

Shorter Features

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The Shorter Features department serves as a forum for sharply focused archival topics that may not require full-length articles. The department also may include articles about archivists' experiences implementing archival programs of particular interest within specific institutional settings. Members of the Society and others knowledgeable in areas of archival interest are encouraged to submit papers for consideration. Papers should be sent to Managing Editor, *American Archivist*, Society of American Archivists, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago IL 60605.

The Critical First Step: In Situ Handling of Large Collections

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In 1967 a New York organization shipped its records to the Archives of American Art in Detroit. The records arrived in 44 metal-strapped boxes weighing about 50 pounds each. Nothing accompanied the shipment to indicate the contents of the boxes. Years later they were shipped again, this time to the Archives's new Washington office, still strapped shut. Eventually archives staff transferred the records into record storage boxes which in turn sat, unused and unusable, for a number of years. Finally, an intern spent two months going through each of the 98 boxes and preparing an initial inventory. An archives technician then tried to reconstruct the order of the papers. Based on the first inventory, he was able to bring related documents together, box

them, and start a new inventory. This took several more months and still did not return the records to their original state, although they were now usable to some degree.

This situation could easily have been avoided. Archival repositories are likely to give careful attention to evaluating historical materials and negotiating for their transfer yet surprisingly little attention to the important final steps in the transfer process. When dealing with large or complex collections, it is critical for the archivist to spend the necessary time in situ, applying archival expertise to the materials prior to shipment.

Proper preparation for transfer begins when a group of papers or records is offered to an archival repository. At

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that time archival staff who will be surveying the records or supervising the transfer should familiarize themselves with the person or organization that created the materials in order to determine what records to expect and to be able to note what records are missing. For example, an archivist knowing that an organization had an office in Paris for a century would expect to find thousands of letters from that office in the company's records. Should such letters not be evident, he would be able to inquire about what happened to them. Perhaps they were overlooked or purposely held back. This kind of information can help ensure a complete shipment and avoid possible misunderstandings.

Knowing the background of the creator and the nature of work involved also will help the archivist identify different record types and communicate more effectively with the donor. Most people are familiar with records kept in an office setting, but what kinds of records are kept by an art foundry, a scientist, or an accountant? Being able to call a document by its name is an important skill for those involved in records shipment.

The efficient transfer of records and papers always depends on close cooperation between the archivist and whoever has custody of the records. Direct communication with the donor is an important part of the process. The donor should be alerted in advance that an initial review of the records may take an entire day or more. During this review, the archivist can ascertain whether the records are stored in filing cabinets, transfer files, crates, hanging drawer files, or in some other way, and how voluminous they are.

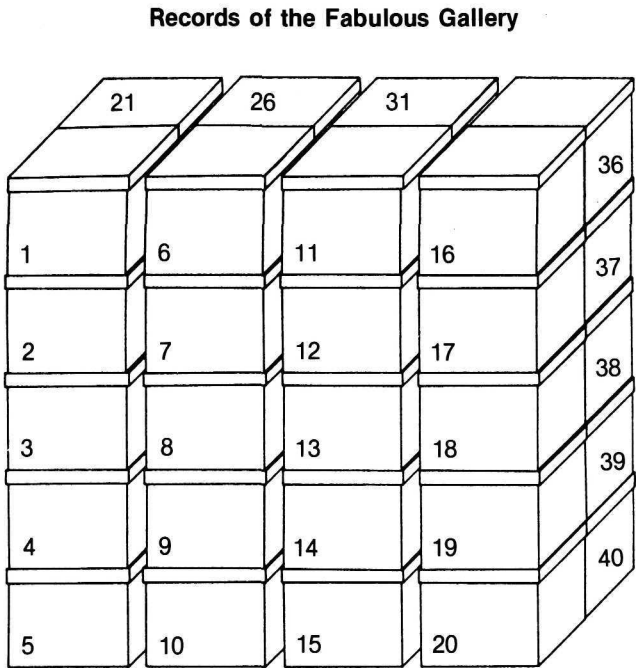
In some instances a preliminary visit to the site also may be beneficial to determine what preparations will be necessary for shipment and to make appropriate ar-

rangements with the donor. Will it be necessary to box the records? How many boxes will be required? Can the empty boxes be shipped in advance? Is there a truck rental nearby? Is there parking for a truck? Is a loading dock available? Will anyone help load? Does the site have enough room to permit examination of the papers? A preliminary visit by staff of the Archives of American Art to the vacant home and studio of the late Philadelphia artist Violet Oakley revealed that the furnace was out of order and the inside temperature was five degrees. The donor agreed to repair the furnace. When a team from the archives eventually arrived at the house, the heat was on and, just as important, the snow had been plowed from the steep driveway that led down to the house. The packing and loading of this large collection would have been extremely difficult had both of these problems not been resolved ahead of time.

Before packing is begun, the archivist should determine where all the papers to be transferred are located and, if possible, should bring them together. This step is particularly important if a series has been stored in two or more places. Based on an overview of the records any necessary boxing can be planned and completed.

The primary consideration at this stage is the identification of the various parts of the collection. These may be alphabetical letter files, scrapbooks, board minute books, photographs or other materials. Each distinct group of records should be kept intact and boxed in the order in which it has been stored. In most cases the order in which the various series are packed probably makes no difference so long as the internal order of each is retained, each box is numbered in succession, and a box inventory is prepared simultaneously. No large collection ever should be transported without prior

Figure 1



Initial box inventory.

- 1-4 Correspondence of the
director, 1927-1978
- 5-7 Artists files, A-Z
- 8-10 Photos of works, A-Z
- 11-13 Scrapbooks
- 14-18 Clippings
- 19-20 Customer file cards, A-Z
- 21-22 Warhol exhibition
- 23-24 Lennon exhibition
- 25-28 Financial records
- 29 Folk Art files
- 30 Photo album
- Autographed catalogs
- Photos of artists
- Annual reports, 1927-36
- 31-40 Speeches
- Press releases
- Award certificates

This is an example of how a collection should be treated at the source. This simple inventory (it needn't even be typed) simplifies all future parts of the acquisition/processing operation. The collection may be serviced, i.e. is accessible, from the start.

preparation of an inventory indicating the contents of each box. This is essential in order to maintain the integrity of the collection, minimize confusion at the archives, and provide some basis for an insurance claim should one or more boxes be lost (Figure 1).

If more than one person prepares the records, their actions must be coordinated so that packing and inventorying will be done systematically. One art dealer who had owned several different galleries arranged for his records to be packed prior to moving. The workmen doing the packing emptied three or four file drawers and placed their contents in boxes simultaneously. As a result, virtually every box held files mixed together from three or more organizations. Furthermore, the files from one drawer were spread among three or four boxes. When the records were finally given to the archives, it took two months just to get them back in order.

Experience suggests that archivists may wish to discourage owners of large bodies of records from doing their own packing. Owners rarely pack records as a professional archivist would, and it almost always takes far less time to box the records properly than to organize them after someone else has done the packing. Furthermore, donors are likely to include extraneous materials that otherwise would have been weeded out.

The actual shipping may be handled in several ways. The repository itself may move the materials in its own vehicle or in a rented truck or trailer. Trucks come in various sizes, including U-Haul's "mini-mover," which handles like a car but has a capacity of 170 cu. ft. To use a trailer a car must be equipped with hitch and light connectors and also must be powerful enough to pull a load without suffering damage. Trailers also may be very difficult to back up. On the other hand, when the repository takes full control of the move, the archivist is able to maintain complete control of loading and unloading of the materials and also can ensure security in transit. This means archives record storage boxes can be used in the move and shelved immediately on arrival. If a moving company transports the materials, boxes probably should be sealed. In addition, each box must be identified with the archives's name and address because the records may be put on a truck with other shipments.

If proper on-site procedures are completed, the accessioning and shelving of the collection should be simple. The on-site inventory will serve as a basis for reference work and research use even though the final processing and arrangement of the records may be years in the future.

Records Management in Italy

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Since the nineteenth century, legislation in Italy has controlled the creation, arrangement, management, and disposal of records in all Italian government agencies. Under Napoleon, a classification and registration system was introduced that still is used for intellectual control of documents created by Public Administration in Italy,¹ though now prescribed by Royal Decree (R.D.) 35 of 1900. The system was adopted, it should be noted, as an administrative tool, without regard for the creation of historical archives. In general terms, this filing system (known as "systematic classification by mandate") provides for records to be organized into as many titles as the agency's mandates and functions and, under each title, into classes. Subclasses, categories, and sub-categories, each of which is given an alphanumeric symbol, reflect the services offered by the agency. The basic unit is the file, which brings together documentation created and received by the agency for the handling of a particular matter.

The general classification scheme for an agency's records is called its *titolario*. It mirrors the agency's past and present responsibilities, activities, tasks, and services and provides the basic structure for organization of its records. Symbols for functions that exist in all sectors of Public Administration such as personnel and accounting are common to *titolari* of all agencies and are established by a Ministry's decree. For example, in 1897 the Ministry of Interior prescribed the

same *titolario* for records created by each one of the more than 8,000 Italian municipalities, and in 1940 for those of all Italian prefectures.

As prescribed by the Royal Decree of 1900, each title in a *titolario* corresponds to a register and a series of records, thus one title, one register, and one record series relate to each function. Every document received or created by each office must be registered in a special register called a *protocollo*. Registered documents are numbered consecutively. For incoming correspondence, the register indicates the date of receipt, the name of the sender, and the subject. For outgoing correspondence, it records the date of creation, the addressee, and the subject. Registration is juridical evidence of the existence and authenticity of a record. When a document is registered, it also receives its definitive classification, which is written in the *protocollo* with notations of possible preceding or following records related to the same matter. If the document relates to a new matter, a new file is begun; if it is part of an outstanding matter, it is included in the relative file. From the *protocollo* office, the whole file is sent to the appropriate office for handling.

The use of the *protocollo* system of registration provides intricate and sophisticated control and uniformity in handling documents. Outgoing documents are annotated with the classification given by the originating office and

¹Public Administration in Italy refers to all government agencies and public bodies, the latter being statutory public organizations financially and administratively autonomous from the central government. These include territorial bodies such as municipalities, provinces, and regions and non-territorial bodies such as public utility boards.

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are registered in its *protocollo*. Each document also is registered in the *protocollo* of the receiving office, together with the new classification assigned by the receiving office, and so on. Thus, a series of reciprocal relationships is created, not only among the records of the same office, but also between offices involved in the transaction. These functional relationships and the flow of business within one office and among many different offices are reflected in the *protocollo*.

In addition to the *protocollo*, each office also maintains a catalog of the files known as a *repertorio*. The *repertorio* is a register that lists each file created in each class under a single title, giving each a consecutive number and fixing its position in the current archives.

In Italy, active files are called current archives and are the responsibility of *archivisti*, who must pass a national open competition to obtain their jobs. Although these *archivisti* share the same title as officials working in the State Archives, employees of current archives are clerks. Their minimum education is completion of the equivalent of high school, and they do not receive any special training for their work, apart from studying relevant texts for the competition.

Archivisti in current archives are responsible for (1) classification of records and assignment of classification symbols, (2) creation of files, (3) registration of records in the *protocollo*, (4) compilation of the indexes to the *protocollo*,² (5) preparation of the catalog of files, (6) maintenance of the tickler file, (7) updating the register of file movement in the current archives, and (8) preparation of retrieval cards. All these tasks are set out

in Royal Decree of 1900. In public agencies there is a current archives for every division (a public agency is divided into general directorates, which are further subdivided into divisions and the divisions into sectors and offices) and, therefore, there should be as many *archivisti* as divisions.

Every year inactive files are transferred from the current archives to the agency's deposit archives, which serves several current archives. Thus in the State Central Administration, as a rule, there is a deposit archives in each general directorate and, by the same principle, one deposit archives in each prefecture (provincial government), which receives the records transferred from two current archives, that of the cabinet office and that of the administrative offices.

Records remain in deposit archives for forty years from date of transfer.³ At the end of the forty-year period, the records chosen for permanent retention for cultural, juridical, or administrative purposes are selected for transfer to the historical archives.

In Italy, there is one historical archives for the national government, known as The Central Archives of the State and a State Archives for each territorial district or province. All other public bodies by law must have a historical archives separate from its deposit archives for records inactive for over forty years that have been selected for permanent preservation. Again by law, staff responsible for these historical archives must hold a university degree and a Master of Archival Science. If a public body chooses not to create a historical archives, the national government either provides for its establishment and for arrangement

²The indexes to the *protocollo* consist of two registers that alphabetically list the names of persons and the names of agencies to which the records refer and a third register in which each matter is extensively indexed.

³The retention period for the records of all the offices of the state and of the local governments or public territorial bodies (regions, provinces, and municipalities) is prescribed by the President of the Republic's Decree (D.P.R.) of 30 September 1963, no. 1409 (art. 230), which, together with the R.D. 35 of 1900, constitutes the main body of Italian archival legislation now in force.

and description of the records at the agency's expense, or gives it the option of depositing its archival materials in the responsible State Archives. Thus, in Italy, the basic life cycle of a record is controlled from current archives to deposit archives to destruction or to historical archives.⁴

Although day-to-day records management is carried out by the *archivisti* responsible for current archives, the direction and control of records management is the responsibility of Commissions of Surveillance and the Archival Superintendences. The Commissions of Surveillance of current archives and deposit archives are appointed in all central, inter-regional, regional, or inter-provincial and provincial agencies of the national government (except the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Defence) and in judicial offices not inferior to courts (D.P.R. 1963, art. 25). The membership of each commission consists of the chief of the agency (or his delegate), a management-level employee of the agency, a representative of the Ministry of the Interior (whose input relates only to national security matters), and a representative of the responsible state archives. Each commission is appointed for three years by a decree of the responsible ministry, and by law should meet at least twice a year at the call of the chief of the agency or of the representative of the state archives.

The commissions must (1) oversee preservation and arrangement of records and maintenance of inventories and other finding aids, (2) identify records appropriate for disposal, (3) enforce the rules concerning reproduction of records established by the Board for Reproductions, and (4) prepare the transfer of records to the state archives. The com-

missions in central agencies also compile and update the general disposition schedule.

The state agencies to which article 25 does not apply because of their lower level (D.P.R. 1963) must appoint a special commission with the same rules every time that it is necessary to carry out disposal operations.

Proposals for destruction of records formulated by the Commissions of Surveillance and the special commissions are submitted to the Minister of Cultural and Environmental Properties, who makes final decisions concerning disposition after asking the opinion of consultative organs of the archival administration, if he considers it necessary.

The Archival Superintendences are agencies of archival administration with regional responsibilities. They are completely independent of the state archives, and their jurisdiction is only for non-state records. Because such records belong either to private or to public bodies, the Archival Superintendences look after not only the archives of considerable historical interest which are owned by private persons or institutions, but also the archives of public bodies. The superintendences ensure that public bodies (1) preserve and arrange properly their current and deposit archives, (2) establish a historical archives with competent staff, (3) allow researchers, through the superintendent, to consult records not restricted by law, and (4) recommend which records are to be destroyed. These disposal decisions must be approved by the authority that watches over the public body, but the prior approval of the archival superintendent is required.

The Archival Superintendences have proved to be able to perform their

⁴In effect, then, there are no record centers in Italy. The only institutions conceptually close to them are the Notarial Archives, which receive the notarial deeds at the end of the activity of each notary and transfer them to the responsible state archives after one hundred years.

responsibilities effectively. For various reasons, the same cannot be said for the Commissions of Surveillance. The numerical shortage of state archivists (historical archivists) compared to the vast number of state agencies is such that every archivist must be a member of many permanent commissions. It thus is easy to understand why in many agencies the Commission of Surveillance either has not been established or has not been renewed.

State agencies also try to reduce the duties of their commissions simply to those relating to records disposal, ignoring other important responsibilities. Furthermore, even in those commissions with duties limited to disposal, participation of both archivists and administrative officials is not always effective. The state archivist is in a clear minority and does not always succeed in ensuring preservation of records, even though the commission's conclusions are not reached by vote.

Experiences of archivists and records managers in North America may offer guidance to help solve this problem. It may be appropriate to include in the permanent staff of government agencies

records managers with an education and archival training similar to those required by state archivists in Italy, although more oriented toward modern records. These records managers should be responsible for preservation, arrangement, and description of current and deposit archives. (The methods of registration and classification, which are prescribed by law, would not be part of their duties.) Because the identification of archival material should start, conceptually, when the records are created to allow for better care, the selection of records designated for indefinite retention could be left to the state archivists, although in consultation with records managers.

Based on this framework, the Commissions of Surveillance could be replaced by a records management program similar to that found in North America. On the other hand, archival training optimally would be mandatory for records managers as part of the requirements for examination for the open national competition for such positions with the aim of avoiding the contrast between records managers and historical archivists that often is observed in North America.