

Record Selection

GUSTAW KALENSKI

Edited by MEYER H. FISHBEIN

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THIS ESSAY BY GUSTAW KALENSKI was published in 1934 under the title *Brakowanie Akt* as a separate bulletin of the Publication Committee, Archives Section, Society of History Patrons, to train archivists at the Archiwum Dawnych (Ancient Archives), in Warsaw. The author's preface to the bulletin noted that the problem of selection had been mentioned by Kazimierz Konarski in his manual, "Modern Polish Archival Economy and Its Tasks." The treatment by the author accorded with the "Regulations for the Preservation of Records in Government Administrative Offices" (*Monitor Polski*, no. 2 [1932]). Kalenski averred, and the editor agrees, that the principles he outlined would be useful to private institutions with problems in appraising records.

A copy of the bulletin in which the article appears was probably obtained by the staff of the National Archives when foreign archival practices were being studied for their potential values in establishing policies and procedures. About in early 1940, Wanda Fernand of the Federal Records Survey prepared a draft translation into English. When Solon J. Buck read the translation he asked Emmett Leahy and Philip C. Brooks whether it should be printed, whole or in part, as a staff information paper. If so, would one of them undertake the editing? The editor found no evidence of an immediate response.

In June 1942, Brooks recommended and Oliver Holmes and Ernst Posner endorsed publication of the essay in the *American Archivist*, after a revised translation had been drafted by Olga Paul (later Olga Irvine). Olga Paul agreed that a revision would be desirable, and she recommended that the editors include a comparison of the author's views with current practices in the United States. Paul completed her translation a few months later.

The then-editor of the *American Archivist*, Theodore C. Pease, also concurred with the recommendation for publication, but the wartime shortage of personnel and the reduced size of the journal suspended the project. In 1947, Brooks renewed his proposal by a letter to Margaret Norton, Pease's successor. Norton agreed that the article deserved publication, although she was concerned about its length.

Buck's inquiry in December 1947 to Ryszard Preselaskowski, director of the Public Library of Warsaw, about Kalenski drew this response: "About Mr. Kalenski I cannot give any good news: he is one more victim of the Hitlerian system and occupancy in our country. Arrested 1942, he was murdered with all his family in a quite beastly way."

Brooks then waited until February 1957 to offer the unedited article to *AA* Editor Philip Bauer, from whom it passed on to the successive editors, each of whom considered the essay to be of general archival interest. Finally, the present editor asked

A few details of Kalenski's life are given in the Introduction. Fishbein, who formerly was director of the Records Appraisal Staff of the National Archives and Records Service, is director of the Military Archives Division of NARS.

my opinion. We agreed that publication should be delayed no longer. On April 9, 1975, I wrote to Leon Chajn, director general of the State Archives of Poland, for information about Kalenski, the current opinions about his principles, and about the national organization of Poland between the world wars. Chajn's reply included a Kalenski biography from the *Polski Słownik Bibliograficzny* (Warsaw, 1965) and the statement that "the appraisal of archival fonds (have been) greatly modified and widened nowadays—in institutions and archives both in matter of form and in content."

Gustaw Kalenski (1881–1943) was a military historian and archivist. He fought with great distinction in the Polish Legion (First Polish Geographical Brigade) during World War I. In 1921 he became captain in the Military Archives and later was appointed archivist in the Bureau of Military History. Historians considered him the leading expert on the 1863 January Uprising.

The article is by no means outdated. The author was remarkably ahead of his colleagues in other countries, most of whom had little interest in the appraisal of twentieth-century records. Several years later, senior staff members of the National Archives came to somewhat the same conclusions about the appraisal process.

The translation that follows is based essentially on the version drafted by Olga Paul. I have made some changes without intending to change the meaning of the author's remarks. Kalenski had two sets of footnotes. One was at the bottom of the page and the other was citations to the bibliography. These two sets have been combined, with additional footnotes, identified by [ED], by me.

CHAPTER I Records Appraisal. Its History

What is *brakowanie akt*¹ (records appraisal)? All files are divisible into two categories: class A files of lasting importance that should be preserved permanently and class B files of transitory value that should be preserved only temporarily. Appraisal consists of (1) the evaluation of files, resulting in their inclusion in either class A or B and the assigning of class B files to one of the several groups in accordance with the time limits set for their preservation;² and (2) the elimination of class B files when their retention period has elapsed.

At first glance, weeding files for disposal may seem wholly inadmissible. Records are unique specimens, as a rule. May unique specimens be destroyed? The deeper we plunge into history, the rarer become all documents and written communications in general. Cuvier was able to reconstruct the skeleton of a prehistoric beast from one bone. Often a historian studying the Middle Ages is called upon to recreate a picture of political and economic conditions in the distant past from one charter or an entry in a court register or other volume.

Conditions are quite different, however, in the nineteenth and particularly the twentieth centuries. The state embraces ever-widening spheres of national and

¹ [ED.] The term *brakowanie akt* is literally "selection of records," a term still used by many foreign archivists as a synonym for appraisal. Kalenski's article does include the term *ocene*, which means appraisal; nevertheless, the editor in most cases translates *brakowanie* as appraisal, as the word now commonly used in the United States for the activity to which the author refers. In fact, Chajn translated Kalenski's title as "The Appraisal of Records." The term *akt* may be translated as files, records, or even documents. Olga Paul translated *Archiwum Akt Dawnych* as Archives of Ancient Documents; however, I assume Polish archivists would have used the term *documenty*. In most cases where I refer to records, Paul translated *akt* as files.

² [ED.] Kalenski's comments about records scheduling, later in the article, remains an excellent statement of standards and procedures.

social economic life. To the administrative branches of police (internal affairs), foreign affairs, military affairs, finance, education, religious denominations, and justice, existing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, governments have added agriculture, industry and commerce, transportation, and postal and telegraphic services.

The state makes constant inroads upon self-governing urban and rural administrations and extends strict control over its citizens. Simultaneously, with the expansion of state agencies and the development of their activities, the number of its officials and records increases. The frequent use of print and lithography which facilitates the duplication of executive orders, circular letters, and announcements, and the use of forms facilitate this increase.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the registries of administrative offices began to feel the shortage of space. At that time selection of records for preservation or disposal was first recognized as an actual necessity. This selection was conducted by the administrative offices without recourse to the opinions of archivists or historians. At first it was undertaken in a rather haphazard, unregulated manner. The initial regulations pertaining to record selection appeared somewhat later. The occupying powers issued these regulations between the years 1830 and 1840.

Chronologically, the first regulation was the 1832 decree of the Chancery of the Court of Francis I, Emperor of Austria, entitled "Regulations Regarding the Elimination and Destruction of Useless Files in Registries and Archives." Its most important part reads:

Care must be exercised that during this survey those files are not designated for destruction, which may still be or may become indispensable, useful, or important, as well as others, which, although no longer necessary for official use, have or may have some historical or other value.

The text of the regulation clearly shows that its purpose was to prevent overzealous disposal. Files which were not to be destroyed were to be divided, it seems, into those of practical value to the administrative office (which was the primary consideration) and those having historical or other value. The regulation does not specify which files (of class A in present terminology) should be included among those not subject to destruction. Neither does it specify who is to make the decisions in this important matter.

Of interest also is the first Prussian regulation, a ministerial decree of 1833, relating to record selection. It states:

For the reduction of registries and the elimination of files no longer necessary for current official business, space should be provided in official premises, and thereupon a general survey of registries should be conducted in all administrative offices to determine which files (a) are indispensable to further administrative purposes and therefore must still remain in the registry, (b) are suitable for further preservation, although they are temporarily of no use in current matters, and (c) should be destroyed unreservedly.

The beginning of this decree clearly indicates its genesis. The sole criterion of historical value mentioned in the Austrian decree is absent. Everything is left to the unhampered decision of the administrative offices. It can only be attributed to the great conscientiousness and special knowledge of Prussian officials that this decree did not cause considerable damage to their official records.

The first Russian decree relating to record selection is dated 1830, the second 1845. Others appear mainly between 1860 and 1864. There is no doubt that the major consideration was lack of file space. The well-known fact that the largest number of files were destroyed in Russia between 1860 and 1870 confirms this belief. The year

1880 may be considered as the terminal date of the first period, the period of skeletal regulation and the generally haphazard selection of records without recourse to the opinion of archivists.

Archivists employed in state institutions in the West had little to do with modern files because the files in the so-called registries of the Austrian and German administration were preserved by agencies, if space permitted, for one hundred years or longer before transfer to the state archives. Also, archivists had little to do with appraisal, because this function, as already explained, was performed by the administrative offices themselves without asking for permission, advice, or directions from archivists. Being influenced exclusively by valuable ancient documents which were not subject to destruction, archivists involuntarily applied the same rule to modern records. This is undoubtedly the reason why we find very little reference to appraisal in the archival handbooks of the early years and even later.³ This accounts for the reluctant and negative attitude prevailing among archivists toward record selection. Their role in this early period was limited mainly to criticizing the activities of state administrative offices (especially in Russia) and to protecting files from destruction.

In the second period, ending with the World War, regulations concerning selection became increasingly more exhaustive and detailed. Undoubtedly, this evolution was brought about by the desire to avoid irreparable damage to records through ignorant or dishonest application of skeletal regulations relating to record selection by officials. For a long time, officials concerned with selection received a considerable part of the profit from the sale for paper manufacture of eliminated files and, therefore, they endeavored to set aside as many files as possible for this purpose. It should be noted that the progressive measure of saving files by issuing exhaustive and detailed regulations should be attributed, especially in Russia, to the perseverance of archivist-historians against the administrative officers.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, especially during and after the World War, the role of the state expanded. The extent of the state's tasks and functions increased. The nineteenth-century activities of state administration were expanded to include aviation, new types of communications such as the telephone and radio, agrarian reform, public health, protection of labor, fine arts, and the conservation of natural resources. The state penetrated ever deeper into the lives of its citizens. State agencies became more and more differentiated. Consequently, administrative records increased enormously. The typewriter and the development of duplicating methods contributed importantly to this increase.

The third period in the history of the selection of files began after the World War. In a number of states, mainly in those that survived revolution or political upheavals, such as Russia, Germany, Austria, and finally Poland, yet another revolutionary phenomenon occurred, beneficent in its results—the centralization of state archives.

Archivists, having taken over the administration of the so-called registries or the archives of various administrative offices, became familiar with contemporary files, in many cases for the first time. They had never before been faced with the menacing problem of what to do with the deluge of papers flooding not only the file rooms of the administrative offices but threatening in turn to flood the state archives also. In

³ Franz Löhner, *Archivlehre*, Paderborn (1890) 324; Muller, Feith, Fruin, *Anleitung zum Ordnen und Beschreiben von Archives*, Leipzig-Gräningen, (1905) 93; Georg Holtzinger, *Handbuch der Registratur und Archivwissenschaft*. 2d ed. Leipzig (1908) 161.

the face of this reality the negative attitude of archivists toward appraisal underwent a change within a short time. Archivists began not only to advocate appraisal but also often to deal with the problem in depth. It may be of interest to quote two opinions, expressed almost simultaneously in two widely separated parts of Europe in countries of entirely different political organization and culture.

In England in 1922, Hilary Jenkinson, author of a modern handbook on archival economy, wrote the following about appraisal: "We have suggested that much might be done by what is, in effect, a reversion to old procedure; i.e. by making the Administrator the sole agent for the selection and destruction of his own documents: only we have to make sure that he destroy enough On the other hand, we must see that our Administrator does not revert too completely to primitive habits and destroy unreasonably."⁴

In Russia in 1926, Bogojawlenskij, chairman of the Authenticating (*powierocznoj*) Commission in the Central Archival Administration, the agency controlling appraisal in the entire state, and, therefore, without doubt an eminent expert in the matter, writes:

In case everything is preserved, the investigator is threatened with drowning in a sea of papers of similar nature, of worthless content, that will attract his attention needlessly.

On the one hand, it is the task of the archivist to prepare material by reducing the bulk and thereby to improve its quality; on the other hand, because of discarding this or that document, he is threatened with just reproaches on the ground of destroying material of importance for official information or historical research.⁵

Faced by a common danger, we find agreement between two heretofore hostile camps, administrative state officials and archivist-historians. Mutual efforts were made to compile regulations relating to selection, to draw up record schedules with time limits for their preservation, and to issue technical instructions. Instead of the insufficiently developed skeletal regulations of the nineteenth century, detailed instructions appeared in France and Russia. In doubtful cases the administrative offices call upon archivists for clarification; and what is most important, archivists have the deciding word, as the principle is being generally established that no files should be destroyed without the consent of the state archives.

The struggle of many years duration between scholarship and bureaucracy ended with the triumph of scholarship, with undoubted advantages to the state. Archivists, responsible for the fonds of various offices, have a wider experience than administrative officials who, as a rule, have to work with the records of only one fonds.

What conclusions may be reached from this outline of the history of appraisal? There is no state in the world wealthy enough to erect buildings to house all files, arranged and inventoried, without exception. Yet one must remember that each record is in principle a unique specimen. When appraising records, we condemn to destruction unique specimens which, although without any practical value to administrative offices, may be invaluable historically. Furthermore, it is impossible to foresee what problems will be studied and from what point of view future historians will conduct their researches.⁶

⁴ Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, Oxford (1922), pp. 114-31. [The quotation is on pp. 130-31. ED.] This principle of administrative determinations has been discarded by the U.K. Public Record Office for records that are retained by agencies longer than 5 years.

⁵ S. Bogojawlenskij, *Rabota powierocznoj i razborocznych kommissij*. *Arkhivnoe delo*, 5-6: 68-83 (1926).

⁶ [ED.] The problem of determining future research trends is discussed in the editor's article, "Appraisal of Twentieth Century Records for Historical Use," *Illinois Libraries* 52 (February 1970): 154-62.

This dilemma will be solved if records are appraised in a careful, skillful, and far-sighted manner by administrators with the cooperation of specialists and under the control of archivists.

CHAPTER II. Bases for Records Appraisal

The first activity in record disposition is appraisal, consisting of designating files in class A or class B and classifying B files by the time limits set for their retention. If this appraisal is not to be arbitrary and thus dependent upon the whim of the person performing this function, it must be founded on permanent, unchangeable bases which will be discussed below.

Duplicates

Documents or communications are often made in many copies, the copying greatly facilitated by modern duplicating methods. Among such documents are regulations, instructions, circular letters, reports, statistical tables, and the like. All copies of printed or mimeographed records are identical. One or two copies suffice for archival purposes, the others may be destroyed during the selection process. This rule applies also to typewritten copies of letters of which several are often made needlessly when a single copy for the files is sufficient.

Printed Papers or Documents

Some documents or communications are printed. Certain originals may be destroyed,⁷ such as, for example, reproductions of statements, reports, and statistical tables. Obviously, originals having any historical value must not be destroyed despite their publication in printed historical sources. Originals having special holographic or paper significance or those bearing autographs of famous personages must not be subject to destruction.

Records Containing Data Repeated in Other Records

Statistical tables are the most characteristic example of such records. For instance, county governments⁸ submit monthly statistical reports of infectious diseases in their locality to the provincial governor. On the basis of these reports the provincial governor⁹ compiles a monthly statement of diseases, and, later, annual reports are made from the monthly statements. If the data furnished by the county offices are incorporated in their entirety in the monthly statements of the governor, then the reports of the county offices may be destroyed. If the statistical statements have been published in printed form by the governor, then their originals may also be destroyed. This rule applies to statistical reports of every type, but always on condition that all the data contained in them has been utilized.

Unique Files

In the appraisal of unique files or records, we proceed step by step from the criterion of their importance for the state as a whole to the point from which the

⁷ [ED.] See Paul Lewinson, "The Preservation of Government Publications," *American Archivist* 22 (April 1959): 181-88.

⁸ [ED.] The term *starostwa* may be translated as subprefecture. It appears here in its American equivalent, county government.

⁹ [ED.] The editor, similarly, uses the designation "provincial governor" for *województwo* (voivodeship or director of a voivode, spelled *vaivode* in *Webster's Third International Dictionary*).

appraisal of files is undertaken on the basis of their importance to a certain locality only.

1. *General Bases*

a. *Historical Period.* Almost every country with the exception of Poland has established certain chronological limits in accordance with which files originating before the established date may not be destroyed. As a rule, a date significant in the national life of the state is taken into consideration. Generally, the reason for not destroying any records originating prior to the established date is the small number of such records and their consequent historical significance.

In prewar Austria, any records originating before 1815, the date of the Congress of Vienna, could not be destroyed; in France, none originating before 1850, the date of the July Revolution; and in Russia, none from before 1811, the year preceding the Franco-Russian war of 1812.

The year 1867 seems suitable for Congress Poland.¹⁰ Records originating prior to that year should not be destroyed, as a rule. There are three outstanding reasons for choosing that date. In 1867, the Russian language was introduced into the administrative offices; furthermore, in 1866 a far-reaching reorganization of the administrative offices took place as a consequence of the January uprising; and finally, very few Polish records from preceding years remained in the administrative offices of the first and second level because of the merciless and senseless disposal effected by the Russian officials. In Galicia, on the other hand, 1866 is the beginning of a new era of territorial autonomy and the Polonization of administrative offices. In the part of Poland formerly under German occupation it is difficult to set a definite date, but here also the year 1866 is important as it marks the entry of the Grand Duchy of Poznan into the North German Confederation.

In addition to the chronological limit set, there are certain historical periods significant in the history of the state. During such periods strong upheavals occurred that affected the life and social conditions of the nation to such an extent that we find their reflection in a mass of ordinary files which in normal times would have no historical value. Therefore the best method is a general prohibition of destruction of these files. Such periods in the recent history of Russia are the years of the first revolution, 1904-7, and of the second revolution and civil war, 1917-22.

The files for similar periods in Polish history that should be very carefully selected are those of the World War and of the first years of the existence of the restored nation, from 1914-22 inclusive, because during this period Upper Silesia was awarded to Poland and Central Lithuania joined it.

b. *Administrative Branches.* Files of one administrative branch are more important historically than those of another. If we consider the functions of the administrative branches of the state from the standpoint of their role in the state organization, we easily come to the conclusion that the importance of these branches is by no means identical. The Ministry of the Interior is concerned with more important transactions than those that concern the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs or the Ministry of Transportation.

c. *Extent of Agency Authority.* The degree of importance of files depends upon the extent of the authority of the agency. Files of agencies of the first or lowest level of authority (i.e., those having territorially limited jurisdiction) relate, as a rule, to local matters and are less important historically when judged by state criteria than those of agencies of the second level, which in turn are less important than the files

¹⁰ [ED.] Congress Poland, ruled by the Russian Czar, comprised the central portion of Poland after the partition by the Congress of Vienna.

of the agencies of the third or highest level. For instance, files of the subprefectures are less important than those of the Ministry of the Interior. Agencies of the first and second levels act, more or less, as sieves through which transactions are sifted on their way to the agencies of higher authority. Finally, the agency of the third or highest level, being the final authority, is the initiator and creator of legal norms and also their interpreter, as well as the controller of the functions of the subordinate agencies.¹¹

Many transactions reach the higher authorities only in the form of statistical tables, dry figures, bare facts. On the other hand, in the offices of subordinate agencies these transactions are alive and vital. For this reason they are of extreme importance to a particular locality like a provincial government, a district, or a community. These are geographical bases of appraisal which will be discussed below.

d. *Distinctions between Functions.* Some files belonging to the same agency are more important than others, depending upon the type of function they document. For example, in the county government, records relating to national, religious, or political relations are more important historically than records relating to individuals, such as permits for hunting or carrying a weapon. In general it can be stated that files of a housekeeping character have no historical importance. I have in mind routine records relating to the upkeep of the army in time of peace, such as payrolls, and records for feeding, uniforms, border patrol, prison guards, and the like.

2. *Legal Bases.* Under this heading will be discussed files having, at least in principle, no historical importance.

Superannuation. Terms of limitation established in civil codes, codes of claims, laws, and regulations. The civil codes of occupational powers have a wide range of periods of limitation, after which the right to submit claims is outlawed. These terms extend from six months to ten years (Russian Civil Code, *Collection of Laws*, vol. 10, part 1) and even to thirty years (French Napoleonic civil codes) in force, with some change, in the territory of former Congress Poland; the Austrian code in force in the territory formerly under Austrian occupation; and finally, the Prussian code in force in the territory formerly occupied by Prussia. The Code of Claims, established in 1933 and in force after July 1, 1934, in all of Poland, abolished all former provisions of the civil codes relating to claims. The longest period of limitation, the thirty year term, is shortened by the Code of Claims to twenty years for outstanding debts.

In addition to the civil codes and the Code of Claims a number of laws and decrees set terms of limitation. Lack of space forbids their enumeration. Time limits for preservation of records are based on the statutes of limitation. It is unnecessary to preserve files for twenty years if cases become inactive in ten years, provided no other circumstances need be considered.

Time limits for preservation of files established in the Commercial Code, laws, and decrees. The Commercial Code,¹² promulgated in 1934, abolishing all commercial codes of the occupying powers, formerly in force, established ten years as the time limit for preserving ledgers and commercial correspondence. It is evident that there is a distinct contradiction between the provisions of the civil codes and the

¹¹ [ED.] See T. R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," Bulletin No. 8 of the National Archives (October 1956), p. 17. The editor differed somewhat in his "A Viewpoint on Appraisal of National Records," *American Archivist* 33 (April 1970): 175-87.

¹² Decree of the President of the Republic of June 27, 1934 (Dz. U. R. P. Journal of Laws of the Republic, No. 57, poz 502). Kodeks handlowy (Commercial Code), Art. 56.

Code of Claims. For instance, how may a person engaged in commerce secure his rights, expiring in twenty or thirty years, if, acting in accordance with the provisions of the Commercial Code, he disposes of his books or commercial correspondence in ten years? Because of this inconsistency, some financial institutions, among them the State Agrarian Bank, keep their most important books (main journal and cash journal) as well as memoranda and cash books for twenty or thirty years.¹³

In addition to the Commercial Code, several other laws and decrees (not cited here for lack of space) set time limits for the preservation of files and documents.

3. *Administrative Requirements.* I will mention a few files indispensable to the proper functioning of administrative offices. Such files consist primarily of the so-called general files or records containing either interpretations of laws or decisions in certain cases which constitute precedents for the future conduct of transactions. General files possess historical value in addition to their practical value as they show the rules of procedure that determine how a particular office handled transactions.¹⁴

After the general files come files relating to the formulation and execution of a budget, to the construction and repair of buildings, to the administration of real estate, to office organization and subsequent reorganizations, to rosters of personnel, to inventories and appraisal of files, and so forth. Some of these files also contain very valuable materials for administrative history.

In addition to the files mentioned, one should always keep files that are evidences of ownership or proof of obligations, such as registers of mortgages, parcels of land, property, civil status files, granting and loss of citizenship, treaties, agreements, conventions, and the like.

4. *Historical Bases.*

a. *General Files.* Several decades ago only transactions of royalty, wars, and the most important political events were treated as history. The historical viewpoint has changed fundamentally only within the past few decades. Histories of organizations, of economics (agriculture, industry, commerce), of social developments and social movements, and of culture have emerged into the light. Historians approach the study of the past from a continually changing perspective. Today, there is no aspect of national or social life that is not thoroughly examined.

Records having the greatest importance for a particular part of the state administration will also be of value for historical studies; therefore, they should be preserved. For example, the text of a law and its successive changes are indispensable to the administrative office. To the historian, however, the materials used in formulating the law may also be of great value. Examples of such materials are the successive texts of the proposed laws, together with corrections and amendments, the opinions of the offices and various individuals, and minutes of conferences and sessions of the legislative bodies; in short, everything that throws light on the origin of the laws. The same may be said in regard to all the most important decrees, edicts, instructions, regulations, circular letters, and, finally, to decisions of officials, especially those of the higher administrative offices.¹⁵

¹³ [ED.] Most business institutions are advised to retain primary journals indefinitely. Business archives normally preserve them.

¹⁴ [ED.] Compare Schellenberg, "Appraisal of Modern Public Records," pp. 15-18; Lewis J. Darter, Jr., "Records Appraisal: A Demanding Task," *Indian Archives* 18 (January 1969): 6-7.

¹⁵ [ED.] Records retention plans developed by the National Archives always include these classes of documentation.

b. *Personal Files*. Dossiers and other records concerning prominent personalities were until recently, and in many cases still are, highly valued by some archivist-historians, sometimes too highly valued. Obviously, one cannot underestimate the role of great men, of creative and gifted individuals. But one must remember that only those records have real importance that are evidences of their roles in certain events or transactions, or form a contribution to their biographies. Other files or records will possess only *pretium affectionis*, a sentimental or museum value, and sometimes will constitute only curios. Following are a few examples.

One archivist-historian, speaking during a conference on the necessity of careful selection of even seemingly worthless records, cited the fact that among the accounts of the Academy of Fine Arts, Cracow, set aside for destruction, he found receipts for tuition fees paid by Jan Matejko. But what do these receipts prove? The history of this great painter's life is well known, as are the details of his attendance at an art school of that time, later the academy. The names of his professors and colleagues and the influences upon his talent are known. These receipts merely show that Matejko paid his tuition, and the amounts. The receipts, therefore, have almost no importance for his biography and certainly none for the history of the development of his genius.

Another example: the Division of State Archives received word some time ago from Kielce that in the local fiscal board were to be found files of great import of the period of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, which were threatened with destruction. The deputy sent there by the division found only one paper with the authentic signature of Prince Jozef Poniatowski, and that in a rather unimportant matter. The alarm given with the best of intentions turned out to be false because thousands of worthless papers with Prince Jozef's signature exist, and only documents of real importance bearing his signature can have historical value.

From the above examples, it is evident that records must be appraised according to their importance and not according to the person who signed them. There is no question but that outstanding persons holding high positions usually sign papers of greater importance than are most records. Such persons, however, may have occupied entirely subordinate positions for a number of years. The signature alone is no proof of the document's value. In examining postal receipts, registers, counter-bills, and so forth, thousands of autographs of great persons could be found, but we should not be governed by such considerations when making selections from such documents.

Personal records or files have different values. These papers may actually contain valuable contributions to biographies of officials of low rank who were or became great writers. Examples are Mickiewicz, a subordinate official in the office of the wartime Russian Governor General; Slowacki, an applicant in the chancery of Prince Lubecki, Minister of Finance; Reymont, a petty official at a minor railroad station; and Prsybyszewski, an official of middle rank in the Danzig Post Office. The periods of administrative service of these writers were episodes of only little significance in their lives. Papers about that service, therefore, throw light on only a few events.¹⁶ Personal documents of statesmen, outstanding administrators, leaders, scientists, people who spent their entire lives in the service of the state, are of greater importance.

Next in order after records having historical importance because of their subject matter come records gaining importance only because of the transactions, facts, or

¹⁶ [ED.] These papers have value principally for exhibits.

problems in which they are indirectly concerned. Such files must be appraised with special skill and care.

In regard to personnel files of subordinates, only those of higher officials and outstanding individuals should always be preserved;¹⁷ however, material in the files of even middle or low-ranking officials shows the background of the official, the circles in which he moved, his service, family connections, and so forth. All this characterizes the status of officials in a certain epoch. When such files contain particularly interesting material they should always be preserved.

Court files of penal cases should be considered next. Such files must be preserved for a period of sixty years, for the purpose of establishing whether or not a certain individual was punished and the reason for such punishment. Some of these files contain valuable historical material and should be preserved permanently. Usually such files relate to lawsuits of a political, national, or religious nature. Next in order come records throwing interesting light on manners and customs, records concerning rituals, usages, prejudices, and superstitions; and files of the most important criminal cases such as assaults, robberies, murders, arson, grand larcenies, forgeries, and embezzlements.

Following these two groups there are several groups of files containing personal information or concerning social or economic relations, such as records concerning loans, especially long-term loans, from state banks; disability records from the Ministry of Social Welfare; workmen's accident compensation records in the offices of labor inspection; and so forth.

5. *Geographical Bases*

The files of first and second level administrative offices mentioned as having no importance for the history of the state may and do have genuine significance to a province, a county, a city, or a community. Such files have regional or local importance although the transactions relate to minor matters. Because these files concern the lives of the people, local customs, prejudices, superstitions, peculiarities of language, dialect, and nationality stand out distinctly and conspicuously. But these considerations do not constitute the only value of such files. Well-grounded and definitive local monographs should be published in order to depict the entire history of the state from the social, economic, national, and cultural standpoints. Only on the basis of such monographs can a comprehensive picture or synthesis be created. Therefore, the same care should be exercised in appraising local files as in appraising the files of the higher administrations.

6. *Substitution Value*

Damage has often occurred to fonds because the files were moved during the World War or transferred from office to office. Important records may have been lost, and only those of secondary importance remain. In such cases selection can be made only after the fonds have been arranged and on the guiding principle that records of secondary importance must be substituted for the important ones lost.

For example, in bookkeeping the most important book is the main journal; other books are either detailed records or auxiliary books. It has been mentioned that some financial institutions keep their main journal for thirty years although the detailed records may be destroyed after ten years. So, if the main journal is lost, the detailed records must take its place. In such cases the detailed records should be kept for thirty years.

¹⁷ [ED.] This is a general policy of dubious validity. If only records of the elite are required, how may their careers be compared with others?

Archivists know of cases in which files or documents without any value under normal circumstances have played important roles as substitutes. In the case of a loss of registers or rosters of students in a particular class, certificates showing attendance at classes were issued on the basis of receipts for tuition fees. It is quite apparent that if one paid tuition of the eighth school level he must have finished the seven previous levels.¹⁸

The scholarly side of the problem of substitution will not be discussed here. Historians accustomed to laborious archival research know very well how significant can be records of lesser importance in the case of scattered or fragmentary fonds. How often, when files have been lost, it is a consolation when facts are verified from a register of correspondence, although the letters have been lost.

7. *Typical Fonds*

To acquaint posterity with the working methods of administrative offices, it is necessary to leave one complete fonds of every type of administrative office at the lowest level within the jurisdiction of the office of the next level (e.g., files of a county government under the jurisdiction of a provincial governor; or files of a fiscal office in the jurisdiction of a fiscal board; or one complete fonds of every type of administrative office of the second level, such as provincial governor, fiscal board, railroad administration, and so forth). From such a sample, a fonds to a certain extent serves as a museum. No records, not even the least important, should be eliminated. Such fonds, left untouched, should be those of administrative offices regarded as exemplary or typical.

CHAPTER III

Records Appraisal and Elimination

The definition reads as follows of files that should be included in class A of state administrative offices:

In class A belong files of permanent importance for the interests and history of the state as well as for public administration, for the rights of citizens, and for scholarly research.—Przepisy o przechowywaniu akt w urzędach administracji, § 2 (Regulations concerning preservation of files in administrative offices of the government, section 2). With this definition and the directions discussed in the foregoing chapter as guides, we shall endeavor to enumerate examples of files that should always be preserved. Obviously, this enumeration will not be complete.

One should always preserve (1) laws, decrees, and edicts of the President of the Republic, decrees and resolutions of the Council of Ministers and of individual ministers, orders of chiefs of authorities of the 1st and 2nd instance; instructions, regulations, circulars,¹⁹ projects relating to laws and decrees; (2) minutes of sessions of corporate bodies (committees, conferences, commissions) in important matters; (3) files concerning organization of the state; (4) files concerning territorial-administrative organization and its changes; (5) files concerning the activities, development, administration, and investiture of administrative offices, authorities, institutions, establishments, and state agencies; (6) budget estimates and allocations of the budget; (7) periodic reports, especially annual reports; (8) reports of controlling agencies; (9) compilations and statistical tables, as well as data for the most important aggregations; (10) international treaties, conventions, and commercial agreements; and (11) files relating to diplomatic and economic relations of Poland with other states. Also to be preserved are files relating significantly with matters that are (12) political; (13) national; (14) religious, cultural, and educational; and (15) economic (agriculture, industry, commerce, and trade); and matters of (16) communication and transportation (railroads, high-

¹⁸ [ED.] Illustrative of this principle is the retention, for the purpose of replacing files lost in the recent fire, by the NARS Military Records Center of personnel records normally designated for destruction.

¹⁹ Publications of other offices received by way of exchange are not included. Complete sets of the *Journal of Laws of the Polish Republic* and *Monitor Polski* are generally preserved in the office library.

ways, navigation, aviation, posts, telegraphs, telephone, and radio) transactions; (17) agricultural, settlement, and colonization reconstructions; (18) labor, wages, and social insurance; (19) social welfare; (20) hygiene and public health; (21) army organization and training operations; (22) political upheavals, riots, strikes, and political, economic, social, national, and religious disturbances; (23) extraordinary occurrences and catastrophes caused by the elements (acts of God); (24) manners and customs, usages, prejudices, superstitions, spells and charms; (25) national and state celebrations of exceptional importance; (26) organizational statutes of offices, and their changes; (27) files relating to outstanding events in official life; (28) files concerning relations of administrative offices to the public; (29) personal files of higher officials, beginning with the chiefs of the divisions; (30) personal files of officials who for one reason or another have become prominent; (31) schedules of files, repertories, registers, inventories, correspondence journals, indexes, reference books (for Austrian files); (32) files concerning records selection; (33) official registers of mortgages; (34) contracts and documents pertaining to purchase and sale of real estate, permanent land tenure, and service land grants; (35) files regarding estates, gifts, bequests, foundations, and educational and charitable legacies; (36) registers and documents concerning civil status; (37) the acquisition and loss of citizenship, change of name of persons and localities; and (38) private property. And there are others.

Detailed schedules of class A files are compiled by the main administrative branches for themselves as well as for their subordinate offices, in agreement with the Division of State Archives. In compiling these schedules it is highly desirable for the main administrative branches to consult the opinion of experienced officials and representatives of the various operating divisions and for the Division of State Archives to consult scholars who are specialists in applicable branches of learning.

The files not included in class A have only temporary importance. The time limits for their preservation, with the exception of the files mentioned below, are from two to thirty years, depending upon the periods of limitation established by law. Theoretically, as many of these periods may be set up as there are years in the thirty year term. Taking into consideration the most important periods of limitation, class B files may be divided into four groups:

Group I includes files of transactions that become obsolete at the expiration of thirty years, the longest term established by the Napoleonic, Austrian, and Prussian civil codes;

Group II includes files that become obsolete after twenty years, the longest term established by the Code of Claims;

Group III includes files relating to normal routine administrative activities of general administrative offices of the 1st and 2nd instance, fiscal offices, and so forth, as well as books and commercial correspondence that are to be preserved for ten years;

Group IV includes files that have no legal value but should be preserved for two years for purely practical reasons. Only files indispensable for official needs and personal and court files will be preserved beyond thirty years. With the exception of records that will be included in class A, court records of criminal cases will be preserved for sixty years from the time the sentence takes legal effect.

If an official has obtained a pension, his files should be kept as long as claims may be submitted to the State Treasury by himself or his immediate relatives (wife and children), meaning no less than sixty years after the closing of the files. Naturally, this does not apply to personal files included in class A.

The principal authorities have the task of compiling detailed schedules of class B files with time limits for their preservation. In this matter it would be desirable to consult with experienced officials on one hand and with the Division of State Archives on the other. As an example of such schedules, the list of files of administrative offices of the second level shows time limits for their preservation as provided by an appendix to the French Départementale archival regulations of 1922.²⁰

²⁰ Loi, décrets, arrêts, règlements et instructions concernant le service des archives départementales. Melun, 1922.

This schedule contains over 500 titles of files, grouped by subject. The time limit for the preservation of the files is shown next to each title. The file titles carry remarks relating to exceptions from the established time limit for preservation. For example, sixty years is the limit for preserving personal files, but under the title are listed the exceptions to this rule, such as files of higher officials or those of officials who have become prominent for various reasons, and these are not subject to destruction. A list of titles in alphabetical order is appended to the list.

In the file plan, the period for preservation should appear next to the title of every folder. It is most important that the file plan should be arranged properly. File plans should have no titles such as *Varia* or *Miscellanea* and should be developed in greater rather than less detail so that the folder should contain records relating to one transaction or case only. The purpose in this is the possibility of eliminating entire folders and only in exceptional cases using the method, called *triage* by the French, that consists of looking through each folder sheet and discarding only those papers or documents that are not worth keeping permanently.²¹

We now come to the technical aspect of selection in which two circumstances may be met: (1) the selection of current files, arranged on the basis of detailed schedules of files with time limits for their preservation, and (2) the selection of files of older origin, frequently not arranged. These situations will be discussed consecutively.

1. *Appraisal of Current Files*

a. *Records Appraisal by the Operating Official.* Records appraisal is conducted on the basis of a detailed schedule of files with time limits for their preservation. It is desirable that this action be taken by the operating official when working on a particular transaction.

This requirement seems to contradict the provisions of section 7 of the cited regulations relating to the preservation of files, which states that appraisal and elimination is performed by the official in charge of the file room, in agreement with the representative of the operating section the files of which are subject to elimination. This seeming contradiction, however, is explained by another provision of the same section which states that "the method and time of eliminating files in administrative offices is fixed by the proper authorities meaning, as a rule, the authorities in charge." In accordance with this provision, the Ministry of Finance inserted in the regulations for its file rooms the following: "The assignment of files to one or the other class is carried out during the elimination of files. This assignment may be performed by the officials acting as transactors in the cases. The initial assignment, however, is subject to revision at the time the files are being eliminated in the file room, and may be changed."²²

Records appraisal by the operator or principal is more effective because he, when transacting the case, has its entire status and course of procedure fresh in his mind and is in a position to make decisions more easily and with the expenditure of minimum time. On the other hand, the contents of the file are, as a rule, unknown to the director of the file room and, after the passage of years, the case will be unknown also to the representative of the operating division whose files are in process of elimination. One can state, almost positively, that the files will not be examined by the same official to whom they were referred for action or by whom they were created,

²¹ [ED.] These reasonable standards were not generally practiced in the United States until after World War II.

²² Przepisy o przechowywaniu akt w Ministerstwie Skarbu (Dz. Urz. Min. Skarbu Nr. 22, z r. 1932, pos. 341 S 1) [Regulations relating to the preservation of files.]

but by a successor often several times removed. Therefore, these two officials, one from the files room and the other from the operating division, find it necessary to become familiar with files that are strange to them. This procedure entails not only a perusal but also a study of the files, a time-consuming requirement. It is doubtful that any operating division or department can permit its representative to spend months in the file room in eliminating old, completed files. It is also doubtful that the director of the file room can find very much time for the selection of files. Under such circumstances, appraisal of files performed only in the file room will, no doubt, be intermittent and detrimental to records selection.

In order to save time and expedite disposition, the following sequence of action is considered most appropriate: (1) appraisal by the operating office, (2) weeding by the director of the file room, and (3) verification of the director's action by the representative of the operating division.

I believe that it would be well to adopt the principle that files which have not been appraised by the operating division cannot be accepted by the file room.²³

The appraisal by the operating official should be shown (1) on the file plan, (2) on the file cover or folder by filling in the space and striking out any unnecessary words in a stamped or printed heading, and (3) on the register of incoming and outgoing files if such a register of files transferred to the file room is maintained.

b. *Records Disposal by the File Room Director.* The director of the file room eliminates disposable records. This action should be taken once a year to avert overcrowding the file room. The most suitable time is the first quarter of the calendar year. The elimination should be effected before files from the operating divisions are taken over by the file room, thus providing space for incoming records.

The importance of the role of the director of the file room in eliminating files can not be passed over without comment. Of the indispensable qualifications of candidates for this important but often unappreciated post I will speak elsewhere; here I desire to enumerate only a few.

The director of the file room should know thoroughly (1) the statutes of organization of the office or offices transferring files to the file room, the division of their functions, and the history of these offices; (2) the legal regulations relating to the functions of the offices, especially regulations establishing time limits; (3) office regulations, especially those concerning the files on deposit in the file room; (4) the languages of the local minorities; and (5) the mutual relationship and interdependence of various kinds of files and of accounting books and documents. In addition, the director of the file room should have a full realization of the importance of the work being done. He should understand that careless, ill-considered destruction of a file or document may result in irreparable material or historical loss to the state.

In the process of disposal, the file room director should be guided by the time limitations designated in (a) the file plan, (b) the detailed schedules of files giving time limits for their preservation, (c) registers of incoming and outgoing files (if they exist), and finally (d) the notation on the file cover or folder. Each folder containing records to be destroyed should be examined, as it may happen that they have acquired historical value in the meantime or that they should be moved elsewhere. When the director proposes to save certain records from destruction he sets them

²³ [ED.] This system has long been recommended, but it is rarely implemented. NARS records centers now refuse offers that have not been authorized by the Archivist for either eventual disposal or permanent retention.

aside for inclusion in class A, making the necessary notation on the covers of the class B files, and on the registers of incoming and outgoing files.

c. *Verification of Elimination by a Representative of the Proper Operating Division.* During the course of eliminating the files of a division, its head delegates a representative to the file room for the purpose of verifying the decision. The representative detailed to this work should be a senior employee with experience in his own division and with an excellent knowledge of its history. His general knowledge of the files and of the transactions involved must surpass that of the director of the file room.

The disposals should be reported in two separate schedules for each operating division. One schedule should show by subject groups the accurate titles of the files that are to be destroyed, giving the number of folders in each group. Titles that are too short or that do not reflect the contents of the folders should be supplemented with explanatory notes. The second detailed schedule should include the titles of class A files intended for transfer to the State Archives. In both schedules the order of the entries should be the same as in the filing plan of the division. The dates covered by the files are given in both schedules. The schedules are made in three copies. The first copy is intended for the State Archives, the second for the file room, and the third for the division whose files are being eliminated. All copies of the schedules are signed by the director of the file room and the representative of the operating division.

d. *The Office Director's Verification of Disposal.* The schedules are examined by the director of the office. He has the same right as the file room director to change files from class B to class A, or from the lower to the higher group. He notes necessary changes in the schedules, under the heading "Remarks," and initials them. On all copies of the schedules the office director inscribes the term "Seen," the date, and his signature.

e. *Approval of Higher Authority.* Before forwarding the schedules of files to the archival establishment, the official next in rank should be given the opportunity of acquainting himself with the completed destruction and expressing his attitude in the matter.

The disposal of county government records should be approved by the provincial governor, and that of the files of the provincial governor by the Ministry of the Interior. The procedures would be the same. All schedules of files are sent to higher authority. After examining the schedules, the chief of the administrative branch, or his representative, makes whatever changes are necessary in the same manner as the director of the office whose files have been eliminated. After approval, the schedules are returned.

f. *Approval by the State Archives.* After approval by higher authority the first copies of the schedules are forwarded to the State Archives. The file plans of the individual divisions are attached to the schedule of files of class A that are intended for transfer to the Archives.

The Archives has two months to determine its attitude. If during that time the Archives makes no corrections in the lists of files to be destroyed or has no objections either because of lack of space or other reasons to the transfer of class A files to the Archives, then the intentions of the administrative office are carried out. The files selected as class A are forwarded to the Archives, those of class B are destroyed.

The Archives should be in a position to control the proper performance of the disposal. This control may be accomplished in two ways: (1) by sending a properly qualified deputy to the office which performed the disposal, or (2) by requesting

that those folders of class B files that have been designated for destruction incorrectly be forwarded to the Archives. No request is necessary for the forwarding of class A files as they will be transferred to the Archives anyway.

In order to establish uniform standards of procedure, it would be advisable during the first few years after the adoption of the regulations concerning record preservation that the Division of State Archives perform the disposition functions of the State Archives, or at least control the related activities.²⁴ In the establishment of such control, the State Archives should forward to the Division of State Archives lists of class B files received from administrative offices, together with their comments. The division, after examination of the lists, would return them to the Archives with its remarks and opinion. It is greatly to be desired that the Division of State Archives as well as the Archives secure, in doubtful cases, the opinion of scholarly specialists.

2. *Appraisal of Records Created prior to the Issuance of Detailed Filing Schedules.* These files may be divided into: (a) files located in the file room, and (b) files located in the Archives.

a. *Files Located in the File Room.* The segregating of permanent and disposable files must be performed by the director of the file room in cooperation with the representative of the proper operating division.

Before starting the selection both officials should acquaint themselves thoroughly with the organization, jurisdiction, and functions of the office that created the files. For this purpose it is necessary to study thoroughly the statutes establishing the office, the relevant laws, decrees, instructions, circulars, and the like. Then the system under which official procedure was conducted, whether German, Russian, Austrian, or mixed, should be ascertained. Also, it must be understood how the files were created; whether an arrangement by subject and a filing plan existed, or there were only lists of folders. If the Austrian office system was used, then in what manner were the files created? Were they arranged according to the number of the day-book (the usual numerical system), or in accordance with case numbers (the Kielmansegg system), or according to subject headings? In doubtful cases, it is well to turn for information and explanation to officials who have served in the office since its establishment and who remember past practices.

Furthermore, it should be determined whether the files are arranged according to the system under which they were created. If such is not the case, the original arrangement should be restored. When performing this work, it is necessary to determine if gaps exist in the records and, if so, what they should contain.

Only after performing these tasks can the disposition process be started, using as directives the detailed disposal schedules with time limits for their preservation compiled by the administrative authorities in agreement with the Division of State Archives. Files dating from the first years of the existence of re-created Poland until the year 1922 inclusive should be appraised by the State Archives and not by administrative offices. Files originating even in later years have to be appraised most carefully not only because of their importance for the history of a young state but also because they were not created, as a rule, in a planned and competent manner. Therefore, these files should be examined very carefully and not on the basis of the title of the folder only. Files created according to the Austrian numerical system

²⁴ [ED.] The Division of State Archives was the central administrative unit in the Polish Ministry of Public and Religious Instruction that controlled, supervised, and reviewed the work and activities of the several State Archives.

must be inspected document by document, sheet by sheet; otherwise it is impossible to appraise them properly. The subsequent disposition procedure is similar to that used in the elimination of current files.

b. *Files Located in the Archives.* The statements made concerning the selection of files located in the file room are all applicable to office files located in the Archives.

Appraising Records of Administrative Offices of States Formerly Occupying Poland. The files of administrative offices of states formerly occupying Poland should be forwarded in their entirety to the State Archives. Only the State Archives are competent to provide for the disposition of these files. This task is more difficult and even more responsible than the selection of Polish files because these files have reference to a period of Polish history which, to the present time, has not been thoroughly studied by historians (1) because access to these files was impossible before the World War and (2) because gaps often occur in them for various reasons. After having established the existence of gaps while arranging them, the possibilities of substitution as mentioned in Chapter II should be considered.

Generally speaking, when appraising files of the former powers of occupation, be guided by the principle that it does not pay to scrutinize files of a given division if no more than 20 percent of them are to be destroyed. It may also happen that in order to obtain space in the archival establishment as soon as possible, segregation must be started, contrary to principle, before arrangement of the fonds. In such cases the work should begin with the elimination of files most obviously of no value, such as various receipts, auxiliary account books, and finally, the records of those divisions that, as a whole or with very few exceptions, have neither historical nor practical value.

In arranging files prior to selection, close attention should be given to indexes, inventories, and in general to lists of files in any form whatsoever. In the first stage of the work, such lists are of great service for orientation as to the kind of files that were created in a given division.

When files are being arranged, loose papers occasionally fall out of folders. These are known in archival parlance as "fugitive papers." A particularly large number of these will be found when arranging Austrian files, which were usually not stitched. Fugitive papers should not be destroyed. They should be assembled temporarily so that after examination they may be returned to their proper places in the folders.

Is it necessary for me to emphasize that records selection in archives requires archivists who possess extensive legal and historical knowledge, broad mental capacity, and exceptional ability for examining records from various points of view?²⁵ These archivists should have a thorough knowledge of the languages in which the records subject to selection have been written.

The Destruction of Eliminated Files. Files destined for destruction are disposed of in two ways, either by incineration or by pulping. Secret and confidential files must be burned. Burning proofs of payment, debentures, promissory notes, repaid loans, bills of exchange, and similar documents is desirable.

Other files are sold to paper factories for conversion. When selling files to private factories, a written guarantee that the files will be converted into paper pulp should be secured. Prior to the sale the files are rendered unfit for use. Stitched or pasted files are torn apart and scrambled. Maceration of records by a mechanical cutter is

²⁵ [ED.] Compare H. G. Jones, *The Records of a Nation*, New York: Atheneum, 1969, p. 85; Fishbein, "Viewpoint on Appraisal of National Records," p. 186.

also advisable. It is worth while to remove from the files intended for destruction all unused paper and also the front and back covers of all account and office books. Otherwise the entire contents of the folders should be destroyed. It is not permissible to remove loose leaves or documents because of contents, form, stamps, or autographs of well-known persons for the purpose of adding to public or private collections.