

Business Archives Literature

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WHILE COMPILING *A Select Bibliography on Business Archives and Records Management* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1981), I had an opportunity to take a close look at the literature in the field. One conclusion I drew from this scrutiny was that the works were predominantly pragmatic, many falling into the how-to-do-it category. Institutional holdings, policies, and practices were usually thoroughly described. The Ford Motor Company Archives, which was among the first business archives in the country, received considerable attention in the literature. The Eli Lilly Company, the Baker Library of Harvard University's Business School, and the Walt Disney Archives were all well described because their archivists have been prolific authors.

This kind of literature, which describes the types of records being kept, the processing, reference and access policies, as well as a brief history of

the establishment of the archives, is a help to the novice in the business archives field. Because as a profession we are still in the process of developing standards and guidelines for business archives, the literature provides guidance and offers reassurance that an institution is operating within the mainstream of current practice.

Among the articles that exemplify the state of the art in business archives are Helen L. Davidson's "Selling Management on Business Archives," *ARMA Quarterly* 3 (July 1969): 15-19. In it the author provides an outline of major record groups and, within them, the types of records that should be preserved to document the operations of a firm engaged in research and production and having subsidiaries and foreign operations. Davidson's advice is based on her experience with Eli Lilly Company. Helen M. Baker Cushman, a business consultant, in "The Modern Business Archivist," *American Archivist* 33

(January 1970): 19–24, summarizes procedures for establishing a business archives, including qualifications for archivists, likely areas of responsibility, and the company's expectations of the archivist. Henry E. Edmunds in "The Ford Motor Company Archives," *American Archivist* 15 (April 1952): 99–104, notes the origin of the Ford Archives as an outgrowth of plans for the 50th anniversary of the company. He discusses the role of Robert Bahmer in conducting an initial survey of company records and making a report calling for the establishment of an archives. Peter M. McLellan's "The Boeing Archival Program," *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966): 37–42, reviews Boeing's records-retention program and includes a case study of the establishment of the archives. Linda M. Matthews describes the establishment of the Coca-Cola Company archives and discusses its holdings in "The Archives of the Coca-Cola Company: Preserving the Real Thing," *Georgia Archive* (Spring 1973): 12–20. David R. Smith, archivist for Walt Disney Productions, has documented the establishment of the Disney Archives and its holdings in a number of articles, including: "Comics and Cels," *California Historical Quarterly* 56 (Fall 1977): 270–274; "It All Started with a Mouse: The Walt Disney Archives," *California Librarian* 33 (January 1972): 23–28; and "A Mouse is Born," *College and Research Libraries* 39 (November 1978): 492–494.

Another body of articles is devoted solely to the topic of the establishing of archives in a business. These articles are designed to convince business management, unfamiliar with archival operations, that there are practical benefits in having an archives. They emphasize the value for the company's legal, public relations, or marketing programs. Examples of this type of article are Helen

M. Baker Cushman's "Using Business History," *ARMA Quarterly* 16 (1977): 5–8, 16; Wilbur G. Krutz's "Business Archives in the Corporate Function," *ARMA Quarterly* 4 (April 1970): 5–11; Marian M. Orgain's "Starting A Company Archives," *ARMA Quarterly* 8 (1974): 9–10, 18; Faye Gamel's "Are Your Association's Archives Hiding in an Attic?" *Association Management* 29 (June 1977): 64–71; and Ralph W. Hidy, "Business Archives: Introductory Remarks," *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966): 33–36.

In addition, the Society of American Archivists supported the publication of Edie Hedlin's important work, *Business Archives: An Introduction* (Chicago 1978), which provides, on microfiche, samples of typical business archives forms.

An article that explains the reasons why American businesses have not been particularly concerned with business history, and why they have not provided access to their materials, is Douglas A. Bakken's "Archives and American Business," *Brewer's Digest* (May 1973): 40–45. Bakken, who is currently director of the Ford Archives, also draws from his experience as archivist for Anheuser-Busch to describe some corporate uses for archival records. A complementary piece is Thomas Peterson's "Historians, Businessmen, and Research: A Critique and Appeal," *Business Horizons* 14 (August 1971): 3–34. Peterson expresses the problems that historians have encountered when approaching businesses to do research. He suggests that for the sake of accurate business history, companies should reevaluate their access policies. Maynard Brichford, in his "Business Use of Business History," *ARMA Quarterly* 4 (October 1970): 14–16, argues that a business should be concerned with the documentation of its experience and contributions.

Few articles discuss the obligation or social responsibility that businesses have to document their history for the general benefit of society. One article that addresses the need to preserve and provide access to information for economists and business historians is Richard C. Berner's "Business Archives in Perspective," *Journal of Forest History* 18 (April 1974): 32-34.

Professional ethics is another important topic that has received scant attention. Richard H. Lytle has written on the subject in "Ethics of Information Management," *ARMA Quarterly* 4 (October 1970): 5-8; he makes a plea for ethical considerations beyond those of mere "technical competence and honesty." He also expresses concern for the protection of privacy of information. Until recently, Lytle's was the only article in business archives literature to grapple with these difficult issues, which need additional exploration and definition. Particular attention should be paid to the subject of ethics for business archivists, because their positions and responsibilities are somewhat different from the rest of the profession and include a higher probability of involvement in protracted litigation.

As the number of businesses creating archives has increased, there has been a spate of articles about business archives in popular periodicals, augmenting those in the professional journals. In

1957 an informative article, "Business Sits For its Portrait," in *Business Week* 1431 (February 2): 129-38, discussed the trend toward having scholarly company histories written by researchers allowed free access to all materials. It also analyzed the methods and costs of publication of these histories, and the uses to which they had been put by businesses. More recent articles that discuss the growing numbers of American business archives and the usefulness of corporate history are Roberty Levy's "Inside Industry's Archives," *Dun's Review* (May 1981): 72-76, and George David Smith and Lawrence E. Steadman, "Present Value of Corporate History," in the *Harvard Business Review* 59 (November-December 1981): 164-173. In addition, the entire issue of *The Public Historian* 3 (Summer 1981) is devoted to business and history.

An assessment of the state of the art suggests that business archivists should begin to concentrate on theoretical issues, such as those of standards and ethics, in their professional literature. At the same time, they should continue to articulate the value of business archives programs and should have pragmatic pieces on their establishment published in popular business periodicals, where they are more likely to be read by members of the business community.