following principles: (1) international law and order and good faith shall govern the relations among states; (2) an act of aggression against one American state is an act of aggression against all other American states; (3) controversies shall be settled by peaceful procedures; (4) peace and prosperity are based on political democracy." It employs approximately 1,600 people.

The term "archives," as employed by the Organization of American States, includes all permanent and long-term records. A Records Retirement Schedule was established in 1961 and was slightly modified in 1972. Despite a chronic lack of space for records storage, with no room for expansion permitted even in view of the constant growth of the Organization and the resultant increase in the volume of records, retention schedules are kept up to date. Approximately 75 percent of the stored records have only a limited lifespan. Archival material has been identified as such.

Most of the archival records are stored in a combination archives/records center located in an unfinished basement which unfortunately does not have proper climate control equipment. The records are stored in records-center boxes on standard metal shelving. Larger boxes are used for oversized documents and computer printouts. Some records are stored also in filing cabinets in the office of the chief of the Records Management Center. Data processing tapes of active personnel, payroll, and retirement records are stored in safes in different buildings. The computer printouts and related records are retired to the records center for storage when they are no longer needed by the originating offices. A vault in the same building as the archives/records center contains all original inter-American treaties, agreements, and conventions, the Seal of the Organization of American States, and all original evidence presented at meetings of consultation of ministers of foreign affairs. The vault contains also a collection of tapes of significant speeches made by prominent members of the Organization of American States and distinguished visitors. These voice recordings have been saved systematically only since about 1973, but some older recordings have also been preserved.

Records are usually transferred to the archives/records center at

either the end of the fiscal year or the end of the calendar year. However, in practice, the originating offices often transfer records only when time permits, meaning that records transfer goes on all year long. Currently about 2,800 cubic feet of records are being stored. The chief of the Records Management Center and one assistant are charged with custody and maintenance of the archives/records center.

Staff members of the Organization of American States, other international organizations, and scholars have access to the records stored in the archives/records center. The originating office, the successor office, or a higher office with authority over these records have immediate access, but access for outsiders is determined by the nature of the request and the identity of the requester. The number of requests per month varies greatly, from approximately seventeen to seventy-two per month. In the mid-60s, scholars used the resources of the archives/records center more heavily than they do today. Records are loaned to staff members, and, if their requests are approved, other international organizations and scholars receive electrostatic copies.

The files of the general secretariat of the Organization of American States are maintained on a decentralized files plan based, however, on a standard filing system using an obligatory subject-numeric outline. All records retired to the archives/records center are accompanied by a Records Transmittal and Receipt Form, a copy of which is filed by the originating office while the original is maintained in the Records Management Center which stamps the date of receipt on each copy. This "invoice" is a record of all documents sent to the archives/records center for storage. Disposal is noted as it occurs. The boxes of records are stored by subject, originating office, and date of arrival. Each record is easily found by referring to the respective transmittal form and date of receipt. The Records Management Handbook (Provisional) OEA/Ser.D/I.7, 31 October 1972, is available, and copies can be received upon request. A permanent edition in both English and Spanish is contemplated.

There is no microfilming program, as it is felt that the cost would far outweigh the benefits, and many of the more important documents, such as treaties and agreements, are in published form.

Questions should be directed to: Miss Mercedes Fritzsching, Chief, Records Management Center, Room ADM-B10, Department of Publications and Conferences, Organization of American States, 17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW., Washington, D.C. 20006.

INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION

The International Labor Organization, founded in 1919, employs 2,500 people. Its purpose is "to improve labor conditions, raise living

standards, and promote economic and social stability as the foundation for lasting peace throughout the world."

The term "archives," as used by the International Labor Organization, denotes the records of historical interest or value, and certain records of legal obligations or of a contractual nature. Retention periods have been established for each of the record categories in the International Labor Organization's holdings, but all archival material has not been identified as such.

Some of the International Labor Office's archives are housed in a building about five kilometers from headquarters, but all archives will be kept together upon completion of the new headquarters building at the end of 1974. Vaults, cabinets, shelves, and boxes are used to store the archives. Records are transferred two years after the date of the latest paper in the file, and 1,700 linear meters are now being stored. At present, four staff members are employed for the custody and maintenance of the archives.

The staff, other international organizations, scholars, and the general public have access to the archives, access being permitted generally after ten years except in the case of confidential records for which there are special conditions of access. Records are not loaned out except in rare instances for exhibition purposes. About five requests for information are received per month.

There are at present virtually no finding aids except for registry-type indexes, but plans exist for the preparation of a guide and a general list. Records are arranged according to the principle of provenance. Microfilm is used for security purposes.

Questions should be addressed to: R. E. Manning, Registrar, International Labor Office, CH 1211, Geneva 22, Switzerland.

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

The International Civil Aviation Organization, created on December 7, 1944, employs 600 people. It promotes "international civil aviation in the direction of peaceful uses."

The term "archives," as used by the International Civil Aviation Organization, includes all records of the organization. The Records Retention Schedule form used is a listing by office, showing for each record group the period of time it is to remain in the records center before final destruction or retirement to the archives.

Cardboard boxes and steel filing cabinets are used to store the archives. Noncurrent records, if of permanent or long-term value, are normally retired when requests for consultation diminish to less than six requests per annum. The quantity of archives being stored is 542 cubic feet, and four staff members are in charge.

Access to the archives of the International Civil Aviation Organization is permitted to staff members, other international organizations, and scholars. Ninety-five percent of these records are available for research, subject to administrative regulations and to restrictions imposed by offices that produced the records. Records are not, however, loaned out. Requests for information number about 100 per month.

Finding aids include the accession register, inventories, logs, card indexes, and lists. The records are arranged in numbered groups on the basis of office of origin. Records in each group are further divided into subgroups, series, and subseries and are arranged thereunder by subject, in chronological order, or in some other systematic manner.

The microfilm program has the primary aim of ensuring that selected series of valuable, historical, and legal noncurrent and archival records are preserved permanently. The first positive copy of completed microfilm is deposited with the Public Archives Records Center, which is a branch of the Public Archives of Canada.

Questions should be directed to: A. O. Groven, Chief, Administrative Services Branch, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Aviation Building, 1080 University Street, Montreal 101, Quebec, Canada.

UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations, whose charter was signed in 1945, strives "to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems; to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in attaining common ends."

At the United Nations, the term "archives" is used to designate all the official documentation that has administrative, historical, or other research value, and which contains evidence of the functions and organizations of the United Nations.

Broad retention periods have been established, and further refinements of these periods in the light of experience are now in progress. Archival material has been identified as such and is stored in a building approximately three miles from the main offices of the United Nations.

Shelves and boxes are used to store the records, with cabinets being used for nonstandard material. Records are transferred to the archives according to schedule for registry records and the needs of administration. There are now approximately 17,000 cubic feet of records in the archives, and twenty-four staff members are charged with custody and maintenance.

The United Nations staff, other international organizations, scholars, and the general public have access to the archives. The period of time after which archival records are available for research varies with the type of record in question and the use to which they are to be put, but a liberal policy is the aim. Records are loaned from the archives only to staff members. More than 250 requests for information are received per month.

Descriptive inventories (lists) and summary inventories (Registration Sheets) are the most important finding aids. The archives is arranged by office of administrative origin and subdivided as necessary to reflect the changes in and within the office.

A safety microfilm program is now being planned. This program will replace an earlier microfilm program designed for space-saving.

In the long term, the plan for the United Nations Archives includes: (1) the introduction of a clear time-limit for public access; (2) computer applications and a link to a future information management system for the U.N. secretariat; (3) a publication program; (4) an oral history program; (5) a repair shop; and (6) new premises.

Questions should be directed to: Alf Erlandsson, Chief of Archives Section, United Nations, New York, New York 10017.

WORLD BANK GROUP

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development began operations in 1946 and its affiliates, the International Finance Corporation, the International Development Association, and the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes, were founded in 1956, 1960, and 1966, respectively. Collectively known as the World Bank Group, these organizations employ some 3,700 people. The World Bank's purpose is "to assist in the reconstruction and development of its member countries by facilitating the investment of capital for productive purposes; to make loans for productive purposes when private capital is not available; and to promote private foreign investment by guarantees of, and participation in, loans and investment made by private investors."

The International Development Association performs a similar function, but it lends at a highly concessional interest rate and it does not guarantee or participate in the loans of private investors.

The International Finance Corporation's objectives are "to provide risk capital for productive private enterprises involving private investors and management; to encourage the development of local capital markets; and to stimulate the international flow of private capital."

The International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes

helps "in the settlement of investment disputes between states and foreign investors."

The term "archives" as used by the World Bank Group has not yet been really defined. At one time, when the Archives Division included the Language Services and Communications sections, the term was used in the sense of all permanent and long-term records; but this organizational arrangement no longer exists, and there is no longer a unit known as the Archives Division.

Retention periods have been established for all record types. A survey has been made to determine what record material has particular historical value. Some of these records are still held by various departments, such as the Secretary's Department and Personnel Department, and have not been transferred to the Records Center, established in 1969, which holds much of the World Bank Group's semicurrent and, potentially, permanently valuable record material. Other valuable material is stored in the underground storage facility of the National Underground Storage Company in Pennsylvania, under the World Bank Group's Vital Records Program.

Access to the records of the World Bank Group is strictly limited to staff members, although numerous publications are available including copies of all loan and credit agreements.

Microfilm is currently being used primarily in conjunction with the Vital Records Program and, depending on the type of records, much of the microfilm is sent to the underground storage facility for safekeeping or else the records themselves are sent and the microfilm copies are retained for reference along with whatever printed or carbon copies exist.

It is hoped that in the course of the next few years a separate and distinct body of long-term, permanent, and historically valuable material will be culled from the World Bank Group's record holdings, and that procedures and practices will be established with regard to arrangement, access, and the preparation of finding aids.

Questions should be directed to: Mr. D. K. Bloomfield, Chief, Records Management Section, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1818 H Street, NW., Washington, D.C. 20433.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

The World Health Organization, created in 1948, employs about 1,400 people at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Its purpose is "to carry on a worldwide program which will bring about a high level of health for the peoples of all nations."

The retention period for each category of records of the World Health Organization is in the process of being established. However, archival material has been already identified, the term "archives" being defined as historically valuable records. This archival material is housed in the same building as the other records of the World Health Organization and consists of approximately ten linear meters of original documents and some 16mm. microfilm.

Records are transferred to the archives when they are twenty years old, after having been reviewed and determined to have permanent value. M. A. Petrier has sole charge of the archives of the World Health Organization.

Staff members may use the archives, but access is not permitted to other international organizations, scholars, or the general public for forty years, except in certain categories for which access is permitted after twenty years or is further limited to sixty years. Records are not loaned from the archives, but the necessary information is furnished or else photocopies are provided. About sixty requests for information are received each month, the majority being from staff members of the World Health Organization.

Catalogs and indexes established with the dossiers or during transfer of records constitute the finding aids. In preparation are detailed inventories and an administrative history. The archives is divided into record groups. The most important record group, from the main headquarters, is arranged according to reference numbers in dealing with dossiers from the Central Registry. The other records are arranged by units of origin.

Most of the records in the archives have been microfilmed, and the original records have been destroyed. However, future use of microfilm will be limited and the original records will be retained.

Questions should be directed to: Records Management Officer, World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. The former records management officer, Yves Pérotin, has left the World Health Organization and a successor has not yet been named.

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

The Inter-American Development Bank was founded in 1959. Employing 1,500 people, it seeks to "promote the economic development of its member countries, individually and collectively."

The term "archives," as used by the Inter-American Development Bank, encompasses historically valuable records, although only about thirty-five cubic feet have yet been identified as such, and retention periods have not been established for each category of records.

Most records are stored in a records center in standard-size records center boxes on shelves, while some other records are stored in fire-proof safes. Records are transferred to the records center in yearly accumulations except in the case of loan records, which are transferred after a loan has been fully disbursed.

The archives of the Inter-American Development Bank are not available for research. Records are loaned from the archives to staff members, however. A finding aid is in the process of being compiled. Most of the archives is arranged by file classification.

Microfilming is done in conjunction with a vital records program in which material, some in hard copy form, is sent to an off-site location.

Questions should be directed to: Mrs. Patricia Munoz, Director of Records Management, Inter-American Development Bank, 808 17th Street, NW., Washington, D.C. 20577.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

The Food and Agriculture Organization, created in 1945, employs 6,000 people, approximately half of whom serve in the field. The purpose is "to raise the standard of living in various countries by helping them to improve their farming, forestry, and fisheries." It "acts as an agricultural clearing house for information and gives technical advice to its member governments."

The Food and Agriculture Organization has, for maintaining and disposing of its records, an organization-wide system which consists of: (1) for each division, one registry which receives the division's mail and maintains the records (for the most part, correspondence and reports files); (2) an interim storage facility for *all* inactive records of the Organization, including registry files; and (3) an archives consisting of records from those stored in the interim storage facility, which the archivist selects as of historical value and/or continuing administrative use to the Organization. Most archival material has been identified as such.

Retention periods have been established for some categories of records (legal instruments, staffing records, purchasing, accounting, and personnel records), but not for all. All records are, however, assigned a retention period upon their transfer to the interim storage facility for inactive records.

Equipment used to store the archives consists of cardboard transfers (boxes), one movable-shelving unit, and metal shelves. Upon the expiration of the retention period assigned to them for interim storage and after certification by the originating office that they are no longer

needed for current or foreseen work, records are transferred to the archives or destroyed. Thus far, 230 linear meters of records have been accessioned and five staff members are charged with the custody and maintenance of the archives.

The staff of the Food and Agriculture Organizations, scholars, other international organizations, and the general public have access to the archives. Records are available for research generally after they are ten years of age, but they are loaned from the archives only to staff members and then only very exceptionally. Finding aids consist of inventories, record group registration sheets, and a limited number of indexes. Records are arranged by record groups which denote the originating sector of the organization. An average of fifteen requests for information is received per month.

Limited use is made of microfilm. It is employed to ensure the security of selected series of records.

Questions regarding the archives of the Food and Agriculture Organization should be directed to: Patricia Wright, Archivist, Administrative Services Division, Food and Agriculture Organization, Via delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy.

INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

The International Atomic Energy Agency, established in 1957, employs 1,200 people. It seeks "to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy for peace, health, and prosperity throughout the world. The Agency encourages and assists research on, and the development and practical application of, atomic energy for peaceful uses throughout the world, and fosters the exchange of scientific and technical information and personnel."

The term "archives," as used by the International Atomic Energy Agency, encompasses all permanent and long-term records. Although the retention period has not been established for each category of records, archival material has been identified as such.

Archival records are stored in boxes which are placed on shelves. Records are usually transferred to the archives once or twice a year, but transfer may occur more frequently should the need arise. Three thousand cubic feet have thus far been accessioned and two staff members are devoted to the custody of the archives.

Access to the archives of the International Atomic Energy Agency is limited to staff members of the Agency. There are approximately eighty requests per month for information. Records are loaned out only to staff members. Finding aids include a card index, lists of

accessions according to offices of origin, and lists of accessions by disposal date. Arrangement is by disposal date according to the classification of records received.

No use is made of microfilm. Electrostatic copies are made of damaged records, as a method of preservation.

Questions should be addressed to: L. Nechutny, Chief, Registry Services, International Atomic Energy Agency, Kärntner Ring 11, A-1010 Vienna, Austria.

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

The Asian Development Bank was established in 1966. It employs 640 people. Its purpose is "to elicit significant amounts of capital from Asian countries as well as from outside sources as a means of promoting Asian development."

The term "archives," as used by the Asian Development Bank, encompasses the Bank's permanent and historically valuable records. In 1972 an ad hoc archival program was begun. A circular was sent to all staff members instructing them to transmit to the Records Section of the Administration Department, which had been given custody of the archives, all documents or other materials with historical and enduring value as soon as action has been taken on them. Copies are retained where needed for working purposes. However, all archival material has not been identified as such, and the records retention and disposal schedules are still under preparation. The archives of the Asian Development Bank include such items as documents created during the formative years of the Bank, the original Bank Seal, the headquarters agreement, some policy and procedure papers, loan case files and case files consisting of important original documents of projects approved by the Board (up to 1972), historical films and photographs pertaining to the Asian Development Bank, and copies of the Bank's publications.

The archives are stored in a vault room. Fireproof file cabinets are also used. Records are transferred to the archives after action has been completed on them. The Asian Development Bank now has about forty-four cubic feet of archival material. The Administrative Assistant (Records Section) has custody of the archives, and he is assisted by other records clerks.

Access to the archives is limited to staff members of the Asian Development Bank. It has not been decided whether all archival records should be available for research after a certain period of time.

An average of eight requests for information are received by the archives per month. Records are loaned from the archives to staff members.

A temporary list according to record series titles is the finding aid being used. Records are arranged by subject. Microfilm is used for security purposes.

Questions should be directed to: Shamshad Ali Khan, Records Officer, Asian Development Bank, 2330 Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City, Philippines.

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

The Commission of the European Communities is comprised of the European Coal and Steel Community, founded in 1952, and EURATOM, and the European Economic Community, both founded in 1958. The Commission of the European Communities was established in 1965 by the merging of these three institutions providing them "with common legal, statistical, and information services." A total of 9,000 persons is employed by these organizations.

At this time the term "archives" encompasses all of the records of the Commission of the European Communities. The retention period for each category of records has yet to be established. Approximately 30,000 feet of records are now being stored. Records are put in storage when there is no longer sufficient space for them in the General Directorate.

The records are stored in cabinets, shelves, and boxes. Thirty qualified people are charged with custody and maintenance of the records, while additional staff are employed in the different registries. Records are arranged by General Directorate, of which there are twenty-three. Each box in which records are stored is numbered, the number being noted on the records transfer list. A copy of this list is returned to the sender. A classification scheme based on the Universal Decimal Classification System is the finding aid being used.

Access to records is limited to staff members, to whom records are loaned out. There is a proposal to make records available for research after twenty years. Requests for information usually involve current records, and the number of requests has not yet been noted. Only chronological series are microfilmed.

Questions should be directed to: R. L. Visser, Head of Registry, Directorate-General for Personnel and Administration, Commission of the European Communities, Rue de la Loi 220, B-1040, Brussels, Belgium.