

THE PROTECTION OF FEDERAL RECORDS AGAINST HAZARDS OF WAR¹

WHEN Miss Arbaugh first asked me to take part in this evening's program, she suggested I discuss the work of the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources. Since most of us here, however, are interested primarily in records of the federal government, I want to confine my remarks about the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources to that subject and will not undertake to discuss what it is doing about museum materials, works of art, library holdings, or historic buildings, or to describe its work in preparing long-range plans for the enrichment and better utilization of the country's cultural resources. But I do want to give you as complete a picture as possible of the whole problem of protecting federal records against the hazards of war and of the services that will be available to you in providing such protection for the records of your own agency.

This war is the first in which it has been possible for the enemy—and, let us hope, for us—to wreak serious damage hundreds and even thousands of miles behind the fighting lines. Until recent weeks every day's dispatches from London gave us an impressive picture of the destructive power of the bombing plane. Libraries, museums, and government offices have been smashed along with homes and docks and factories. There is no ground for assurance that we are immune from similar destruction here. Those who realize how essential a part records play in the day-by-day administration of the government and in the prosecution of the war and how important a part of our cultural resources they are must feel a deep sense of responsibility for their effective protection in the face of these dangers.

Many of you have seen a letter of January 12, 1942, from Dr. Waldo G. Leland, chairman of the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources, which was sent to the heads of all federal agencies and of the principal bureaus and divisions. This letter attempted to define the existing state of military hazard and to outline a recommended course of action for the protection of materials of cultural, scientific, and historical importance. Shortly afterwards, you may have received a letter of February 7 from the archivist of the United

¹ This paper was presented at a meeting of the Federal Records Conference, April 28, 1942, and subsequently published as Miscellaneous Processed Document No. 42-6 by the National Archives.

States, tendering the services of the National Archives in measures for the protection of federal records. Still more recently you have probably learned of the preparation by the Public Buildings Administration of a code for the protection of public buildings and their contents, which will include records among the objects of its concern. I suspect that by now most of you anticipate that the next move will be the appointment of a co-ordinator of activities for the protection of federal records.

The situation is not as complicated as it sounds, however, and the three agencies concerned have quite different functions in dealing with this problem. The Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources grew out of informal meetings, beginning in December, 1940, among the heads of federal institutions having the custody of cultural materials and interested persons outside the government. It was formally established by the National Resources Planning Board in March, 1941, with the responsibility of developing plans and promoting measures for the better conservation, wider availability, and more effective use of the cultural resources of the country. Coming into existence on the eve of war, the committee naturally accepted as its first task the formulation of plans for the protection of cultural resources against the dangers that the impending conflict might bring. A memorandum of September 16, 1941, issued by the director of the Bureau of the Budget at the request of the President, gave the committee the specific responsibility of preparing plans for the protection of materials of cultural, scientific, or historical importance in the possession of agencies of the federal government. In the execution of this request, the committee made a careful study of British and European experience, sought expert military and technical advice, and conducted a detailed survey of records, books, manuscripts, museum objects, and works of art in the possession of federal agencies in Washington. On the basis of the information thus obtained, the committee prepared as a part of its recommendations estimates of the nature and amount of bomb-resisting construction that would be needed to afford proper protection to the more valuable government holdings.

The Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources is a planning agency, not an action agency, and once it had developed its recommendations for protective construction, they were turned over to the Public Buildings Administration on October 15, 1941, for its consideration and possible execution. Lack of available funds pre-

vented the construction at that time of the recommended shelters, and upon the outbreak of war a few weeks later, it was necessary for the committee to formulate another set of plans to provide for the effective protection of important materials without reliance upon bomb-resisting shelters. These were the plans that were communicated to all federal agencies in Dr. Leland's letter of January 12, 1942.

Shortly after the outbreak of war state committees on conservation of cultural resources were established throughout the country. They are in a position to render services to field agencies of the federal government similar to those given agencies in Washington by the national committee.

The Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources had been thinking for some time in terms of a protective program that would be financed and co-ordinated by some central agency. The logical agency was obviously the Public Buildings Administration, since the protection of records cannot be dissociated from the protection of the buildings in which they are housed, and since the task of arranging for space outside Washington to which records could be evacuated would also be a normal function of the Public Buildings Administration.

This fact was recognized in a letter of January 12, 1942, from the President to the administrator of the Federal Works Agency, of which the Public Buildings Administration is a constituent part, requesting that agency to prepare plans and drafts of appropriate legislation for a protective program. The President directed that the program should include materials in federal buildings as well as the buildings themselves and specifically mentioned records.

I would prefer that a representative of the Public Buildings Administration give the details of that agency's plans, but since Mr. Graf, who is a member of the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources, and I have assisted in preparing the sections of the Public Buildings Administration's code on air-raid protection dealing with records and other materials, perhaps I can give you a general picture. The Public Buildings Administration appointed an Interdepartmental Advisory Committee to draw up a code outlining protective measures that should be taken for activities, building, personnel, and records and other materials. Mr. Thompson, our presiding officer tonight, is chairman of that committee. Chapter X of this code deals with the protection of materials and is based prin-

cially on the plans developed by the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources. The measures to be taken, as established by the code, depend on the importance of the activities of an agency in the war effort and the degree of danger from enemy attack existing at a given place and time. The individual agency is responsible for carrying out all measures except those involving construction; the Public Buildings Administration undertakes essential construction and provides funds for the protective measures undertaken by the individual agencies. This does not mean, of course, that the Public Buildings Administration will put up a bombproof shelter for every agency that wants one or microfilm all the records of the federal government. What it will be able to do will necessarily be limited by the available funds and materials and the necessity of doing first things first. An initial appropriation to the Public Buildings Administration of \$12,500,000 to enable it to get the protective program under way has passed both houses of Congress and is now in conference.²

The agency that has the most immediate interest in all federal records is, of course, the National Archives. Certain measures for the protection of records require its approval, such as the transfer of records to the archives building, the microfilming of records if subsequent disposal of the originals is contemplated, or the disposal of useless records, which may be necessary to provide adequate space for the safekeeping of more important records. In all other measures to insure the physical safety and the integrity of records of the federal government the archivist of the United States has a direct interest.

A staff committee was established in the National Archives on December 8, 1941, "to make recommendations to the Archivist regarding the protection of the National Archives Building and its contents, including personnel, and of records of the Federal Government in general against the hazards of war." The National Archives has on its staff specialists in the appraisal, packing, storage, and microfilming of paper records and in the care of photographs, microfilms, motion pictures, and sound recordings. The services of these specialists are available to all agencies of the government that may desire assistance in planning for the protection of their records. The National Archives building is probably the most nearly bomb-resisting federal building in Washington, and direct assistance can often be given by the transfer of records to the archives.

² The act containing this appropriation (Public, No. 528, 77th Cong.) was approved by the President, April 28, 1942.

The set-up, then, is that the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources is a planning committee in the executive office of the President to formulate general plans for the protection of materials of cultural, scientific, and historical importance; the Public Buildings Administration in this instance is an action agency to make working plans for the protection of all federal property and execute them or finance their execution; the National Archives has legal responsibilities in connection with certain types of protective measures and is in a position to give technical advice and assistance in others. Perhaps I have spent too much time in describing the activities of these three agencies in connection with the protection of records, but I have felt that a clear understanding of their respective functions on the part of the records officers of the various federal agencies is a matter of importance.

Many of you, I know, have already familiarized yourselves with much of the material that has been published on the protection of records, and others will want to do so. The basic document with which you will want to become thoroughly familiar is the code on air-raid protection for federal buildings to be issued by the Public Buildings Administration, as this will provide you with the general regulations affecting the protection of federal records. The best technical treatment of the problem is *The Care of Records in a National Emergency*, prepared by two committees of the Society of American Archivists and published as *Bulletin* No. 3 of the National Archives. The Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources has had a large reprint of this bulletin made, and copies are available here tonight for any of you who are interested. A more recent and more general publication is a handbook entitled *The Protection of Cultural Resources Against the Hazards of War*, prepared by the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources. Copies will be available within the next few days and may be obtained from my office. This handbook and *The Care of Records in a National Emergency* cover most of the problems you will need to face, though if you want to pursue the subject further, both of them have rather extensive bibliographies. Though protective construction will be primarily a responsibility of the Public Buildings Administration, you will probably be interested in familiarizing yourselves with the general possibilities of construction and of physical alterations of the storage space as measures for the protection of records. Here again there is a considerable literature, of which the most authoritative and useful

publications are those of the Office of Civilian Defense and the War Department. Two of them, *Protective Construction* and *Glass and Glass Substitutes*, are of special pertinence in connection with the protection of records. Finally, everyone responsible for the protection of federal records ought to be familiar with the general policy letter of January 12, 1942, from the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources, and with the two documents that describe the assistance available from the National Archives, the archivist's letter of February 7, 1942, to all federal agencies and the *Manual of Information About The National Archives for Government Officials*.

Even after you have talked to all the people on the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources and the experts in the Public Buildings Administration and the National Archives and have read all the pamphlets and letters I have mentioned, you will still have a big batch of records on your hands and an uneasy feeling that they may be bombed tonight, and you may still be wondering just what ought to be done next. So perhaps we may spend a few minutes on this point. It all boils down to four major steps:

1. Find out what important records you have.
2. Determine their relative safety where they are.
3. Decide what protective measures are essential and are best adapted to each group of important records that are in danger and form these measures into an integrated and carefully thought out protective program.
4. Carry out the program.

These sound easier than they are, for there are serious difficulties in the way of the formulation and execution of a very effective program for the protection of the records of any federal agency.

To take the first step, finding out what important records you have, it will be necessary to survey the holdings of your agency and classify them on two bases: use and importance. Some records you will find are in daily use and have to remain available in offices or other working space; others are consulted occasionally and must remain available, but in storage if necessary; still others are no longer needed for administrative use and can be placed in dead storage. On the basis of importance, some records are of very great importance indeed; some are important but not indispensable; others have or will have when their current use is ended little or no importance. The National Archives, I am sure, will be glad to consult with you on any appraisal problems.

Some agencies seem to think that when the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources or the National Archives speaks of "important" records only things like the Declaration of Independence or letters signed by George Washington are meant. Let me emphasize that every agency has important records. A file of records is important if it is essential to the conduct of the business of the agency, if it guarantees the rights or property of individuals or establishes the rights or property of the government, or if it contributes significantly to an understanding of the policies and operations of the agency. A crude but fairly workable test is to imagine that the enemy has landed on Rehoboth Beach and the army has ordered your agency out of Washington immediately. Suppose only one or two or three trucks are available to move your records and all those left over are to be burned to keep them out of the enemy's hands. In such an imaginary case, what records would you move? Those you would select are the ones that for one or another of the reasons I have mentioned you consider most important, and those are the ones that should receive the maximum possible protection in the situation we are actually facing.

Almost all federal agencies have made a survey of their records such as I have described in filling out the questionnaires about materials in their possession sent out by the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources in September, 1941. If the information sent in by your agency is not immediately available to you, the completed questionnaires may be consulted in the files of the committee.

The next question is to decide how much danger your records are in now. Nobody knows, of course, but the best information available would indicate that if they are within one hundred miles of either coast or are in large industrial cities or near important military objectives within three hundred miles of either coast or border, there is quite a good chance that they will be bombed. The Public Buildings Administration will from time to time in the future proclaim that a specific state of hazard—moderate, dangerous, or extreme—exists with respect to federal property in given locations. Such a warning will, of course, officially govern the application of protective measures. The Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources will also advise from time to time on the hazards faced by materials in the sphere of its interests.

The danger to which a file of records is exposed depends not only on the likelihood of its being bombed but also on the building and

area within the building in which it is located. Surveys of all federal buildings are being made by the Public Buildings Administration to determine the degree of protection afforded and the best shelter areas within each building. Careful use should be made of these surveys by custodians of records in working out their protective programs.

When a clear picture has been obtained of the groups of records in the custody of any agency in terms of relative importance, frequency of use, location, quantities, and degrees of hazards, it is possible to select the particular means of protection best suited for each group. What are these means or methods of protection?

1. The building in which the records are housed can be reinforced to lessen the likelihood of penetration by incendiary bombs and to minimize the effects of near misses by high-explosive bombs.

2. Fire precautions can be increased; implements for dealing with incendiary bombs can be provided; and constant day and night vigilance can be maintained to combat incendiary bombs.

3. The records can be removed to safer parts of the building.

4. They can be transferred to the National Archives.

5. They can be evacuated from Washington.

6. They can be microfilmed.

Measures of the first two types, structural protection and fire protection, will not ordinarily be the responsibility of records custodians, and records will benefit simply from the general precautions that are taken for the protection of the building itself and its occupants and contents. Hence I am not going to discuss these except to call your attention again to the extreme importance of extraordinary precautions against fire in any building housing a large quantity of records.

The other four measures—removal to safer space within the building, transfer to the National Archives, evacuation, and microfilming—will ordinarily be the responsibility of records custodians, and I do want to talk a little about them; but instead of taking them up one by one, I want to go back to the classifications of records on the basis of use and importance that we talked about earlier and attempt to suggest the measures best suited to each type of record.

Your records that are in use every day are all obviously of considerable importance for the transaction of current business if for no other purpose, but the very fact that they are being used constantly makes it difficult to give them any special protection other than the general protection given all the contents of the building.

If they are indispensable records they ought to be microfilmed, provided you can get equipment and the physical form and arrangement of the records are such as to make microfilming practical. One or more copies of the film ought to be deposited in the National Archives or in a safe depository away from Washington for security. Microfilm equipment is precious now, and it should not be used for records of slight importance—there will be little enough equipment to use even on records of the very highest importance.

Records subject only to occasional use may have widely varying degrees of permanent importance. Many of them will have little value after they have become completely noncurrent. It is probably best simply to leave such records where they are, or even to move them from the safer parts of the building to the less safe in order to make room for more important records. Other records among those used occasionally may have permanent importance as a record of the agency's activities and policies. They should be moved into the safest areas of the building remaining after shelter areas for personnel have been set aside. The surveys made for the Public Buildings Administration and technical advice from that agency will assist you in selecting the parts of the building offering the safest storage. A few occasionally used records may be of the very highest importance. If their use is relatively frequent, you may have to keep them in your present building, in the safest space available and with the best protection possible. If the nature and frequency of use of the records permit, however, they ought to be removed. One possibility is to transfer them to the National Archives, where highly bomb-resistant storage is available and where service on the records can be given by the archives staff or, in some instances, by members of the agency's own staff. Another is to send them to a field office of the agency located in the interior of the country, where it may be practical to continue any essential use of the records, or to any other safe space outside of the District of Columbia in which arrangements can be made for service on the records.

The noncurrent records, those seldom if ever consulted in the administration of current business, constitute a vast quantity, and for them adequate protection can be more easily provided. If records of this group have outlived their administrative usefulness and have no permanent legal or research value or are duplicated elsewhere, the thing to do is to initiate disposal proceedings to get rid of them. Disposal will free space and facilities for the protection of more

important records, will aid the paper salvage campaign, and in general will do much to lessen the headaches of records administration.

More important noncurrent records ought, of course, to receive special protection. If there is sufficient reasonably safe space left in their present building after provision has been made for personnel shelter areas and for the storage of important semicurrent records, they can be placed there. This will not often be the case, however, and it will be well to plan for their evacuation, now or later. The Public Buildings Administration has made a survey of available storage space in federal buildings in safe areas not too remote from Washington that can be used for this purpose. A quantity of very usable space has been found, and evacuation of records to these federal buildings will not be too difficult to arrange and carry out. If the records have permanent value, transfer to the National Archives may be possible and may offer a better solution than evacuation.

Noncurrent records that are of the very highest legal, research, or historical importance ought to be moved to safety now—either to the National Archives or to buildings outside Washington and remote from military objectives. On the whole, I think transfer to the archives is the better policy for records of this description. They will be small in quantity, and it will be possible to provide storage for them in the safest areas of the National Archives building. The professional care that they will receive and the complete protection from such normal hazards as fire, insect pests, rodents, and dampness more than overbalance the advantages of evacuation from the city. Especially is this true when the bomb-resisting construction of the National Archives building is considered on the one hand and the many dangers incident to packing and shipping out of the city are considered on the other. If a decided worsening of the military situation should later make evacuation essential, the removal of these records will have been facilitated by their previous transfer to the National Archives, as that agency is specially prepared to handle the problem.

At this stage of the game the records officer of any agency knows his problems thoroughly and has decided what protective measures, if any, will be taken for each group of records in his care. Now comes the job of working out from the decisions he has reached an integrated and detailed plan for the protection of the records of his

agency. He must add up the quantity of records that will need to be filmed, calculate the number and types of cameras, readers, and other equipment and the quantity of film that will be needed and compute the total cost. He must calculate the amount and kinds of storage that will be needed for records he plans to remove from Washington and the number and capacity of the trucks that will be needed to move them. The size, type, and number of containers that will be needed for their shipment must be determined and their cost calculated. He must get together the data that will be needed for his requests for the transfer of records to the National Archives or for authority to dispose of them. He must arrange for all files and volumes that will be moved or given other special protection to be clearly marked and identified so that the completed plans can be executed without delay. Personnel to carry out the plans must be selected, trained, and assigned to definite tasks.

It is perhaps unnecessary to describe further the preparation of final plans, as the problems will be different for each agency; but I do want to emphasize two things:

1. It takes time, and a lot of it, and a great deal of very laborious effort to work out all the necessary details. Plans should have been completed for every agency by now. If they have not been completed for your own agency, push them hard. A satisfactory protective program cannot be improvised after bombs begin to fall.

2. Plans should include not only the records of the Washington office of each agency but of its field offices as well. Though most of the very important records of federal agencies are to be found in Washington, many field records have great value, and they are often exposed to even greater hazards than records in Washington. It is essential that field records be provided for in all protective programs.

If your plans have been carefully prepared on the basis of a thorough study of the problem, executing them should be the easiest part of the job. If you come to the Public Buildings Administration with a specific request for funds, are able to show just how the money will be spent, and can justify the expenditure in terms of the importance of the material to be protected, I venture to say that you will get the money you have to have promptly. If you come to the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources or the National Archives with a specific technical problem, I think we can get you the answer immediately. If you come to the National Archives with a specific proposal for the transfer or disposal of records as part of a

protective program, it will be handled with the utmost expedition. The Public Buildings Administration, the National Archives, and the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources are ready and eager to help in every way possible, but until problems have been clearly defined and plans definitely worked out there is not a great deal they can do. The real responsibility for the protection of records of the federal government rests where it should, on the people that know those records best—the records officers of the individual agencies.

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