

## International Progress in Microfilming: The Background and Work of the ICA Microfilm Committee

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THE EIGHTH WORLD CONGRESS OF ARCHIVISTS will meet in Washington, from September 29 through October 3, 1976. Concurrently with the congress, the Microfilm Committee of the International Council on Archives will be holding its seventh meeting.

At the first meeting of the General Assembly of World Archivists, in Paris in 1950, Lester Born, the first general secretary of the International Council on Archives, presented a paper in which he urged archivists to extend their use of microphotography. He pointed to a wide spectrum of uses: microfilm could promote the exchange of documents between archives, it could facilitate scholarly access, and it could enable archives to supplement their own holdings. Born's paper prompted a lively discussion. Although some of the discussants pointed to specific examples in which microfilm had assisted archivists, a few, especially those from France, questioned the permanence of microfilm and the many technical problems which they said made the use of microfilm by archives difficult.<sup>1</sup>

Although uses of microfilm by archives were reported in *Archivum*<sup>2</sup> and discussed at a number of world congresses, many of the older archival administrations looked upon microfilm as a threat to their exclusive control over the records in their custody. It was not until May 1966, when the Extraordinary Congress of the International Council on Archives met in Washington, that a more mature evaluation of the role that microfilm could play in archives, as well as the beginnings of a consensus, were reached.

That Congress had as its theme "Archives for Scholarship—Encouraging Greater Ease of Access." The discussions at Washington led to a number of unprecedented and unanimous recommendations. Some called for a liberalization of restrictions, others called for the strengthening of microfilming programs by extending them whenever possible to entire series of records, and another called for the formation of a committee to investigate the most economical and rapid methods for the publication of archival sources and to study the use of microfilm as a mean of publication.<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 1966, at the Munich meeting of the ICA Executive Committee, Ernst Posner, the U.S. representative, was successful in seeing that a Liberalization Committee and a Microfilming Committee were established. The work of these two com-

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<sup>1</sup> *Archivum*, vol. 1 (1951): 76-101.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the report of Bertrand Gille, "Equisse d'un plan de normalization pour le microfilmage des archives," *Archivum*, vol. 3 (1953): 87-104.

<sup>3</sup> The author served as the associate reporter for the third session and prepared a report entitled "Selected Aspects of Microreproduction in the United States." This report was reprinted in *National Archives Accessions*, no. 60 (December 1967) and in *Archivum*, vol. 16 (1966).

mittees, as well as that of the Extraordinary Congress, was made possible through grants from the Council on Library Resources.

This Microfilming Committee was an ad hoc committee which was to end its activities with its report to the Sixth World Congress of Archivists at Madrid in September 1968. It should not be confused with the present Microfilm Committee which is a permanent committee established after the Madrid Congress by the Executive Committee of the International Council on Archives. The work of the first, the Microfilming Committee,<sup>4</sup> set the stage for its successor, the Microfilm Committee, by developing a firm theoretical foundation as well as practical guidelines for more extensive use by archives of microfilm for publication, preservation, and other purposes. This it did by assembling information on microfilming and documentary publication practices in archives throughout the world; by thorough consideration of the relative merits of microfilm publication, conventional publication, and various combinations thereof; by preparing a basic manual, *Microphotography for Archives*; and, finally, through unanimous agreement on a series of recommendations that were presented to the Madrid Congress.<sup>5</sup>

Information on current practices was assembled primarily by means of a detailed questionnaire that elicited seventy responses from fifty-six countries.<sup>6</sup> The results confirmed, as the discussions at the Extraordinary Congress had indicated, that opposition to microfilming was but a minority view. A few examples: thirty-six of fifty-six respondents stated that they would microfilm entire series of records; no country stated that it would refuse to supply another country with microfilm copies of records relating to its own history; thirty-four countries stated that they would fill a request for microfilm copies of records relating to the history of other countries while only seven stated that they would not do so. The questionnaire also revealed that the use of 35mm. microfilm by archives was standard, that more and more archives were developing and expanding their microfilming operations, and that the uses of microfilm were increasing. The central archives alone of forty countries were producing 25 million negative microfilm exposures a year while the production of positive microfilm in twenty-six countries totalled 15 million feet a year! Fourteen countries stated that they were disseminating positive microfilm copies of records in rudimentary or more developed microfilm publication form. The answers also indicated that more than half of the countries responding did not have adequate technical standards for the production or preservation of microfilm nor did they have adequate guidelines for preparing records for filming or for describing the microfilmed records.

The manual, *Microphotography for Archives*, was developed to provide archivists with basic information concerning microfilming. The manual's purpose was to assist those archives desiring to produce microfilm that would meet archival standards for permanence; to provide guidelines for the arrangement, preparation, and description of records to be filmed; to aid those interested in using microfilm for

<sup>4</sup> The Microfilming Committee consisted of Chairman Etienne Sabbe, president of the International Council on Archives and Archivist-General of Belgium; Vice-Chairman Robert H. Bahmer, archivist of the United States; W. Kaye Lamb, dominion archivist, Public Archives of Canada; Ivan Borsa, deputy director, the Hungarian National Archives; Th. de Smidt, historian from Leyden University, the Netherlands; and Secretary of the Committee Albert H. Leisinger, Jr.

<sup>5</sup> Sixth International Congress on Archives, Report of the Microfilming Committee (Washington, 1968, 38 p.) and *Archivum*, vol. 18 (1968); and International Council on Archives, *Microphotography for Archives* (Washington, 1968). Reprints of both of these publications may be obtained from the author.

<sup>6</sup> The Report of the Microfilm Committee, ICA, Appendix B, pp. 19-38.

publication or preservation purposes; and to assist archives interested in the better control, maintenance, and storage of film. The original English edition consisted of 1,200 copies.<sup>7</sup> A Hungarian edition followed. A Spanish translation was printed in an edition of 3,500 copies by the Servicio Nacional de Microfilm, Madrid, in 1972, and distributed to all archives and libraries in Latin America by the Organization of American States. A French edition was published in 1975.

Some members of the committee, particularly Kaye Lamb of Canada and Robert H. Bahmer of the United States, believed that the best, most effective contribution they could make to the world archival profession was to be the manual. Others felt so about the committee's recommendations, adopted without dissent and similarly approved by the World Congress at Madrid, and they felt that if implemented by a few key archival establishments the recommendations would make a lasting contribution to better archival management as well as to scholarly research. It is worthwhile to summarize a few of the Madrid World Congress resolutions. They are without precedent and they constitute the frame of reference within which the present Microfilm Committee is operating. The first of these states the general premise of the committee as to the value of the microfilm format. The remainder were intended to provide a *modus operandi*:

1. The microfilm publication of entire series of records and the making of copies of them available to scholarly researchers is the most effective, rapid, and economical way to promote greater access to archives; materials so filmed should be identified and described in such a way that the film can be readily and easily used; whenever possible, the explanatory materials should be printed by conventional methods and issued separately; and microfilm publication work should be regarded as a normal activity of an archives.
2. All member countries should prepare, publish, regularly update, and widely disseminate lists of their master negative microfilm unless there are legal restrictions on its use.
3. In filling requests for microfilm copies of straight runs of archival materials, archives should retain the master negative and supply the requester with a positive copy.<sup>8</sup>
4. Archives should follow the best technical standards available to assure production of microfilm of the highest archival quality possible and should assure its maintenance and storage under optimum conditions.
5. A small working group of archivists should be created with expert and practical knowledge of microfilming to advise and assist archives desiring to establish, extend, or improve microfilming facilities or operations and to facilitate the spread of new techniques and technological developments; and this group, at regular intervals, should issue a bulletin.

The absence of vocal opposition to these and other liberalization resolutions at Madrid clearly indicated a continuation of the erosion that had begun at the Extraordinary Congress in Washington of the views of the conservative sector.

Soon after the Madrid Congress the Executive Committee of the ICA established a permanent Microfilm Committee as called for by the Madrid resolutions. The members were appointed by the president of the ICA on the nomination of the committee chairman.<sup>9</sup> Approval of these had to be obtained from their respective archival administrations, so the committee was not finally constituted until April 1969. Without exception, all members had not only an excellent working knowledge of

<sup>7</sup> The English edition was reprinted this year for the fourth time by the National Archives of the United States.

<sup>8</sup> The development and increasing use of duplicate negatives since 1968 has resulted in some archives offering duplicate negatives to purchasers.

<sup>9</sup> The committee at present consists of Chairman Albert H. Leisinger, Jr., U.S.; Carmen Crespo, Spain; Tom Mikhailov, Soviet Union; Wolfgang Kohte, West Germany; Daphne H. Gifford, Great Britain; Christian Gut, France; Elio Califano, Italy; William Wheeler, Canada; and Secretary Ivan Borsa, Hungary.

microfilm operations in their respective archives, but also they were sympathetic to more liberal access policies.

Funds were not made available for the Microfilm Committee to hold its first organizational meeting until the spring of 1970—just about one year from the time of its establishment. Nevertheless the committee, through correspondence, had been functioning. Advice and assistance had been given to numerous central archival administrations as well as to other interested bodies. Examples of the assistance provided included obtaining a reader for a developing archives in Africa so that microfilm copies of records relating to its own heritage could be read by researchers and its own staff, and supplying Australia with data to enable it to produce microfilm of archival standards. Information concerning cameras and readers as well as bookholders, image counters, and storage equipment was provided to archives. Hundreds of requests for the publications of the Microfilming Committee were filled. Some of the more sophisticated requests were for information on the merits and costs of microfilming records for disposal purposes, for data on bibliographical controls for microfilm copies of archival records, for information on the feasibility of using microfiche or ultrafiche for the micropublication of archival materials, and for technical data on how to develop a micropublication program.

Well in advance of its first meeting, the Microfilm Committee in February 1970 sent a circular letter to archives throughout the world informing them of its existence, its membership, its willingness to be of assistance, and of the availability of the publications of the predecessor committee. The circular also informed all archives that a *Bulletin*, to be published in English by the Hungarian National Archives, would print reports about their work, their experiences, and their use of new techniques.<sup>10</sup> In addition, all archives using microfilm were requested to designate as a corresponding member of the committee their person most knowledgeable about microfilming. There are now fifty-two corresponding members, all of whom are invited to attend the meetings and participate in them and to work with the committee on various tasks. A good number of corresponding members have done so. The committee's use of corresponding members has been so successful that other ICA committees are now planning to use the same system. (At our 1974 meeting in Stockholm, for example, corresponding members from Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark attended and participated. The meetings in Paris 1970, London 1971, Moscow 1972, Rome 1973, and Madrid 1975 have all been attended by corresponding members.) At most of these meetings their number has usually equalled the number of regular members. Through their participation, corresponding members have not only brought new insights and vitality to the committee; they have frequently returned to their own archives with new enthusiasms and new viewpoints.

In April 1970, in Paris at its first meeting, the Microfilm Committee agreed to work within the framework of the liberal Madrid resolutions. This agreement has insulated the committee against the dangers of becoming a debating society or from reopening questions already decided. Procedures were developed to see that each member could share in the work of the group, lending his own expertise to answer questions posed to the committee and yet keeping both secretary and chairman

<sup>10</sup> Bulletins were published in 1972, 1973, 1974, and 1975, in editions of from 2,000 to 2,600 copies. They have ranged in size from 57 to 96 printed pages. The *Bulletin* now consists of three sections: (1) the work of the committee, (2) articles and reports on microfilming in archives, and (3) microfilming techniques. Abstracts are now printed in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Copies of all issues of the *Bulletin* are still in print and may be obtained free of charge from either the chairman or the secretary of the committee.

informed of developments. Each member accepted at least one major assignment—the preparation of a working paper, the assembling of data in some particular area, or the responsibility for some aspect of the preparation of the *Bulletin*. The committee agreed that there were a number of other areas in which a contribution could be made. Included among these were:

1. The problem of how best to preserve microfilm against internal and external agents of destruction, especially in tropical countries.
2. The need on the part of developing countries and of UNESCO for lists of good but relatively inexpensive and essential microfilm equipment, accessories, supplies, and facilities required for small or medium-sized microfilm or reprographic laboratories, as well as of personnel training needs. (The UNESCO studies described below provided basic guidelines in these areas).
3. The desirability of establishing close liaison with the International Standards Organization (ISO), the International Reprographic Congress (IRC), and the International Micrographics Congress (IMC).

About its first meeting, the committee approved for the ICA a report which included a series of recommendations concerning microfilming for the UNESCO-Archives consultative group that met in Paris a month later. Most of the Microfilm Committee's suggestions were included in this group's recommendations to UNESCO.

Since its organization, the committee has continually reminded archives, the ICA, and UNESCO, its parent body, that training schools for archivists and librarians in both the developing and developed countries must, to be effective, provide practical training. It has recommended that first-class reprographic and preservation demonstration centers in these schools should be established as promptly as possible. Through correspondence and personal contacts with archival administrations throughout the world as well as with the directors of the schools now established in Dakar, Accra, and Cordoba, as well as in Malaysia and the Dominican Republic, the committee has obtained substantial and unanimous support for this proposal. During the next two years the committee plans to prepare, with the cooperation of these schools, feasibility studies to prepare the groundwork for at least one or more demonstration centers. The committee has realized, of course, that the establishment of demonstration centers for both reprographic and restoration areas is expensive and that funds are limited. (It is imperative therefore that ICA, UNESCO, the Organization of American States, the Pan American Institute of Geography and History, as well as the various archival administrations concerned should cooperate as fully and as closely as possible to see that maximum benefits can be achieved at the lowest possible cost.)

Another major effort of the committee has been to convince archives not only of the need for archival standards for their own filming but also of the need for them to take the lead in establishing national standards organizations, if these do not exist, and to participate in activities of national standards organizations where they do exist. All regular and corresponding members have been urged to participate. As a result many archives are now playing an active part in their own national standards organizations. There has also been increased participation in the work of the International Standards Organization. The committee has continued to urge that these efforts be continued and strengthened.

Not once but many times the committee has requested that ICA and UNESCO support all measures that will accelerate or expedite the exchange of microfilm between member states. The committee has continually held that priority should be

given to the needs of developing countries and of recently created states for microfilm copies of records essential for an understanding of their own heritage.

The committee has urged and continues to urge those archives that have invaluable and irreplaceable records among their holdings to take steps, through the microfilming process, to preserve these records from deterioration and destruction. The committee also has viewed with concern the failure of some archives to act responsibly and positively in this area. Not only has the committee urged the ICA to cooperate fully with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the International Federation for Documentation (FID), the IMC, and IRC; it has also initiated action on its own part to strengthen the ties and cooperation among these organizations.

The committee proposed to ICA and through it to UNESCO the preparation of two studies: one on the "Basic Standards for Equipping, Maintaining, and Operating a Reprographic Laboratory in Archives of Developing Countries," and the other on the "Legal Validity of Microfilm." Both were commissioned by UNESCO. The first has been published in English (Brussels, 1973) and Spanish and French editions are in process. The second has been completed and will, in all probability, be used as the basis for an international conference on the problem.

The committee has been aware that manufacturers of microfilm equipment are increasingly concerned with meeting commercial needs to the neglect of the needs of archives and libraries. Some success has been achieved, especially in the United States, in having a microfilm equipment manufacturer incorporate features that would meet archival and library needs into a reader he was developing. In some instances also, archives and libraries in other countries, when expanding their operations, have been successful in having manufacturers produce equipment to their own specifications that, incidentally, also served to meet the needs of other archives and libraries. The fact is unfortunate that some archival administrations, when they are equipping new facilities, do not use their purchasing power to see that equipment best suited to their own needs is produced. It is important that concerted action be taken whenever possible by both archives and libraries to solve equipment problems by pooling their purchasing power. There is now, for example, a need throughout the world for a good, portable 35mm. microfilm camera, a good portable reader, as well as a good, relatively inexpensive reader-printer which will meet both archival and library requirements. In related areas there are a number of archives, libraries, and scientific testing laboratories, such as those in Sweden, Great Britain, Spain, Canada, and the United States, that have conducted or are capable of conducting tests concerning permanence and storage of various types of microfilm (i.e., silver halide, diazo, and vesicular film). Unfortunately the results of these tests are not always available. The results of these tests should be published and disseminated widely, and through international cooperation scientific studies of the most significant problems that still remain should be planned. Duplication should be avoided. The committee believes it can play a significant role in this area and has taken a few beginning steps.

Another project that a subcommittee is now working on is the development of uniform practices for uniform microfilm or microfiche headings for archival materials.

A committee aim has long been to increase scholarly access to our archival heritage by convincing a number of countries, particularly France and West Germany, which during the past few decades have been filming substantial quantities of their

records for security purposes, to make copies of the film available for scholarly use. It is hoped that substantial quantities of invaluable archival resources filmed for security purposes will be released during the next few years.

The committee continues to provide advice and technical assistance, generally by correspondence, to those archives requesting data on microfilming equipment, standards, and techniques.

Although the Microfilm Committee feels that it has made progress, we have had many difficulties. Some of our problems are the usual ones encountered by committees of both national and international organizations. As meetings are infrequent, the maximum use of the time during each meeting is imperative. The meetings must be well organized and fully planned. Each member is called upon not only to report on his or her activities but also to participate in the discussion of items on an agenda that has been prepared by the secretary and chairman and circulated well before the meeting date.

One of the major stumbling blocks that has prevented the Microfilm Committee as well as other ICA committees from operating as effectively as they might is the shortage of funds. No support is now received from the ICA. Some meetings, at least one annually, are imperative. Fortunately those archival administrations that are represented on the committee will usually pay the fare of their member to a meeting. At most of our meetings the host countries have not only borne part or all of the cost of the meetings, including simultaneous translations and the living expenses of regular members during the meeting, but also of visits for both regular and corresponding members to significant archives and reprographic facilities in their countries. Without this cooperation and financial support no ICA committee has been able to function. In the not too distant future the ICA should be able to provide some support to each of its committees.



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