Business Archives Guidelines

LINDA EDGERLY

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE of North American "archivy" clearly demonstrates the early and continuing interest in, if not deep concern for, the archives of the business community. During the first half of this century, a few scholars and archivists concerned with the history of business bemoaned the paucity of adequate, available source materials. Few, however, had the inclination or the connections necessary to change the situation. Not only did the academic world seem to ignore the need for action, but businesses themselves, with several unusual exceptions, remained indifferent to the disposition of all but their so-called vital records. In retrospect, it appears that neither society at large nor the business community was conscious of, or eager to acknowledge, the modern corporation as a primary locus of power.

The fact that life in the United States and Canada had been affected so frequently by the state of the economy, the health of business, and the relations between politics and the corporate world was undeniable. With the increased availability of education and the broadening range of corporate enterprises, the number of people who studied the histories of the two nations, and whose livelihoods depended on the financial well-being of corporations, increased rapidly after World War II. An ever-increasing percentage of the population grasped the lessons of politics, economics, and business interdependency.

Today, 50 years after the depths of the Great Depression—again amidst serious economic uncertainty—the prominent role business plays in our daily lives is a familiar theme. The number of subscribers to business and financial magazines has risen steadily. Many major daily newspapers carry substantially more business news than they did five years ago, and expansion of coverage of financial and economic issues

The author, currently chair of SAA's Business Archives Professional Affinity Group, is a consulting archivist. Among the corporations and organizations with which she has worked are The Bank of New York, Weyerhaeuser Company, The Chase Manhattan Bank, N.W. Ayer, Media Projects, the 92nd Street "Y," and the New York Zoological Society.

continues.[1] Even in popular non-fiction works, as for instance in Alvin Toffler's book *The Third Wave,* attention has been drawn to the irrefutable connections between us as individuals and the existence of cooperative business structures and worldwide market systems.

Motivated since the 1960s by this expanding awareness of the role of business in daily life, the North American business community began to acknowledge a need to retain documentation that would do more than meet regulatory and tax statutes and offer legal protection in the event of litigation. Records that could be used to reconstruct the process and circumstances of decision making and the mutually dependent relationship of business and society assumed new importance. Records management and vital records programs, many of which were formed during the 1940s and 1950s, could not satisfy this "new" requirement.

The number of business archives grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Gary Saretzky, Archivist of Educational Testing Service, and other members of The Society of American Archivists' Business Archives Committee (predecessor to the Business Archives Affinity Group) conducted a survey of business archives in 1975. The findings included evidence that more than half of the business archives in North America were formed after 1959 and a quarter after 1969.[2] In the 1980 edition of SAA's *Directory of Business Archives in the United States & Canada,* a foreword by Douglas Bakken, then chair of the Business Archives Affinity Group, summarized the results of the 1979 survey. He wrote, "The 1980 *Directory*. . . reflects the continued growth of business archives. . . .The first edition. . ., published in 1969, contained 138 entries; this third edition has 210. . ."[3] Though neither edition claimed to be comprehensive, the 52-percent increase in archival listings could not be accounted for solely by the establishment of new, full-fledged, professionally-managed archives. As the *Directory* indicates, many archival programs within businesses and corporations reported very modest collection, processing, and reference activities. Yet, the number of entries affirms, at the very least, a developing appreciation in the business world for archival resources.

An anniversary, an historically-oriented marketing campaign, or a push from a public relations department may have provided the impetus for establishment of many business archives. However, the consistent internal use of the records by managers, legal staffs, speechwriters, corporate planners, public relations personnel, and others has provided the long-term justification for maintenance of archival collections in businesses and corporations.

An ever greater number of experienced professionals are managing highly-respected archival operations within the business world. They serve sophisticated and varied publics including chairmen, presidents and chief executive officers of companies, as well as attorneys, economists, systems analysts, production experts, scientists and others in industrial research, marketing and advertising specialists,

[1]Edee Holleman, "Why the Press Is Carrying More Business News," *The Corporate Communications Report* (New York, 1979).

[2]Gary D. Saretzky, "North American Business Archives: Results of a Survey," *American Archivist* 40 (October 1977): 414.

[3]*Directory of Business Archives in the United States & Canada* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1980).

stockholders, scholars, and journalists. They work with and learn from professional organizations such as The Society of American Archivists, the Association of Canadian Archivists, and regional archivists' groups. In recent years members of the SAA Business Archives Affinity Group have taken greater responsibility for providing information about business archives to those in business, to colleagues in the Society, and to scholars. Business archivists have prepared the SAA's business archives *Directory* and have written articles, served SAA in many capacities, participated in meetings, been elected fellows of SAA, assisted in five SAA-sponsored Business Archives Workshops, and completed the annotated *Select Bibliography on Business Archives and Records Management* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1981).

Among the projects undertaken by the Business Archives Affinity Group since 1979 is the formulation of broad, practical guidelines for business archives. The guidelines, which follow, were given a final review and acceptance by the group's membership at the SAA annual meeting in Berkeley, Calif., in 1981, and were approved by the SAA Council in January 1982. The introduction to the guidelines explains their purposes.

The guidelines are not an attempt to separate business archivists from other archivists with whom they share many common goals and ideals. In fact, because many of the elements described in the guidelines are basic to any archival program, it is anticipated that they may encompass the diversity of business and other archives. The guidelines, however, do take into account the reality that archives in a business setting frequently require a nontraditional approach to administration.

In many ways, the Guidelines for Business Archives represent for business archivists another step in the process of professionalization. Through them, as well as other projects, archivists in businesses and corporations are striving to define for their employers and the corporate world as a whole what they do, and to create a profile that is comprehensible both to their fellow archivists and to the business organizations whose records they work to preserve.

The Society of American Archivists' Guidelines for Business Archives

Introduction

The number of businesses starting archival programs has grown dramatically in recent years. In an effort to encourage a high level of professionalism among our colleagues, the Business Archives Professional Affinity Group of The Society of American Archivists has collaborated to produce the following set of Guidelines for Business Archives.

The Guidelines are designed to outline the elements of a complete archival facility. They are written not as minimum standards but as desirable objectives. It is hoped that they will be helpful both in the establishing of new programs and in the further development of those already in existence.

The archival records—those materials having lasting or permanent value—of America's businesses are important resources for the companies that generate them, for the business community, and for society. Business archives vary in size and in the extent of their holdings, but their goals and principles are similar. The Business Archives Group hopes that all business archives will attempt to incorporate the proven techniques and methods for successful archival programs outlined in the Guidelines.

More detailed information, sample forms, and further professional advice can be obtained through The Society of American Archivists and its Business Archives Professional Affinity Group.

Program

Typical program elements of a business archives include:

1. A written statement of purpose and objectives.
2. Responsibility for and authority over archives program areas including appraisal, acquisition, arrangement and description, reference, and conservation/preservation.
3. Methods for reporting to and communicating with various constituencies, including management, offices and departments generating records of archival value, and appropriate users.
4. A resource system such as an archives committee or advisory board that meets as necessary to provide advice and expertise on specific operational areas and acts as a consulting body for determining program policies.
5. Close cooperation with, and preferably a formal relationship with, records management activities and other information services within the corporation. As a minimum, the archivist should serve on any committee or other appropriate body that determines and/or reviews retention and disposition schedules for company records.
6. A manual of operations outlining archives policies and procedures.

Policies

Policies reflecting sound archival approaches would include:

1. A policy that clearly outlines restrictions on access to the collection.
2. An accession policy that defines the authority of the archivist to determine the archival value of company records and, when appropriate, to include them in the archives holdings.
3. Regulations regarding physical use of records and loan of materials.
4. Parameters regarding the nature and extent of reference services to be provided by the archives staff.

Procedures

Procedures typically found in professional archival operations include:

1. Record surveys, to identify archival materials in office and storage areas throughout the company.
2. Appraisal of records in terms of their archival value.
3. Methods for accessioning archival records and related material, including forms, an accession log, departmental/donor files, and related systems.
4. Application of archival techniques to the arrangement and description of institutional records, particularly the record group concept and the principles of provenance and original order.
5. Creation of a system of complementary, integrated finding aids, with a preference for the inventory that reflects provenance in its description of record scope and content and that is suitable for institutional record collections.
6. Established procedures for the care and handling of records that are fragile, damaged, or otherwise in need of special attention and restoration/conservation measures. Standard techniques might include photocopying originals to produce use copies, dry cleaning, flattening, deacidifying, housing in acid-free containers, microfilming, and other related conservation methods.
7. Procedures for those inside and outside the company to seek access to records.
8. Written guidelines for the use and handling of records by patrons. Guidelines should give due consideration to the protection and safety of the records.
9. Collection of statistics, such as number of telephone calls, researchers, letters, and related services for internal documentation purposes.

Administrative Relationships

To carry out its mission and serve the company well, a business archives should:
1. Receive support from the highest levels of the organization.
2. Be placed within an organizational unit that provides visibility, understands the goals and functions of the archives, provides appropriate physical and administrative resources, and opens channels of communication to all areas and operations of the business.
3. Have clear authority to collect materials from all units within the organization and be part of a well-defined chain of command.
4. Be administered by a full-time, professional archivist who has authority to prepare budgets, develop programs, make long-range plans, and outline needs to superiors.

Budget

The budgetary needs of the archives include the following considerations:
1. The budget should be adequate to support the ongoing, defined operations and responsibilities of the archives.
2. In addition to operational needs, the budget should include funding for: item-level conservation, staff training and attendance at professional meetings, purchase of supplies and equipment, purchase of related books and documents, and special projects such as exhibitions and publications.
3. The archivist should have substantial freedom to prepare the budget for the archives and to allocate the disbursement of funds granted for the program.

Staff

In considering the personnel needs of the archives, the following should be of maximum importance:
1. The assignment of at least one full-time person to the archives.
2. The involvement of a trained professional archivist in the administration and operation of the archives. Typical credentials for a professional archivist include a master's degree in history or in

library science with an archival emphasis, a minimum of two to three years' experience in an archival repository, and additional specialized training such as archives institutes, seminars, and workshops.
3. The assignment of additional personnel to the archives as needed, including processors, clerical staff, reference staff, historical researchers, records management staff, oral historians, consultants, and microfilm technicians.
4. Maintenance of staff salaries at a level commensurate with the norms of the profession and the wage/grade scale of the parent company.

Facilities

In identifying space for the establishment of a business archives, the following considerations should be kept in mind:
1. Adequate space to perform all archival functions including accessioning, arrangement and description, and reference service as well as office areas and stack space to accommodate present and future holdings.
2. A clean, controlled, and stable environment including temperature of 60 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of between 40 and 50 percent.
3. High-quality, reliable, and frequently tested fire detection and prevention systems.
4. A security system that will prevent any unauthorized access to the records.
5. A location that is convenient to a loading dock, has adequate floor strength for the weight load imposed by the stacks, and is free from risk of flood or water damage.
6. Easy access to equipment and materials used by staff and researchers, such as copy machines, microform readers, and reference tools.