

The Soviet Union's Archival Research Center: Observations of an American Visitor

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The Soviet Union has a complex and substantial archival system.¹ To support this system, Soviet archivists have established educational and research institutions that warrant careful study by American archivists. Their educational programs are among their most readily apparent accomplishments, especially to American visitors acutely conscious of our deficiencies in this area. Archival research programs are less conspicuous and more difficult to describe, but in this area, too, Soviet archivists have been leaders. The institution they have built to address archival research problems is unlike anything we have in the United States and far surpasses in size and scope any of our archival research centers.

This article is a report to American archivists on a visit to the All-Union Scientific-Research Institute for Documentation and Archival Affairs (Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut dokumentovedeniia i arkhivnogo dela).² VNIIDAD, as it is called, is the primary research center for

the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers (Glavnoe Arkhivnoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, or Glavarkhiv).

The Soviet Archival System

Soviet and American archives differ radically in their systems of governance. In the Soviet Union, the archives of different territorial jurisdictions are not independent of the central administration as are state, county, and municipal archives in the United States. All Soviet archives are linked administratively into a centralized, all-union system.

The Soviet Union's centralized approach to archival administration dates from a decree signed on 1 June 1918 by Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. The decree created what is now the State Archival Fond (*Gosudarstvennyi arkhivnyi fond*), which brought together under state jurisdiction all the records of previous governmental jurisdictions.³ In subsequent decrees, additional records were

¹For the best available overview of the Soviet Union's archival establishment, see the many valuable works of Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, especially: *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Moscow and Leningrad* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), and Supplement 1: *Bibliographical Addenda* (Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation Company, 1976); *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: The Ukraine and Moldavia*, Book 1: *General Bibliography and Institutional Directory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); *A Handbook for Archival Research in the USSR* (Washington, D.C.: Kennan Institute, IREX, 1988); "Lenin's Archival Decree of 1918: The Bolshevik Legacy for Soviet Archival Theory and Practice," *American Archivist* 45 (Fall 1982): 429-43; "A New Soviet Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories: A Major Contribution in Light of Recent Reference Aids," *Slavic Review* 45 (Fall 1986): 534-44. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Patricia Grimsted not only in her published works but in her generous personal advice.

²Our visit lasted from 18 September to 2 October 1987. Our "delegation" of two visited most sites together, dividing up only for a half day at the end of the first week. As part of the prearranged understanding with the American members of the sponsoring commission, Francis Blouin focused on archival education, and I concentrated on VNIIDAD.

³Grimsted, "Lenin's Archival Decree," 429-43. The word "fond" has a varied and complex set of meanings for Soviet archivists and may be used to describe any collection of records that has an organizational unity,

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The administrative offices of Glavarkhiv are located in this Moscow building, a pre-revolutionary structure originally built as the archives for the Ministry of Justice.

brought into the fond, such as the records of religious institutions, businesses, revolutionary organizations, labor unions, and families and estates. The decree also established a central administrative authority—the predecessor agency to Glavarkhiv—that was responsible for preserving the records of the State Archival Fond. Now an independent agency under the Council of Ministers, Glavarkhiv is responsible either directly or indirectly for the preservation of all historical records and for the oversight of current records administration in the Soviet Union.

In addition to overseeing a nationwide system of archives, Glavarkhiv also operates eleven major repositories responsible for records of all-union significance. The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts in Moscow houses the records of the Russian Empire from earliest times up through the nineteenth century. Other records of the

Russian Empire from the eighteenth century to the Revolution are in the Central State Historical Archive of the USSR in Leningrad. Prerevolutionary military records are either in the Central State Archive of Military History in Moscow or the Central State Archive of the Navy in Leningrad.

All-union records relating to the October Revolution and postrevolutionary governmental records are in Moscow in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution, High Organs of State Government, and Organs of State Administration. A second major repository for postrevolutionary records is the Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR. Other all-union, postrevolutionary records are maintained in archives organized according to governmental function, subject, or format—navy, army, science and technology, literature and art, documentary films and

ranging from what we would call a collection to a record group to a series. For more information, see Grimsted, *IREX Handbook*, “Arrangement and Description of Archival Material,” section 2.

photos, and sound recordings.⁴

There are some major exceptions to this system. Several important agencies, such as the Foreign Ministry, the KGB, the Academy of Sciences, and museums and libraries of the Ministry of Culture, are authorized to maintain their own archives. A separate Communist Party archives system actually mirrors the Glavarkhiv system from the all-union archives down to the district levels, reflecting party activities in all agencies and organizations of the Soviet Union. Also, below the all-union level, a separate and parallel system of archives exists for the Russian Federation and for all non-Russian union republics.

Even though direct administrative responsibility for Soviet archives is divided, the policies, standards, and procedures developed by Glavarkhiv are to be used by all archival institutions in the Soviet Union. This centralized policy-making mechanism allows Soviet archival administrators to establish standard practices throughout the nation and, when necessary, to promote the general adoption of new techniques or procedures.

Centralized policy making creates both opportunities and obligations for Soviet archival administrators. It provides the opportunity for anticipating and systematically addressing research needs that are too complex or costly for single archives to tackle. The corresponding obligation for Glavarkhiv administrators is that their policies must be flexible enough to work in a wide variety of institutions. In considering the implementation of new standards, Glavarkhiv administrators need to be sure in advance that the standards will be effective and beneficial. To provide the research needed for developing new policies and for meeting its oversight responsibilities, Glavarkhiv established VNIIDAD.

The Structure of VNIIDAD

VNIIDAD began in the 1960s as a small unit within Glavarkhiv, created to study the problem of preserving fading documents. As staff members worked on this project, they realized the need for a more comprehensive approach to this and other problems Glavarkhiv faced. They recognized that, because of the interrelated nature of most archival problems, they could not resolve one issue in isolation from others. VNIIDAD emerged as a semiautonomous institute under Glavarkhiv in 1966, and since then it has grown rapidly. Its staff today includes approximately 240 specialists representing a wide range of academic disciplines, from physics and computer science to psychology and philosophy.

VNIIDAD is organized into ten divisions, which are subdivided further into twenty-two sections and four laboratories. The ten major divisions are:

1) Division of Research in Economy and Labor Norms. This division consists of three sections and concentrates on standards for organizing and measuring work within the Soviet archival system. The department's responsibilities include research into production norms to be established for different institutions and job classifications.

2) Division of Systems for Document Preservation and Records Management. The four sections in this division work on systems for managing the creation and use of records by government agencies. Computerized records are a special area of concern, and the department seeks to develop guidelines for controlling computerized records and to work with agencies that produce records in digital formats.

3) Division of Documentation Studies. The three sections in this division deal with theoretical aspects of what Soviet archivists

⁴The dividing lines of responsibility between the all-union repositories are not always clear and precise. For a more detailed overview of the holdings of the all-union repositories, see Grimsted, *IREX Handbook*, Appendix 1.

call *dokumentovedenia*. This word does not translate directly into English, but may be understood as documentation studies or science. Archivists in this area deal with problems of the systematization of government forms and documentation, seeking to correlate the needs of current record keeping with long-term archival requirements. One section works on theoretical issues alone, while others consider the application of these theories to records administration.

4) Division of Archival Affairs. This division deals with many of the traditional issues of archival administration. One section is concerned with the arrangement and bibliographic control of records in the State Archival Fond. A second section focuses on the appraisal and accessioning of records of the State Archival Fond by agency record centers. A third section studies the use of documents in the State Archival Fond, exploring new ways of introducing documents to wider public use, including documentary publications, media use, and exhibitions. The Archaeography Section addresses general principles relating to the programs and methodological problems of documentary publications.

5) Division of Scientific-Technical and Special Documentation of the State Archival Fond. The twenty-five staff members of this division are organized into two sections. One concentrates on the special concerns of records created as the result of scientific and technological activities. The other deals with special format material—primarily films, photographs, and audio tapes. A key emphasis in both sections is the effort to develop cooperative solutions to problems by combining the skills of archivists with those of technical experts in each record format and with specialists from the field in which the records are created.

6) Laboratory for Automated Information Systems. This laboratory of twenty-one people works on principles and methods for using computers to manage archival

collections. Its primary concern is to develop principles for the standardization and consistency of archival work. This standardization is necessary to ensure Glavarkhiv's future ability to integrate the work of separate institutions into a national archival information system.

7) Division of Preservation of Documents of the State Archival Fond. The preservation division consists of two laboratories—one for paper preservation and one for the restoration of photographs. A special section provides advice to Soviet archives on technological issues relating to preservation. This section has focused in recent years on environmental storage conditions that will ensure the preservation of historical records.

8) Field Center for Scientific-Technical Information on Documentation Studies and Archival Affairs. This center surveys archival literature, both domestic and foreign, to gather and make accessible to Soviet archivists information about new work being done in all areas of archival administration.

9) Division of Automated Archival Technology. One section of this division deals with the output of records from automated systems. The other studies archival issues connected with developing software programs and documentation systems for computerized data bases.

10) Laboratory for the Improvement of Agency Records Management. As the name suggests, this division concentrates on practical applications for improving records management practices in Soviet agencies and institutions.

The structure of VNIIDAD is obviously complicated. Administrators emphasized their flexibility within this structure and their practice of creating special project teams from several divisions to address research topics requiring a mixture of technical and professional skills. VNIIDAD staff mem-

bers also work with other institutes and educational centers on issues of mutual concern.

Our first day at VNIIDAD consisted of an extensive overview of the history and programs of the institute. On our second morning, we visited the preservation laboratory and were shown research projects on paper conservation and photographic restoration. In the paper preservation laboratory, specialists have conducted an extensive array of experiments showing the effects of changes in the environment on paper. We saw the test chambers and the charts on which the results were recorded. The charts illustrated the lag time between changes in the environment and subsequent changes of temperature and humidity of the paper. The laboratory administrators have moved from this research to the development of specifications for archival environmental systems in all the climatic regions of the USSR. The VNIIDAD preservation specialists were well aware of published American research on paper aging and environmental standards.

In discussing their work, laboratory officials reported success in working with the USSR's paper institute on specifications for more durable paper. Their major hurdles are now not questions of technical knowledge, but the difficulties of having the long-life paper produced and incorporated into regular use by agencies creating records of long-term value. The laboratory's work with the ink institute has been somewhat more problematic because of the many different uses and needs considered by ink manufacturers.

A second research laboratory in the same department specializes in a new technique

for enhancing the images of damaged or faded photographs. This technique uses sets of light filters to produce new prints which eliminate, for example, the discoloration caused by water damage. The laboratory has received several patents for these processes.

Our introductory overview of the organization and the tour of two restoration/conservation laboratories consumed almost half the time allocated to us at VNIIDAD. We quickly realized that the time left on our agenda was not sufficient for us to take in all the work of each individual division and laboratory. Since much of the institute's work is conducted through reading, field analysis, and discussions, the time required to understand all these activities is even greater than for activities that can be readily seen. We decided to concentrate our remaining time on one specific topic which reaches across, and reflects the work of, several departments of VNIIDAD. It is an issue of special interest both to American archivists and to future researchers in Soviet archives—the Soviet Union's Unified State System of Records Management (*Edinaia gosudarstvennaia sistema delo-proizvodstva*—EGSD) and VNIIDAD's role in its development and operation.

The Unified State System of Records Management

The Unified State System of Records Management (EGSD) is a complex, multifaceted set of administrative practices and procedures proposed by Glavarkhiv and issued by the USSR Council of Ministers.⁵ It establishes guidelines for the administration of the records of all state agencies and institutions of the Soviet Union. By con-

⁵The following discussion of the Unified State System of Records Management is based on extended discussions at VNIIDAD with the director, A. I. Chugunov; the assistant director (and former head of the records management laboratory), V. D. Banasjuevich; Head of the Acquisitions and Appraisal Section of the Division of Archival Affairs, M. P. Zhukova; and acting head of the Division of Systems for Document Preservation and Records Management, Alexander Chukavenkov. It also reflects briefer discussions with the records management faculty at the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute (MGIAI) and with staff at the Leningrad District Archives and the Moscow City Archives. See also, Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers, *Basic Rules for the Work of the USSR State Archives* (Moscow, 1984), 192–210. *Basic Rules* is an English translation of the basic regulations issued by Glavarkhiv to govern Soviet archival practices.

trast with the chaotic and idiosyncratic records management practices of the United States, the EGSD establishes one basic operational model for records administration in all the agencies, institutes, organizations, and enterprises of the Soviet Union.

As in most other countries, modern Soviet records procedures are built on long-established administrative practices. From the time of Peter the Great, Russian procedures for handling important official records have been very similar to those of other European nations. Agencies had secretariats or general services offices which received all incoming communications. Clerks logged these communications into registers and then forwarded them to the appropriate officials for answering. Each official's response went back to the secretariat where a clerk recorded the date of the response in the register before forwarding it on to the source of the original communication. The secretariats maintained the agency's central files, which included the original inquiries, the registers, and copies of all the responses.

Despite the many changes brought by the October Revolution, this practical and thoroughly tested system for managing paperwork was retained in its basic form by the new Soviet government. From the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s, two important oversight bodies, the Central Control Committee and the Workers and Peasants Inspection Committee, monitored the administrative efficiency of new Soviet governmental bodies. These committees also studied the administrative practices of other countries and sought ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Soviet agencies. One part of this work was the development of guidelines prescribing how documents were to be created and handled, how paperwork flow was to be monitored to ensure timeliness, how file rooms were to be organized, and how documents were to be categorized to establish appropriate retention periods.

When the Central Control Committee and

the Workers and Peasants Inspection Committee were disbanded in 1934, the basic practices they had established continued, though central coordination and support were lost. In the late 1950s, the need for improvements in the records management system again became apparent. To address some of these records problems, the Council of Ministers, in December 1959, enacted a law establishing the Unified State System of Records Management. The act was reaffirmed and expanded in a 1973 revision which consolidated these rules into a system of recommended government standards.

In preparing for the 1973 revision, Glavarkhiv turned to VNIIDAD for research support. VNIIDAD was given primary responsibility for developing recommendations for the new version of the Unified State System of Records Management, and records management policy concerns became a major research area for VNIIDAD. VNIIDAD has now developed another major set of revisions that staff members have been working on since the early 1980s. These revisions have been approved by Glavarkhiv and are now before the Council of Ministers, having also been approved by several other important ministries. The specialists at VNIIDAD who have worked on these revisions are optimistic that the updated system will be adopted soon. Among other changes, these revisions call for the system to become obligatory for all agencies rather than merely a set of recommended practices as it is now.

The Unified State System of Records Management prescribes rules and norms for managing agency records, and even sets guidelines for creating and formatting documents. Perhaps even more important is its establishment of a standard administrative model for the management of records in all government agencies. Because almost all industries, enterprises, unions, and cultural institutions in the Soviet Union are part of the government, the effects of these guide-

lines are far greater in scope and impact than they would be for similar guidelines in the United States federal government.

A key to the operation of this system is the agency secretariat or general services department. This long-established and almost universally recognized office is incorporated into the EGSD as a central component and is responsible for most of what we in the United States call records management. Because the general services office is generally understood to be part of the normal agency administrative apparatus, Soviet agency officials are compelled to recognize the management of their agency's records as one of their basic obligations.

A specific example provided to us was the Ministry of Culture, which has approximately twenty people in its general services office. One section of three or four clerks opens all incoming correspondence. A section of about the same number sorts the correspondence according to the offices of the ministry responsible for answering it. These staff members also complete a routing sheet for each document, noting the date of its receipt, its control number, the subject of the communication, and the office to which it is assigned. One copy of this routing sheet goes to a control file and another goes with the document to the office which is to prepare the response.

The officials who prepare the responses return them to the general services office with recommended filing locations added to the routing sheets. The control staff, another unit of two or three people in the general services office, receives the completed responses and routing sheets from the operational offices. The control staff may have the responses typed or retyped if necessary before the responses are mailed. The control staff also completes the routing sheets and the unit's own records for monitoring the timeliness of the different offices in responding to correspondence.

In accordance with the filing instructions

on the routing sheets and the agency filing system, the correspondence and a copy of the response are then entered into the central file. The central file holds all the agency's correspondence for at least one year. After a year or two, the noncurrent files are transferred to a records center, which is also administered by the general services office. In the records center, the records are sorted for permanent transfer to an archives or for destruction.

According to the staff at VNIIDAD, this system used by the Ministry of Culture is the basic model prescribed by the Unified State System of Records Management and is followed by virtually all Soviet agencies. Larger agencies usually have separate sections within a general services division that handle only records responsibilities. Very small agencies may have just one person responsible for records duties along with other related tasks. Also, ministries or large agencies may operate their own records centers while smaller agencies may rely upon a records center administered by its host archives.

A second key to the operation of the EGSD is the "expert appraisal commission" (*eksperto-proverochnaia kommissia*). A separate commission exists for each agency to oversee the operation of the agency's records program. The commission reviews and approves the filing lists for each year and seeks to address any problems in the records system. The commission also reviews proposals for the disposition of noncurrent records.

The appraisal commissions usually consist of the agency head or designee, the agency archivist and/or records management officer, a small group of administrators from throughout the agency, and the archivist from the institution that will receive the permanent records. When appropriate, outside specialists may also be invited to serve on these commissions.

When an agency archivist prepares recommendations for the disposition of the

noncurrent files, the agency appraisal commission reviews this list to ensure that records of continuing value will be preserved. Following commission approval, permanent records are eligible for transfer from the record centers to the appropriate archival unit in the Glavarkhiv system.

In the fall of each year, the agency records manager usually prepares a list of expected file headings for the upcoming year. These headings are built on the previous year's experience, on directives from Glavarkhiv, and on solicitations to agency staff for ideas about anticipated needs. The appraisal commission reviews, revises, and approves the draft prepared by the records manager, which then becomes the official agency filing plan for the new year. The commission also approves any major changes needed during the course of the year.

One interesting aspect of the Soviet system from the standpoint of American archivists is the division of responsibilities between archivists and records managers. In the Soviet Union, records managers focus almost exclusively on the current records operations of the agency general services divisions—the use of forms, the management of the flow of documentation, and the operation of file rooms. When inactive records are transferred to records centers, the records—both permanent and nonpermanent—become the responsibility of archivists, either of the ministry itself or of the host archives. Like their U.S. counterparts, Soviet archivists seek to influence the format and content of documents from the time of creation, and the standards of the Unified State System of Records Management provide a valuable set of tools for helping in this effort.

Another great benefit of the EGSD from the archivists' point of view is the standardization of procedures for transferring permanent files from the agency to the archives. Since archivists representing the receiving archives serve on the agency

appraisal commissions, many points of potential disagreement are resolved before the file disposition lists go to the archives for formal consideration. Also, the fact that archivists manage the agency records centers helps to facilitate orderly records transfers. Still another benefit of this system to archivists is that the general services office control files can serve as a detailed finding aid, even down to the document level.

In addition to being represented on the agency appraisal commissions, the receiving archives have their own appraisal commissions to review the file and disposition lists of the agencies they serve. These commissions are composed of major department heads and other highly qualified senior staff members from within the archives. Some archives may use outside experts, and regional archives often use some of the most able heads of the agency records centers as commission members. These archival appraisal commissions review, amend, and approve all agency records disposition lists before the lists are finally approved.

One of the services of Glavarkhiv (with assistance from VNIIDAD) is to publish lists of general types of material that should be retained permanently and that may be destroyed. These lists provide guidance for the appraisal commissions in making individual appraisal decisions. The development of these lists is a major responsibility of the Appraisal Section of VNIIDAD's Division of Archival Affairs.

The archival appraisal commissions also perform several other important functions in addition to their appraisal oversight duties. They inquire into problems related to the filing or maintenance of records in the agencies. They also serve as mechanisms for resolving any conflicts between archives and the agencies they serve. In their operations, the chairmen convene commission meetings as needed, and decisions are usually made on a consensus basis.

At the top of the appraisal commission pyramid is the Central Appraisal Commis-

sion of Glavarkhiv. This body of thirty to forty members consists of representatives from Glavarkhiv, VNIIDAD, and other historical and archival organizations such as the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute (MGIAI), the Division of History of the Academy of Sciences, and the heads of all-union archives. The Central Appraisal Commission reviews and approves the general appraisal guidelines developed by VNIIDAD and Glavarkhiv for classes of records to be retained or destroyed. It also approves individual records disposition lists received from the all-union archives and examines major problems that arise in the operation of the entire records management and appraisal system.

Much of the specific review work of the Central Appraisal Commission is handled by an executive committee, assisted by staff from the Appraisal Department of Glavarkhiv. Only more serious problems or major policy issues are taken to the full meetings of the commission. The full commission meets once or twice a year, but the executive committee meets as often as once a month.

General Observations

In reflecting on the visit, reviewing notes, and reading again about Soviet archives, I have difficulty deciding what to emphasize most—the differences between our systems or the similarities. Certainly, the Soviet Union's centralized archival administration and the specific provisions of the Unified State System of Records Management produce an archival establishment that differs from U.S. archives in fundamental ways. Of course, the enormous differences in our political and social systems are also reflected by differences in our archives, both in organizational structure and in the mode of operation. Yet within these differing structures, archivists of both nations are concerned with the same issues of records creation, appraisal, description, preservation, and use. A few general observations

may help flesh out this comparison.

Cooperative Archival Structures. Although the administration of Soviet archives is obviously more centralized than in the United States, the decision-making processes within the Soviet system are far more complex than one might first imagine. There is also more opportunity for the expression of differing points of view than I had expected. In fact, the Soviet archival system relies for its success upon the input and cooperation of many different groups. Collaboration and consensus building are structured into basic Soviet archival processes. Many of the substantive archival decisions, as well as general policy decisions, are made by expert commissions and advisory councils. Also, a complex system of consensus building under the Scientific Council of Glavarkhiv (which serves as an overall planning and coordinating body) and under the Council of Ministers is necessary for the approval of new laws or procedures. This review and approval process is reflected by the current efforts to secure approval of a revised Unified State System of Records Management.

Because U.S. archives are not linked together in any formal system, archivists have not learned to work together on a voluntary basis as well as we should. This lack of strong interinstitutional structures makes it much easier for individual U.S. archives to implement changes; but the weakness of our system is that these changes may lead archives in many different, uncoordinated directions. In fact, U.S. archivists are generally free to ignore any thought of standardization or cooperation, and we operate with little or no outside professional review of our programs.

By contrast, the Soviet system may be too structured and cumbersome. Because of the extent and complexity of the review and approval processes, it can be very difficult to have major new policies approved in the Soviet system. These difficulties might well frustrate constructive efforts by those

who see a need for change but who are not able to have their recommendations approved through the complicated review and approval structure.

Problems. When asked what their problems were, Soviet archivists responded very much like their U.S. counterparts. Many of their problems stem from the lack of resources to implement their programs properly. For instance, some archives are so full that they cannot accommodate any additional records. Other problems result from the creating agencies' inattention to proper records practices. Some agencies with concerned administrators and with energetic archivists and records managers operate very effective programs. Other agencies may be so negligent that Glavarkhiv has to take steps to intervene and compel the agencies to comply with EGSD mandates.

Several strategies for intervention were cited in the discussions. Glavarkhiv may refer problems to the Central Appraisal Commission or even to the Council of Ministers. It also may deny approval of the records disposition lists until agency compliance with other requirements improves. Glavarkhiv's Department of Inspections is responsible for checking on the condition of archival records in both all-union and republic archives, as well as in the agencies creating the records.⁶

One particular problem cited by the VNIIDAD staff is probably common to all research institutes both in the Soviet Union and the United States. In considering VNIIDAD's research priorities, the working archives tend to press for immediate solutions to the vexing problems of the moment. VNIIDAD staff members are concerned that short-term solutions must be worked out from proven, long-term principles, and they believe the institute must focus its research on developing or refining these principles.

They are concerned that without a well-considered, long-term framework, the solutions may prove not only useless, but even harmful. As in the United States, the increasingly rapid rate of change in modern records systems and in information technology makes the need for both short- and long-term solutions an increasingly urgent one.

Differences in the Use of Equipment to Promote Access. In the United States over the last decade, photocopiers and microcomputers have become ubiquitous. One of the major problems of U.S. archivists is how to use this equipment effectively and integrate it into a coherent information system. Indeed, new information processing equipment has increased more rapidly than archivists' administrative skills in using it.

Soviet archivists are also concerned with using computers to manage their collections, but not yet to the extent or in the same ways as their U.S. counterparts. One specific computer application we saw was for developing a list of archival sources relating to historic buildings in Leningrad. Survey sheets had been sent to participating archives, and data from the returned sheets were then entered into computers, which sorted and printed lists of these sources. Staff members in the computer center of Glavarkhiv were also working on a more complex system for subject access to archival sources, though this system appears to be still in the developmental stage. We saw no indication that Soviet archivists are actually using this on-line system in handling current reference inquiries.

The Division of Scientific Reference Apparatus (*Nauchno-spravochnyi apparat*) of Glavarkhiv receives annual reports which include descriptive entries on each fond accessioned by any archive in the Glavarkhiv system.⁷ The staff of this division is working on a comprehensive, computer-

⁶See *Basic Rules*, 198–210, for additional information on archival reporting requirements and inspection procedures.

⁷*Nauchno-spravochnyi apparat* is translated literally as scientific reference apparatus. This division receives

ized listing of all these fond descriptions. We were shown samples of printouts, but this complex undertaking is not sufficiently far along for the staff to project a completion date.

Two other computer applications were to produce enhanced images of photographs and to improve the sound quality of old audio recordings. We were able to hear a speech by Lenin taken from an original wax cylinder master and cleared of virtually all scratches and static. We also saw examples of work of the photographic imaging project.

We did not see any evidence of plans for local computer systems in individual archives, or for linking local systems into a national archival information system. Such a system could dovetail nicely with the central listing of all fonds being prepared by the Division of Scientific Research Apparatus. The centralized administrative structure of the Soviet archival system could also support such a program far more efficiently than the fragmented organization of U.S. archives, but Soviet archivists do not appear as interested in promoting this type of on-line access as their western counterparts.

Soviet archivists appear to be concerned far less about research access than about their role in providing administrative support to the governmental units they serve. Also, long-established operational traditions foster a very strong protective orientation among Soviet archivists toward the records in their custody. For instance, Soviet archivists require an evaluation and recommendation of foreign research proposals by an appropriate Soviet research center prior to granting access to any records. Soviet archival procedures also require the thorough examination and documentation of the condition of all records prior to their use by researchers. A

second formal documented review must be conducted after the research has been completed. Such time-consuming approval and oversight requirements mean that foreign researchers must work out arrangements for using records well ahead of their visits to Soviet archives.

Another serious barrier to scholarly access is the inability of scholars to use the principal finding aids directly. Soviet archivists control the series and file lists and decide for their researchers what they believe are appropriate sources. Although there are some published guides, these guides are not widely circulated and often are difficult for academic researchers to obtain. Because the production and distribution of finding aids has not been a priority, even Soviet archivists may not be aware of many appropriate sources. These practices differ significantly from the increasing tendency of U.S. archivists to concentrate more energy on the creation of computerized finding aids, which are produced with the expectation that all researchers can work through them and decide for themselves which documents they wish to see.

Although limited photocopier services are available to academic researchers, the services are far more restrictive than in most American archives. Photocopiers are also used far less in day-to-day administrative work in Soviet agencies.

Professionalization. Although this question was not discussed in great detail with our Soviet hosts, we sensed an increasing professionalization in archival administration in the Soviet Union. Archival education programs have been established for decades at institutions like the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute.⁸ The expansion of in-service training throughout the Glavarkhiv system reinforces this increased professional consciousness. Close working links between

and develops a master control file of all fond descriptions of all records received by Soviet archives. For more information, see Grimsted, *Handbook*, "Arrangement and Description of Archival Material," Section 2.

⁸See the companion article about Soviet archival education by Francis Blouin.



Yuri Afanasyev, director of MGIAI; Edwin Bridges; Ludmilla Selivanova, translator, from the foreign office of Glavarkhiv; and E. J. Pivovar, head of the Archival Department of MGIAI.

the various archives, MGIAI, and VNIIDAD also support this heightened professional awareness. One feature noticeably missing in the Soviet archival landscape is a national professional association such as the Society of American Archivists which would bring together archivists from different types of institutions and repositories to create a separate, outside forum for the expression of professional interests and concerns.

An interesting related issue is the relationship between archivists and historians. Soviet archival training programs are firmly rooted in the study of history, moving through historical and archival courses as a seamless whole. When faculty members at MGIAI were asked whether they regarded archival administration as a body of theory in its own right or as a set of technical practices, they responded that this was a subject they had often discussed. Their conclusion, however, has been to avoid forcing a decision: "We train archivists," they said, and to provide this training they

have put together a program strongly grounded in historical studies. MGIAI, in fact, is a major center for training historians as well as archivists. Also supporting a close relationship between archives and history is the fact that some of the senior administrators at Glavarkhiv and MGIAI are historians who have come to archives from other historical institutions.

Despite the substantial common bonds between historians and archivists, the forces dividing them may be equally strong. As new information systems become more complex and the courses in records administration become more numerous and demanding, the amount of time spent in historical studies is likely to be lessened. Once archivists are actually at work, their loyalties and interests are also apt to change. As has been the case with many American archivists who have been trained as historians, archivists in agencies realize that they have a primary responsibility to the preservation and research needs of the institutions that employ them. Also, as mentioned

in the section above, archival reference services in the Soviet Union are geared primarily toward institutional needs rather than to the support of scholarly research. Historians are often painfully aware of potentially useful sources of documentation that agencies and agency archivists have denied them.⁹

One particularly striking example was cited recently in a new journal, *Glasnost*, published in Moscow in July 1987 and translated and republished in New York. In one article, Dmitri G. Yurasov describes the systematic burning of the case files of Soviet citizens who were "falsely charged, sentenced, and for the most part, [who] died in the 1930-50's." According to Yurasov, a large set of these files was stored in the Joint Special Archives of the Military Council and the USSR Supreme Court. Regulations require the transfer of these files from the Joint Archives to the Central State Archive of the October Revolution for permanent retention. Instead, new officials at the court recently decided upon an emergency "cleaning." The result is the "archivists" have been burning up to fifteen hundred files per day (the quota is one thousand files per archivist per month). The article concludes with a moving appeal to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev by Sergei Grigoryants to stop the destruction of these and other similar records which document "the last crumbs of memory of millions of our fathers and grandfathers who were tortured and who died in innocence. Historians were virtually never given access to all of these records . . . and many of the cases have remained unstudied and even unread." Unless this destruction is not prevented, laments Grigoryants, "there is no hope we will avoid another age of Stalinism."¹⁰

Glasnost and Perestroika in the Archives. This subject is worthy of a book.

Reduced to a few brief comments, we can report that the reforms now underway throughout the Soviet Union are already affecting Soviet archives, and the potential effects could be enormous.

One new set of regulations permits staff members of many organizations to elect their chief administrators. For example, the director of the Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, M. P. Lukichov, was recently elected to his position by his colleagues. At VNIIDAD, we were unable to fill out our organizational chart with current division heads because the institute was in the process of preparing for elections. The continuation of this practice of elective administrators may well accelerate the professionalization described above.

Other new regulations increase reliance on "self-pay" programs of financing many state agencies. Many research institutes which have operated on direct appropriations are now being compelled to seek new ways of supporting themselves. They raise funds by contracting for research work or by providing services for which other agencies or enterprises are willing to pay. The "self-pay" system may have an adverse impact on VNIIDAD if the institute is unable to secure support for some of its long-term research projects. This new system also affects MGIAI because, in addition to teaching, the institute can contract for research services. In fact, several contractual projects already have begun at MGIAI.

Most dramatically, *glasnost* and *perestroika* may result in easier research access to archival records. General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in his recent book, *Perestroika*, has written: "The most important thing for us in the past history is that through comprehension of it we come to perceive the origins of perestroika. Our history shaped

⁹See, for example, Vladimir Torchilin, "History Lessons for One and All," *Moscow News*, 27 March 1988, 2; Dmitry Kazutin, "Soviet Historical Science on Trial," *Moscow News*, 17 April 1988, 2; Gennady Zhavoronkov, "He Was Truth Itself," *Moscow News*, 17 April 1988, 16; and Yuri Afanasyev, "It is Absurd to be Afraid of Ourselves," *Moscow News*, 17 September 1987, 10.

¹⁰Dmitri G. Yurasov, "The Destruction of the Last Court Archives from the 1930-50's," *Glasnost* 2 (July 1987): 3-4.



M. P. Lukichov, director of the Central State Archive of Ancient Acts in Moscow; Ludmilla Selivanova, translator, from the foreign office of Glavarkhiv; and Fran Blouin in the stacks of the Central State Archive of Ancient Acts.

up under a strong influence of attendant factors. But it is our history, and the sources of perestroika lie in it."¹¹ A special commission has been established to inquire into the question of restricted records and to begin a review of previously closed sources which may now be opened. Not coincidentally, the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute has become one of the Soviet Union's most visible stages for showcasing *glasnost*. There, in a regular seminar series, historians are openly discussing areas of Soviet history that were previously not permitted to be discussed or that received only limited or superficial treatment.

The intellectual leaders of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union recognize the need to examine the past with a more open and analytical eye. They say that only an accurate understanding of the past can provide a secure base for building the future. If the Soviet people are to gain this understanding, records documenting the past must be open

to scholarly and even public analysis. Public interest in a better understanding of the past is now very strong, especially among young people. One reflection of this excitement is the number of applicants for the 1987 entering class at MGIAI, which reportedly had a higher ratio of applicants to available openings than any other educational institution in the Russian Federation.

In our visits to Soviet archives, our hosts on several occasions noted increased efforts to make their holdings more accessible, especially through publications and exhibits. We also sensed in our discussions a willingness to consider more seriously research inquiries which would not have been accepted in the past. The conduct of the exchanges under the Soviet-American Commission on Archival Cooperation provides another example of greater openness to new ideas and new viewpoints in the Soviet archival establishment.

The disagreement over how to deal with

¹¹Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 43.

the past and the records that document past events is a serious issue for Soviet archivists and historians. In a recent series of articles in the *Nation*, Dev Murarka reviewed conflicting Soviet positions on this issue.¹² In Murarka's view, the principal protagonists are the heads of MGIAI and Glavarkhiv. Yuri Afanasyev, director of MGIAI, has pressed energetically for a more open discussion of the past and for greater access to historical records. Fyodor Mikhailovich Vaganov, director general of Glavarkhiv, has argued publicly that Afanasyev has gone too far in opening old wounds that would better be left closed. The tensions and conflict reflected by their differences of opinion illustrate the fundamental importance of archives and history in current policy deliberations. An open reassessment of the past that helps to shape future policies is bound to have a profound effect upon all areas of Soviet society, including the institutions that house the historical records upon which these arguments depend.

Conclusion

The Soviet Union has a mature and sub-

stantial archival establishment. Soviet archives differ from American archives in ways that reflect many of the differences between our social and governmental systems. Yet despite these differences, there are numerous areas where the work and interests of the two archival communities are very similar. VNIIDAD is an enviable achievement by Soviet archivists, providing them with a major research center for examining systematically the problems confronting their archives.

Because many of their problems are similar to those confronting U.S. archivists, we can learn from the Soviets the benefits of a research center as a mechanism for addressing archival concerns at the national level. Greater cooperation between the archival communities of the United States and the Soviet Union can also lead to improved information sharing about both archival procedures and archival holdings. Such cooperation can not only help strengthen the archival programs of each nation, it can also provide new opportunities for both nations to see more clearly the commonality of our interests and to narrow the range of our differences.

¹²Dev Murarka, "Soviet History I: Recovering the Buried Stalin Years," and "Soviet History II: A New Revolution in Consciousness," *The Nation*, 24 and 31 October 1987, 447-51 and 486-90.