

Archival Affairs in the USSR

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The modern organization of archival affairs in the USSR originates from the Decree of Council of People Commissars, "On Reorganization and Centralization of Archival Affairs in Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic," signed by Vladimir Il'ich Lenin on 1 June 1918. The decree laid new principles of archival development in our country.

In short, the five main points are as follows:

(1) all existing archival records were declared state property, the national property of the people, and the entire complex was named the State Archival Fond;

(2) instead of the existing separate archives that lacked mutual relations, a unified system of state archival institutions was established throughout the country;

(3) an ongoing system was initiated for the accession of new records of historical value by the State Archival Fond;

(4) the active utilization of archival records which reflect the historical experience of the past was promoted in the interest of society;

(5) all institutions, enterprises, and agencies of state and economic administration were to conduct records management according to established rules, to select the most valuable part of the created documentation for inclusion in the State Archival Fond, to organize temporary records storage, and then to transfer the selected records to state archives.

In the years following the adoption of the decree, the State Archival Fond of the USSR was elaborated. It is a system of successfully functioning state archival service institutions. The State Archival Fond is composed of a complex of records belonging to the Soviet state that are of political,

economic, scientific, social, cultural, or historical value; and it occupies a well-deserved place in the spiritual culture of Soviet people. Comprising 340 million files (storage units) reflecting the history of the country from ancient times to the present, one can find written relics of early Rus', Ukraine, Belorussia, Transcaucasia, Baltic, and Central Asia. One can also find records showing the process of the formation of the Russian centralized state, of the joining and reunion of other peoples with Russia, of the reforming activities of Peter the First, of the peasant movements under the leadership of I. Bolotnikov, S. Razin, and E. Pugachev, and of the working-class movement and its revolutionary struggle against autocracy and the capitalist system.

Nearly 70 percent of archival records relate to the Soviet epoch, reflecting all stages of Soviet state history: the Great October Socialist Revolution, the Civil War, the struggle of workers and peasants for the victory of socialism, feats of arms and labor exploits of the Soviet people in the course of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), and the contribution of the working people to the strengthening and perfection of socialist society.

There are 3,273 state archives functioning in the Soviet Union. Eleven central state archives have been established on the all-union level for storage and acquisition of records of the highest organs of government and administration, such as the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the USSR Council of Ministers, ministries, professional artistic unions, and other historic institutions and organizations.

There are sixty-five republic-level central state archives acquiring and storing records of the highest organs of government

and administration of union republics. State archives are also organized in autonomous republics, regions, territories, towns, and districts. They acquire and store records of corresponding governmental agencies and administrations; manufacturing enterprises; collective farms; state farms; secondary and higher educational institutions; research institutes; cultural, health service, and athletic institutions; and many other organizations. The state descriptive registration of archival holdings is based on the principles of centralization and continuity of that registration between state and agency archives.

State archives have complementary rights and obligations. They administer the deposit, preservation, conservation, and registration of all holdings of the State Archival Fond of the USSR; they conduct records accession and appraisal, and organize the utilization of archival records in the interests of the whole nation. They have a right to publish historical sources and to exercise methodological archival control in ministries, agencies, institutions, organizations, and other enterprises. They also have been conducting research in the field of archival development.

The agency archives system is a component of the State archival service. Two hundred and thirty thousand agency archives or corresponding departments are functioning in administrative bodies, enterprises, institutions, and agencies.

The Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers exercises archival control on an all-union scale. There are corresponding main archival administrations of the councils of ministers of the union republics; and in territories and regions, there are archival administrations or departments of executive committees of councils of peoples deputies. There are special advisory bodies in state archives consisting of five to seven archival specialists who function as "boards of directors."

In order more effectively to organize and maintain archival services, we have elaborated the official published *Basic Rules for the Work of the USSR State Archives*, *Basic Rules for the Work of Agency Archives*, and rules for the work of audiovisual archives, archives of scientific and technical documentation, and of machine-readable records. National guidelines and instructions have been elaborated for preservation and conservation of records comprising the State Archival Fond of the USSR, taking into account geographical and climatic conditions.

The state archival system also has its research center, the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Documentation and Archival Affairs. The Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute trains staff for the highest qualification of archival work. The journal *Soviet Archives* is published along with periodicals in union republics.

Careful attention to documentary relics of history and their preservation is an important obligation of state archives. The principal need is the creation of optimum storage conditions for records. In the repositories, necessary temperature and humidity controls (air conditioning, air-stove heating, ventilation) are maintained; repositories have security and fire alarms, automatic fire extinguishing and dust removal systems, and apparatus for checking and measuring storage conditions.

Archives constantly review the physical condition of records to reveal adversely affected or damaged materials. Records undergo restoration and conservation, including treatment against mold, bacteria, and insects. Physical treatment methods include high-frequency current, antiseptic treatment, and the bioprotection of materials and glues, among other methods.

More than one hundred laboratories for microfilming, restoration, and preventive inspection of archival records are functioning in the USSR. Microfilm security fonds of the most valuable records are being cre-

ated, as are heavy utilization fonds consisting of microfilm copies of records that are in great demand among users.

Inventory control, or information retrieval, of the State Archival Fond of the USSR is one of the most important archival activities. The main record control within the fond is the inventory. Acquisition registers, lists of fonds, registration books explaining current changes in the composition and volume of archives holdings, fond catalogs, and indexes defining the custody of records in an archives are also used. The Central Catalogue of Archival Fonds includes information about the documents stored and available in all the state archives of the country.

For public information, the following directories have been published: *State Archives of the USSR*, *Personal Fonds in Archives of the USSR*, and *The Central State Archives of the USSR*. Corresponding guides are available for every republic-level or regional state archives.

The most important activities of the state archival service of the USSR are the accession and appraisal of documents transferred to state archival custody. State economic and social organizations produce documentation reflecting many different aspects of society. From their agency records, materials are selected for the State Archival Fond of the USSR.

We have developed and implemented lists of institutions whose records are to be transferred to the state archives of the USSR, and lists of records within those institutions which are to be transferred to the state archives. Of course, only a part of the documentation is of real historical value and is to be transferred to the state archives to compose the State Archival Fond of the USSR. The value and significance of records for history are determined in the appraisal process. The systematized criteria for appraisal which have been created in our country include: the provenance, content, and external features of records. Cri-

teria related to provenance are the importance and functions of the institution creating the records, and the date and place of the creation of the records. Criteria related to content are the purpose of the records and the value of the information they contain. Criteria related to external features include the signs of juridical authenticity, the way of reproducing the text of the document, and the physical condition of the document. Commissions of experts are organized both within agencies and in state archives. The Central Appraisal Commission of the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers is the scientific and methodological center for problems of records appraisal and accession by the state archives.

Annually, 3 to 3.5 million files (storage units) of administrative, scientific, and technical documentation; materials of scientific and cultural institutions and organizations; documentary films; photographs; and sound recordings are transferred to state archives. Certainly the problem of selection of such records for their historical value is always complicated and multifaceted, and involves a high level of responsibility. Soviet archivists consider it their goal further to perfect the selection of documents for state custody, and they invite scholars and other specialists to participate in appraisal commissions in order properly to collect materials of real historical value for state archives.

The historical experience of the past reflected in archival materials is of great importance in resolving concrete problems of social, economic, and cultural development, in educating the working people, in developing historical science, and in satisfying social and legal demands of citizens. Archival materials are actively used in the elaboration of long-term plans for development of various branches of the national economy; for the social and economic development of cities and regions; for planning, construction, and reconstruc-

tion of enterprises; for the restoration of historical and cultural monuments; and for resolving different concrete problems in the organization of industrial and agricultural production.

Annually, more than thirty thousand reference replies or copies of documents are sent to inquiring organizations. Such materials, for instance, have been used in designing the Baikal-Amur Main Railway Line, for the construction of the hydroelectric power stations on the Volga and the Yenisei, in resolving problems of agricultural development of nonfertile regions, and for restoration of the Moscow Kremlin and monuments in Leningrad and other cities.

The archives provide a large number of copies of documents, photographs, and sound recordings for exhibitions organized by enterprises, collective farms, state farms, and scientific and educational organizations. Besides that, more than one thousand documentary exhibitions on various subjects are organized annually in the archives. An exhibition, "The Role of the Records of the State Archival Fond of the USSR in the Development of the Soviet Culture," was organized from March through June of 1984 in Moscow. More than 150,000 persons attended.

Information about archival documents relating to various political concerns, anniversaries, and events is published in periodicals and on radio and television. Documentary film footage and photographs are used extensively. In recent years, significant quantities of such materials have been provided for more than three hundred films and television programs.

Archival documents are an important source base for the development of historical sciences. Hundreds of scholarly books, monographs, and booklets based on archives are published annually, and up to 50,000 researchers work in the reading rooms of the archives each year. Among them are up to 250 researchers from foreign

countries. For the last twenty years, state archives, in cooperation with scientific institutions, have published more than 1,200 volumes of documentary collections. So, in brief, activities of state archives promote the use of documents of the State Archival Fond of the USSR in the interest of society.

The institutions of the State Archival Service of the USSR are composed of an important staff of specialists on archives. More than one-half of the personnel has completed higher education, including special historico-archival programs. The training of more highly qualified archival specialists takes place at the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute, and in state universities of Kiev, the Urals, Vilnius, and Riga, among others. Annually, up to 180 young specialists with professional training come to work for state archives.

Apart from the daytime programs in these educational institutions, there are also evening and correspondence courses where those working in archival institutions can simultaneously combine their work with studies and receive necessary instruction in archival affairs. The Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute has a special program for professional advancement where annually more than one hundred persons study. Professional correspondence courses graduate up to two hundred persons annually.

Regular programs for improving professional qualifications have been developed with special curricula involving practically all the personnel of the state archives. There are also all-union and republic-wide three- or five-day seminars where specialists make reports and exchange experiences regarding various problems of archival work.

Soviet archival institutions have professional contacts with archival institutions of more than fifty countries. These relations include exchange of professional experience, joint preparation and editing of collections of archival documents, exchange of copies of documents, and exchange of

archival publications.

The joint publication of documents concerning contacts and relations of our state with other countries in different historical periods of time holds an important place in the cooperation between archival institutions. Indicative of the scope of this work during the past eight years is the fact that twenty-five volumes of such documentary collections have been published.

An intensive mutual exchange of copies of archival documents is conducted. In recent years Soviet archives have transferred to their foreign colleagues more than 350,000 frames of microcopies of documents and about 100,000 meters of documentary film. The state archives of the USSR correspondingly received from abroad copies of documents of great interest to us.

The Soviet Union and also the Ukrainian and Belorussian Union republics are members of the International Council on Archives (ICA). Delegations from Soviet archival institutions take part in international archival congresses and in conferences of the Round Table on Archives, making reports and sharing information. A representative of the USSR is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Council on Archives. Soviet archivists are members and corresponding members of ICA's working committees on archives of literature and art, on reprography, on information sciences, and on conservation and restoration.

We believe that international cooperation of archivists assists in the exchange of experiences in the field of archival administration accumulated by different countries. It contributes to the development of national archival affairs and to strengthening friendship and mutual understanding which is so necessary in our uncertain era.

In this connection, it would be well to note that Soviet and American archivists have maintained professional contacts of mutual interest for a long time. On their initiative, as it is well known, a substantial publication of documents and materials, *Russia and the USA: The Beginning of Relations 1765-1815*, was prepared and published simultaneously in Moscow and Washington in 1980.

The cooperation between the archival institutions of the USSR and the USA received a new impetus as a result of negotiations that took place at the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987. An Agreement of Cooperation between the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers and the American Council of Learned Societies was signed in Washington in February 1987. The members of this bilateral commission signed a Protocol indicating concrete joint ventures to be carried out during the years 1987 and 1988. We think that our relations will contribute to the amelioration of archival work and to better mutual understanding of the people of our countries.