

International Scene

NANCY BARTLETT and MARJORIE BARRITT, editors

Evolving Appraisal and Accessioning Policies of Soviet Archives

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Abstract: The authors visited the Soviet Union in October 1989 in accordance with an agreement between the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers and the Commission on Soviet-American Archival Cooperation of the American Council of Learned Societies. They discuss the appraisal and accessioning practices of Soviet archives, focusing on the roles of various institutions, including the Main Archival Administration, All-Union Scientific Research Institute, expert appraisal commissions, state archives, and agency archives. The authors also describe new directions in the appraisal area resulting in part from *glasnost* and *perestroika*, including changes in the definition of historical value, greater variety in the sources for archives, concerns about new types of audiovisual and electronic records, and efforts to reduce the bulk of records.

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The authors wish to express their appreciation to those who made their visit possible and productive: to the International Research and Exchanges Board, especially Wesley Fisher; to the Committee on Soviet-American Archival Cooperation, especially Don W. Wilson and the late Robert Brookhart; and to the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers, to L. E. Selivanova, N. Mitrofanov, A. V. Elpat'evskii, and the dozens of Soviet archivists who taught them about the Soviet system and patiently answered questions.

ANY DISCUSSION OF MODERN appraisal and accessioning policies in USSR state archives naturally begins with Lenin. That same revolutionary who refused to let his gunners destroy the Winter Palace in 1917 also established the principle, in 1918, that the records of all sectors of Soviet society were a valuable national resource that belonged to all the people and were to be administered by the national (all-union) government. An updated version of the legal concept of the State Archival Fond, which began with Lenin's decree, is represented in archival regulations of the USSR Council of Ministers. The range of the State Archival Fond is comprehensive: it includes the records of "all facets of the social, socio-economic, scientific, and cultural activities of the peoples, from ancient times to the present day."¹ Soviet state archives contain not only the records of the Soviet government but also the records of Soviet literature, art, trade unions, farms, industries, churches, and so on. Lenin's decree also included a provision prohibiting unauthorized destruction of documents.² In the USSR, unlike the United States, the basic questions of ownership, authority, and control over records were seemingly resolved long ago.

We were privileged to study Soviet archival policies as part of an official exchange of U.S. archival specialists with archivists in the USSR for two weeks in October 1989. The exchange was the second in a series authorized by agreements between the Commission on Soviet-Amer-

ican Archival Cooperation of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers.³ The assigned topic as agreed upon in the second protocol negotiated in 1988—the appraisal and accessioning policies of the USSR archival system—was selected because of its significance. Fyodor Vaganov, director of the Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers (Glavarkhiv), has described appraisal and accessioning as "the most important activities of the state archival service."⁴ In visits to fourteen Soviet archival institutions in the cities of Moscow, Leningrad, and Riga, we discussed this area of archival activity with dozens of archivists.⁵ This paper summarizes the

³For background about these exchange agreements, see Frank G. Burke, "Soviet-American Archival Exchange Meeting in Moscow," *American Archivist* 50 (Spring 1987): 254-61. The first exchange agreement, signed on 19 February 1987, pertained to cooperative activities in 1987 and 1988. Under this agreement American archivists Francis X. Blouin and Edwin C. Bridges visited the Soviet Union from 18 September to 2 October 1987; Soviet archivists Yuri Grigorievich Turishchev, Valentina Andreyevna Ilyicheva, and Tamara Stafanovna Konukhova visited the United States from 27 November to 8 December 1988; and American archivist F. Gerald Ham provided lectures on archival topics in Moscow during the month of October 1988. The second agreement, signed on 18 April 1989, pertained to cooperative activities in 1989 and 1990. It was under the auspices of this second agreement that Allen and Baumann visited the Soviet Union from 1 to 14 October 1989. At this date (January 1991) the planned return visits by Soviet archivists under this agreement have not yet occurred. Other related recent visits by American archivists include the following: a delegation of four Americans (Patricia A. Eames, E. Donya Platoff, Velma Hash Rice, and Gary Mills) visited the USSR from 18 to 28 March 1990, to discuss the possible establishment of a U.S. clearinghouse to facilitate family history searches in central state archives of the USSR; and four American archivists (Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Lawrence Dowler, Kathleen Roe, and Ted Weir) visited the Soviet Union to participate in a symposium (15-18 May 1990) on "Archival Description Programs and Finding Aids in the USSR and USA."

⁴Fyodor Mikhailovich Vaganov, "Archival Affairs in the USSR," *American Archivist* 51 (Fall 1988): 483.

⁵Our discussions were facilitated by Glavarkhiv's

¹Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers, *Basic Rules for the Work of the USSR State Archives* (Moscow: Main Archival Administration, 1984): 1.

²See Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Lenin's Archival Decree of 1918: The Bolshevik Legacy for Soviet Archival Theory and Practice," *American Archivist* 45 (Fall 1982): 429-43. This article includes as an appendix an English language version of the decree titled "Decree on the Reorganization and Centralization of Archival Affairs in the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic."



Figure 1. Marie Allen and Roland Baumann in front of the Moscow building that houses Glavarkhiv, the Main Archival Administration of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, as well as three all-union level archival repositories: the Central State Archives of the October Revolution, of the National Economy, and of the Ancient Acts.

content of those discussions in the context of Soviet archival publications and other selected writings on the topic.

Our initial expectation was that the appraisal and accessioning process would be highly centralized, since this pervasive characteristic of Soviet society is apparent in descriptions of Soviet archival education and research.⁶ However, in appraisal and accessioning, unlike other archival activi-

ties, archivists in the agencies are the key players.⁷ Perhaps it is inevitable, in any massive modern bureaucracy, that the center of gravity for records disposition decisions—the level at which most of the decisions are made—would be in the agencies. The same is certainly true in the federal government of the United States. In describing the roles of various Soviet institutions in the appraisal and accessioning process, this paper compares Soviet and American practices, primarily at the national level, and notes new directions resulting from *glasnost* and *perestroika*.⁸

United States desk officer L. E. Selivanova who traveled with us and translated for us. Selivanova's knowledge of archival terms and procedures, as well as her excellent command of the English language, contributed significantly to the success of our visit.

⁶Edwin C. Bridges, "The Soviet Union's Archival Research Center: Observations of an American Visitor," and Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute and Archival Education in the USSR," *American Archivist* 51 (Fall 1988): 486-511.

⁷For the purpose of this article the term "agency" refers to any of the Soviet ministries, administrations, departments, sectors, or other governmental units.

⁸For additional information, see a series of articles by Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, including "Glasnost

The Role of the Main Archival Administration

A semi-independent unit attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the Main Archival Administration (Glavarkhiv) administers the eleven central state archives on the all-union level and provides guidelines for the work of all other Soviet state archives.⁹ There is a parallel organization in each of the union republics. In territories, regions, *oblasts* and other local levels, there are archival administrations or committees in the councils of peoples' deputies.¹⁰ For clarity, the term *Glavarkhiv* will be used in this article to refer only to the Main Archival Administration at the all-union level.

Principles of Appraisal. Glavarkhiv provides general guidance for all aspects of archival work, specifying types of finding aids, principles of arrangement, forms, reference procedures, and other guidelines. The general principles of appraisal are stated in Glavarkhiv regulations: "The examination of documents for enduring value shall be undertaken on the basis of party spirit, historicism, documentary completeness and comprehensiveness through the integrated application of criteria as to the origin, contents, and external features of the documents."¹¹ The three basic criteria are further defined as follows:

- **Origin:** (1) the importance of the institution or the person in the life of society; (2) the importance of the event

(development and subject) reflected in the documents; (3) the time and place of the documents' production.

- **Contents:** (1) the importance of documentary information; (2) its recurrence in other documents; (3) purposeful designation, type, and variety of documents.
- **External features:** (1) authenticity; (2) presence of endorsements or other remarks on the documents; (3) external appearance of documents, including artistic or other features and physical condition.¹²

American archivists use different terms for describing archival value, differentiating evidential from informational value. However, both Soviet and American archivists ask the same basic questions, summarized in the list above, about a document's age, importance, uniqueness, type, and physical condition. American archivists generally ask additional questions relating to volume (weighing importance against the size of the records unit) and informational value (legal rights information, genealogical information, historical research value, and so on). Developments in the Soviet Union now are beginning to address these additional questions, as described in this paper in the section titled "New Directions."

Glavarkhiv has established standard transfer periods for permanent records held by agencies.¹³ All-union and republic-level

in the Archives? Recent Developments on the Soviet Archival Scene," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 214-36; and "Perestroika in Soviet Archives?: Further Efforts at Archival Reform" in this issue. The authors would like to thank Grimsted for sharing the latter piece with them in draft form.

⁹For more detailed information on all-union, republic, and local archival repositories, see Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *A Handbook for Archival Research in the USSR* (Washington: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies and International Research and Exchanges Board, 1989).

¹⁰Vaganov, "Archival Affairs in the USSR," 482.

¹¹*Basic Rules*, 185.

¹²*Ibid.* 185-186.

¹³For convenience, the term *permanent records* is used in this article to refer to those records appraised as having sufficient archival value to warrant continued preservation beyond the time they are needed for their creating organization's administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes. These are sometimes also referred to as archival records, permanently valuable records, or archives. *Temporary records* refers to records identified for disposal, either immediately or after a specified retention period. Neither of these terms is meant to refer to the quality or life span of the paper or other media used in the creation of these documentary materials.

documents should be transferred to state archives fifteen years after creation; regional and district records, after ten years; personnel records, after seventy-five years; scientific-technical records, after twenty-five years; audiovisual records, after three years; and machine-readable records, after five years. Some warehouse-type records centers exist, but are used only for temporary records retained more than five years. Permanent records are usually transferred directly from agency archives to state archives. In the United States, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) regulations for the transfer of permanent records indicate thirty years for paper records, five to ten years for audiovisual or microform records, and for electronic records, "as soon as the records become inactive or the agency cannot meet the maintenance requirements [specified in these regulations]."¹⁴

Some Soviet agencies are exempt from these requirements to transfer records to central state archives. The agencies that have secured permission from the Council of Ministers of the USSR to maintain their own archival repositories include the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, the KGB, the Communist Party, the Academy of Sciences, and the Communist Youth Organization.¹⁵ Except for the Supreme Court, Congress, and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, all of the units of the U.S. government are covered by federal records statutes administered by NARA. NARA has established an "affiliate archives" status for some half a dozen non-NARA archival repositories such as those at military academies; in each of these cases, however, the records are legally accessioned by NARA.

¹⁴National Archives and Records Administration, *Federal Records Management Laws and Regulations* (Washington: NARA, 1991) II: 15.

¹⁵Many of these agencies' archival repositories are listed in Grimsted's *Handbook for Archival Research in the USSR*.

Finally, Glavarkhiv regulations on appraisal differ from those of the United States government in their emphasis on the early identification of permanent records. Agency archivists and state archivists are required to keep registers of "exceptionally valuable files" and produce microfilm copies of these records for an "insurance fond."¹⁶ In addition: "For exceptionally valuable documents discovered, abstracted lists shall be compiled, discussed by an expert [appraisal] commission, or by the methodological commission of the archive, and approved by the administration of the archive. After the approval of the lists, the exceptionally valuable documents shall be registered."¹⁷ By contrast, United States agencies place less emphasis on the identification of permanent records, including the small percentage of documents with intrinsic value, than on the early identification and disposal of temporary categories of records. This emphasis is partly an outgrowth of the economic imperatives in the paperwork explosion era, when the elimination of unnecessary storage and maintenance costs for temporary records has become tremendously important. It also results from the fact that agencies must secure authority from NARA for all disposal of federal records, either from authority provided in general schedules and agency schedules or through special requests. Unless they relate to a category of records reserved for review by Glavarkhiv, Soviet records disposal requests are routinely approved at the agency archives and agency expert commission levels.

Expert Appraisal Commissions. One of the most interesting Soviet innovations in the appraisal and accessioning process is the creation and use of the "expert appraisal commission." Commissions con-

¹⁶*Basic Rules*, 85-87.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 191.

sisting of archivists, records managers, and representative agency officials exist at every level of Soviet government to provide oversight in appraisal and accessioning matters.¹⁸ The Central Expert Appraisal Commission at Glavarkhiv, which provides oversight for the entire system, includes more than forty members, among whom are Glavarkhiv department heads and representatives from the archival education and research organizations. The commission gathers once or twice a year in full plenary session to consider major issues and problems; its executive committee provides administrative support and meets on a more frequent basis.

We attended a meeting of the Expert Appraisal Commission of the Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR on 5 October 1989 (see Figure 2). The first topic of the meeting was the review of an accession inventory submitted by an archivist from the Ministry of Oil, Gas, and Light Industry (Item #1). The records were those of an agency within the ministry eliminated in recent government restructuring. Present were representatives from the receiving archival repository, the ministry, and the appraisal department of Glavarkhiv—all of whom commented that the inventory was accurate and acceptable, with several minor exceptions. One person noted that a key publication of the agency relating to the records had been left out. Another pointed out the omission of orders and instructions from one of the agency's departments. The ministry archivist agreed to include the publication but stated that the orders and instructions were included in a separate department's records. Several attendees expressed concern about the restructuring occurring as a result of

perestroika, and the possibility that records might be lost as new units were created and old units were reorganized or eliminated.

The commission next considered and approved, with relatively little comment, inventories submitted by the Ministry of Equipment or Small Machinery (Item #3) and the Ministry of Coal Production (Item #4). Another inventory, submitted by the Department of Labor and Wages (Item #5), sparked a discussion on whether working papers should be included as permanent records. The discussion was heated, requiring the commission chairman to call for order several times. The final decision was to include the working papers as proposed in the inventory. The entire meeting lasted several hours, was attended by approximately twenty persons, and included the review of almost a dozen agency inventories.

The expert appraisal commission provides a useful forum for the involvement of government officials, archivists, records managers, and other knowledgeable parties in records disposition decisions. Experts from related fields may also be invited to participate. The commissions review the quality of the appraisal inventory as well as noting possible gaps in the documentary record or areas of overlap with other agencies. The commission method has its problems also; one is that commission members may advocate the self-interests of their agencies rather than good records procedures. Archivists in one republic told us that their agency's expert appraisal commissions paid little attention to the historical importance of records, focusing only on leaving as few records as possible in the agency to administer.

The All-Union Scientific-Research Institute for Documentation and Archival Affairs (VNIIDAD). Within Glavarkhiv, VNIIDAD is another significant unit in the appraisal and accessioning process. The divisions and functions of VNIIDAD were

¹⁸For an additional discussion of expert appraisal commissions, see Bridges, "The Soviet Union's Archival Research Center," 493-94.

ПОВЕСТКА ДНЯ ЭПК ЦГАНХ СССР (05.10.89)

1. Миннефтехимпром

Опись №11 за 1986 г. в количестве 999 дел.

2. Минхимпром

Опись №3 (дополнительная) за 1972-1977 годы
в количестве 119 дел.

3. Минприбор

Опись №3 за 1984 г. в количестве 1060 дел.

4. Минуглепром

Опись за 1982 г. в количестве 648 дел.

5. Главный вычислительный центр Минфина СССР

Номенклатура дел на 1990 год.

6. Архивохранилище ЦГАНХ СССР

- Акт №7870 о выделении к уничтожению документов Главного управления электростанций за 1949-1955 гг. в количестве 13 дел.
- Акт №8826 о выделении к уничтожению документов управления "Главнефть" за 1946-1953 гг. в количестве 1 дела 18 листов.
- Акт о выделении к уничтожению документов Главного управления домостроения за 1949-1953 гг. в количестве 780 листов.

Figure 2. The Expert Control Commission's agenda for the day of 5 October 1989 covers various file numbers appearing on records schedules/inventories of five Soviet ministries in the economic sector (items 1-5). Under #6, Central State Archives of the Economy, are listed acts and laws on the disposition and selection of file units or documents for Electric Power Stations, Oil Industries, and Housing Construction. The meeting was chaired by Dr. V. Kuzmim of the Archives of the National Economy, Main Archival Administration (Glavarkhiv), USSR Council of Ministers.

reported in a separate article in the *American Archivist* by Edwin C. Bridges.¹⁹ The institute plays a major role in the records management activities of Glavarkhiv, particularly with the design and control of forms for all-union government bodies. VNIIDAD also produces lists of standard categories of records and recommended retention periods.²⁰ Unlike general sched-

ules at the equivalent level of government in the United States, which primarily list disposable categories of records, the Soviet schedules list general categories of both temporary and permanent records. Sample categories include common types of records such as regulations, orders, acts, and correspondence, with standard recom-

¹⁹Bridges, "The Soviet Union's Archival Research Center," 486-500.

²⁰VNIIDAD Director A. I. Chugunov translated the

title of one of his primary publications for us as follows: "Schedule of Typical Records Which are Created in the Activities of State Committees, Ministries, Departments, and Other Institutions."

Supplement 138a
articles 3.6; 3.18. continued

- 294 -

Serial No.	Acquisition date	Name of institution /name of person/ that deposited their records	Name, No. and date of document that recorded the acquisition	Name of fund	Years of document	Number of storage units or unclassified documents	Brief state characterization	No. of fund signed to accession record list of State	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>Total accessioned documents for _____ /year/ _____ storage units (documents) /in figures and words/.</p> <p>The form of a registration book for the acquisition of documents.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Form 43/197 x 450</p>									

Figure 3. This form for the “acquisition” or accessioning of documents is one of the appendices in the English-language version of the Soviet archival rules and regulations, *Basic Rules for the Work of the USSR State Archives* (Moscow: Main Archival Administration, 1984), 294.

mended retention periods. VNIIDAD Director A. I. Chugunov described these general schedules as obligatory for all Soviet records.

The Role of State Archives Repositories

Whether at the all-union, republic, or local levels, each of the 3,273 Soviet state archives has certain common functions in appraisal and accessioning.²¹ These include periodic inspections of institutional archives, reimbursable assistance with arrangement and description, and assignment of records to appropriate repositories.

According to regulations, comprehensive inspections of agency archives should occur approximately once every five years, with control checks following about a year after a comprehensive inspection. The inspections are organized in accordance with

a plan approved by the pertinent archival administration and the director of a state archives, and are designed to verify:

- (1) compliance with Council of Ministers’ decisions relating to archival matters;
- (2) compliance with archival regulations;
- (3) performance of the archives with regard to planning and reporting work, including the preservation, arrangement, and timely transfer of documents to appropriate state archives, and training programs for employees;
- (4) performance of the archives with regard to storage conditions, document inventorying, registration of exceptionally valuable documents, and making insurance copies of valuable documents;
- (5) performance of the archives with regard to supplementing the institutional archives through identifying related

²¹Vaganov, “Archival Affairs in the USSR,” 481.

- 317 -

Supplement 26 to
articles 3.21 and 5.2.16

/A form of a state archive/

APPROVED BY
Director of the state archive
Signature Its deciphering
00.00.00 /date/

STATEMENT No. _____
on disposal by destruction
of documents not
to be retained
00.00.00 /date/

Minutes of the Central Expert
(Expert) Commission of an
Archival Body

No. _____
00.00.00 /date/

Minutes of the Expert Examination
(Expert) Commission

No. _____
00.00.00 /date/

Selected for destruction: documents of the fond No. _____
the fond's name _____

/category of the fond/ _____
on the basis of: /reference made to normative and methodological
documents for carrying out examination _____

Se- rial Nos	Names of groups of docu- ments, boundary dates	Inventory Nos	Nos of files on in- ventory	The num- ber of files	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6
In total there are _____ /in figures and words/					
Number of files, boundary dates, and brief characteristics of documents remaining to be stored _____ /signature, its deciphering/					
Head of a department /repository/ _____					
Post of the person who conducted examination _____ /signature, its deciphering/					

Figure 4. This form for the disposal of documents is also provided in an English translation as one of the appendices in *Basic Rules*, 317.

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Figure 5. Director Natalia Volkova demonstrates Soviet records arrangement practices in the stacks of the Central State Archives of Literature and Art of the USSR. Folders are placed horizontally in archives boxes and the boxes are placed on top of each other on the shelves.

material, and the work of the expert appraisal commissions;

- (6) correct reference procedures for the use of documents in the archives; and
- (7) correct recordkeeping practices in the various departments of the institution.²²

Moscow city archivists told us that the most important documents in the identification of records for accessioning were Glavarkhiv guidelines and agency inspection reports. Inspection reports are also an important part of the appraisal and accessioning processes at NARA, although staff shortages have severely limited the number of inspections that can be done.

A Soviet state archives is required to or-

ganize a "supervisory file" for each institution from which it receives records, with information about the institution's archives, recordkeeping practices, instructions on recordkeeping procedures, inspection, or other reports.²³ An automated version of such a control system, referred to as the "Agency Profile," is being considered within NARA.

The reimbursable assistance provided by Soviet state archives is popular with agency archivists. The regulations for contractual assistance list the purposes as the following: "to assist institutional archives in their efforts to preserve, arrange and use documents, and to set up an insurance fond of copies of exceptionally valuable docu-

²²*Basic Rules*, 202-204.

²³*Ibid.*, 209-210.

ments.”²⁴ There is a separate budget line for such assistance in agency budgets, and the funds designated for this purpose cannot be used for other purposes. The size of these contractual staffs is impressive; for instance, at the Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR, one entire department, consisting of thirty-one employees, was organized solely to fulfill contracts with government agencies whose records were destined for that repository. The contracts are paid only after the appropriate expert appraisal commissions verify successful completion of work. In Latvia, we were told that only 4 percent of the republic’s agencies have archivists; the others utilize part-time reimbursable assistance to accomplish records management functions.

An additional function of state archival officials is to determine the distribution of records among repositories. Record groups (*fonds*) are divided according to chronological and subject divisions. At each level of government, records created before 1917 are generally assigned to a Central State Historical Archives or to an Archive of Literature and Art; records after 1917 are divided between a general repository (the Central State Archive of the October Revolution) and separate repositories for records relating to science, technology, economics, military affairs, and literature and art. The Main Archival Administration at each government level determines the distribution of records among its repositories, thus establishing the areas of responsibility of each repository for oversight of appraisal and accessioning.

Finally, state archives encourage good appraisal and accessioning procedures through a variety of positive measures, such as giving awards to outstanding institutions or institutional archives; holding confer-

ences, seminars, and briefings on timely topics; producing annual reports on the condition of recordkeeping in institutions; and certifying institutional archives (based on satisfactory statistical reports) on an annual basis.²⁵

The Role of Agency Archives

Archivists in the various government units of the USSR play a major role in the arrangement, description, appraisal, and accessioning of records. Soviet government is organized first by levels (all-union, republic, city or other local level) and then by hierarchical groupings (ministry, administration, department, sector, agency). Within any of these units, depending on the size of the organization, there may be both archivists and records managers. At the all-union and republic levels, agency archivists are often former *Glavarkhiv* staff members trained at the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute (MGIAI), ranking among the highest-paid of Soviet archivists. At the ministry level, the archivist is responsible for the oversight of all records in the various administrations, departments, and other subunits of the ministry. Ministry Archivist Volkova showed us the stacks, storage boxes, and sample files in her charge and described her standard procedures. She explained that records managers are responsible for identifying and transferring standard types of files, generally after two years, to their agency archives.

If records have retention periods of less than ten years they are retained in their original departments. Departmental records managers prepare authorizing “Acts of Disposal” for the destruction of records, which are reviewed by the ministry’s archivist and the expert appraisal commission. Records managers must follow procedures established by the agency ar-

²⁴*Ibid.*, 207.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 192-210.

chivist, even though they do not report administratively to the archivist.

Records with longer retention periods are transferred periodically to ministry archives. Volkova applies VNIIDAD and Glavarkhiv guidelines to ministry materials, arranging for appropriate destruction of temporary files. Permanent files are transferred to state archives after fifteen years, once the transfer list is approved by the ministry's expert appraisal commission.

The transfer document prepared by an agency archivist is called an inventory (*opisi*) and it becomes the standard finding aid for those records in the state archives. Records at state archives are retained in the group with which they are accessioned. The accession inventories for a fond are numbered in the order in which they are received by the state archives, rather than through a hierarchical arrangement, and are retained as the primary descriptive tools for the records.

The primary archival arrangement and description work in the USSR is thus accomplished at the agency level, with well-trained archivists and the use of archival contractual services assuring quality work. In the words of Vaganov, "The state descriptive registration of archival holdings is based on the principles of centralization and continuity of that registration between state and agency archives."²⁶

In the United States there is an interim level of scheduling, at the national level, between the general schedule and the accession document. These schedules describe an agency or department's recurring records, using either a functional or organizational framework. Parallel types of schedules do not seem to exist in the USSR. The Soviet accession inventory, which corresponds to a transmittal memorandum in the U.S., becomes not only a list but also

the basic unit of appraisal, accessioning, arrangement, and description in the state archives.

New Directions

Glasnost and *perestroika* have had a major impact on the practices of archivists in the USSR. In the area of access, millions of records have been opened to research for the first time.²⁷ The appraisal process has also changed in response to *glasnost* and *perestroika*. New directions in appraisal are apparent in several areas: in the impact of public opinion on the determination of what records are historical; in the effort to widen the range of documentary sources; in coping with audio-visual and machine-readable records; and in the emphasis on reducing the bulk of archival holdings.

Expanding the definition of historical records. In the past, one of the key differences between American and Soviet systems had to do with the importance of users' or citizens' viewpoints in defining what was a historical record. The anticipated research needs of scholars and the informational needs of the public play a significant role in the determination of informational value for American archivists. Until recently, the determination of what constituted historically valuable records in the USSR seemed to relate more exclusively to the government's needs and criteria. One example of changes in this area can be seen with regard to Stalin-era documents.

N. Mitrofanov, first deputy director of Glavarkhiv, described many ways in which greater openness with regard to government records and information had led to an

²⁶Vaganov, "Archival Affairs in the USSR," 482.

²⁷See Teresa M. Brinati, "Glasnost Expands in Soviet Archives," *SAA Newsletter*, January 1990: 16-17; and Marie Allen and Roland Baumann, "Interim Report on US-USSR Archival Exchange," *NAGARA Clearinghouse*, 6 (Winter 1990): 3. Ten days after their return from the Soviet Union, Allen and Baumann reported on Soviet archival developments at the SAA annual meeting in St. Louis in October 1989.

interest in restudying certain periods and leaders. We noted press accounts of Soviet citizens' organizations such as "Memorial" and "Search" and their efforts to perpetuate the memory of those who died as a result of Stalin's purges.²⁸ Many of the pertinent records—court records, concentration camp records, burial records—have apparently been destroyed. The Moscow City Party Committee reported in *Izvestia* that it had identified and examined almost 15,000 pertinent court cases but had not been able to find the burial books for mass graves.²⁹

When we asked Glavarkhiv deputy director A. V. Elpat'evskii about the purported destruction of such records, he assured us that all destruction of Stalin-era documents had stopped and that reappraisal was beginning, taking into account the demonstrated demand for information from the public. Both the deputy director and other Glavarkhiv officials insisted that any destruction of Stalin-era documents had occurred in accordance with standard disposal periods for temporary records; case files for prison camp inmates, for instance, were usually retained according to a formula that linked the retention period to the number of years of incarceration of the inmate. The demonstrated interest by the public in these materials will probably result in the lengthening of some retention periods and the

designation of many previously temporary records as permanent.

Soviets are also asserting their legal rights. Americans have a long tradition of using government records to establish the individual's rights in courts of law. In the past, Soviet citizens have not regarded state archives as their sources for such protection. With changes in the Soviet legal system, leading to more individual rights and increasing restrictions on the power of the government, Soviet appraisal principles may need to expand to assure the retention of records with potential legal use. One Soviet archivist told us of a recent instance in which a citizen had applied for copies of the property records for a parent tried and executed in Stalin-era purges. The Soviet government had previously denounced the trial and "rehabilitated" the parent's memory, and his children were attempting to use the records to regain confiscated property.

Expanding the sources for archives. Another example of changing priorities can be seen in the types of organizations and institutions whose records are targeted for transfer to state archives. Of the 340 million archival units estimated to be in the state archives now, approximately 200 million are government records. Glavarkhiv is implementing changes in its regulations to reduce the percentage of records created by state administrative organs such as ministries and departments, and increase records of industrial and commercial undertakings, socio-cultural institutions, and private individuals.³⁰ Several of the archives we vis-

²⁸Among other articles, see V. Korneyev, "What the Archives Tell Us," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 42 (February 14, 1990), which is a condensation of an article originally published in *Izvestia* on January 2, 1990; and Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Glasnost in the Archives? Recent Developments on the Soviet Archival Scene." Also see the article by N. Yermolovich on the subject of the massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest, "Katyn: Our Common Pain: An *Izvestia* Correspondent Interviews Professor Jarema Maciszewski and Academician Georgy Lukich Smirnov," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 42 (May 16, 1990), a condensation of an article originally published in *Izvestia* on April 14, 1990.

²⁹See Korneyev, "What the Archives Tell Us."

³⁰V. P. Tarasov, "The Current State of Soviet Archives," translated by George Bolotenko, *Archivaria* (Winter 1989): 186. The statistics provided in this article include the following: 200,000,000 government records; 2,300,000 technical documents; 6,500,000 photographs; 500,000 films; 400,000 audio records; and 1,000,000 donated private files. It is difficult to compare U.S.-USSR statistics because of the different units of measurement used. Soviet archivists report their holdings in terms of "units." A Soviet unit (*delo*) refers to a single document, vol-

ited already have significant and valuable collections of records of private individuals, most notably the Central State Archive of Literature and Art of the USSR in Moscow and the Leningrad State Archive of Literature and Art. The Leningrad archives reported that 250 of their 500 fonds were donated private materials, and that there was increasing competition among repositories for these materials. According to the archivists we interviewed, private collections of documentary materials are valuable not just because many contain personal creative products of artists but also because personal collections contain more frank and unedited types of documents. Glavarkhiv has issued a separate set of regulations for the selection of permanently valuable personal materials for state archives.³¹

This theme, widening the sources for Soviet documentary materials, was one that we encountered frequently. Many reform-minded archivists spoke of a desire to secure the records of dissidents; others of acquiring and retaining letters to newspapers, a primary form of Soviet political expression in this period of *glasnost*. Latvian archivists mentioned their efforts to acquire the records of nationalistic groups such as the People's Front. One of the most visible expressions of this effort is the new People's Archive at the Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute. In May 1990 several American archivists visited the People's Archive. Delegation chief Trudy H. Peterson described the comments of archives director Boris Ilizarov as follows:

ume, or file. There is no Soviet level of description and arrangement analogous to the American "series." Soviet "units," organized in accession groups described by inventories (*opisi*), are arranged within fonds (*fondy*) according to creating organizational units. The Soviet "fondy" seem to be generally analogous to American record groups.

³¹Main Archival Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers, *Methodical Recommendations for Completing of the Government Archival Fond of the USSR with Documentary Materials from Personal Archives*, undated.

Glavarkhiv has as its type of documents those of government organizations; archives generally, he thought, were usually interested in retaining documents of the highest level of institutions and the most important political and other persons. The founders of the People's Archive thought it would be possible to collect papers of individuals, because in a "totalitarian society—as this one still is" individuals are not valued. Ilizarov said he thought the USSR was the first country in the world that has a group dedicated to saving common, everyday people's documents of every class and every group. He said the Archive was trying to collect from every walk of life, from the man-in-the-street to the intelligentsia. He said the Archive also wants to collect the records of certain social organizations that otherwise would not be preserved by Glavarkhiv, and that people are already sending material.³²

Whether through separate collections such as the People's Archive, or through greater variety in the sources for state archival holdings, Soviet archives are broadening their definitions in applying the principles of enduring value.

Expanding the types of formats of records. Our exchange experience also included visits to audiovisual archives including the Central State Archive of Film, Photographic, and Phonographic Documents of the city of Moscow. Director N. S. Margolina described her repository's holdings as consisting of approximately 140,000 photographs, 60,000 phonographs, and 200 audiotapes. Although there were few audiotapes in the repository now,

³²Trudy Huskamp Peterson, "Report to IREX on Soviet-American Symposium on Archival Description Programs and Finding Aids in the USSR and USA Archival Systems," (Princeton: International Research and Exchanges Board [IREX], 1990).

large numbers were beginning to be accessioned annually from sources such as Moscow University.

We heard similar expressions of interest in audiotape and videotape in Latvia from the director of the Central State Archive of Film, Photo, and Phonographic Documents. The Latvian archives is particularly interested in acquiring audiovisual records that document the republic's history and culture, and considers this an important responsibility. The audiovisual archivists are concerned about equipment needs and about providing adequate storage conditions for the audio and videotape that they expect to accession in greater numbers in the years to come.

In common with their American colleagues, Soviet archivists also expressed concern about the issues arising out of electronic records, and the new procedures that would be necessary to cope with these records. In Glavarkhiv, leadership has been provided by the Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR. Director V. V. Tsaplin described how his institution had examined sixty-eight interagency centers for machine-readable records and produced a set of guidelines for the appraisal, preservation, arrangement, description, and reference use of electronic records. Unfortunately, these methods have not been tested. The repository has no hardware for the processing of electronic records or appropriate storage facilities.³³

Reducing the volume of records. Soviet regulations for establishing enduring value do not mention one very important

criterion used by American archivists—the quantity or bulk of records evaluated. American archivists have a long tradition of “weighing” the archival value of records against the costs of preserving and administering them, and resorting to techniques such as sampling to reduce bulk. Concern for the reduction of volume seems to be relatively new in Soviet archives; and Soviet activities in this area do not seem to include sampling or microfilming. The director of the Central State Archive of the National Economy told us that microfilming was seldom used to reduce the bulk of holdings as in the United States and that the originals of microfilmed Soviet documents were generally retained.

Much of the new Soviet activity directed at reducing the volume of holdings was described under the heading of a project labelled “optimization.” V. V. Tsaplin described optimization as a project initiated by Glavarkhiv in 1987 for the purpose of improving the quality of state archives while reducing the bulk. Glavarkhiv would like to reduce the percentage of permanently retained records to 3 or 4 percent of all records created; Tsaplin estimated that the current figure was closer to 8 percent. The reduction of holdings where appropriate is increasingly important as Soviet archives face major staff and budget cuts, ranging from 30 to 50 percent.

Optimization has been applied not only to new accessions, but also to the review and reappraisal of current holdings. The Central State Historical Archives in Leningrad, the largest of the all-union repositories, estimated that reappraisal had reduced their holdings by almost 15 percent. The review of holdings was coupled in many institutions with the review of access restrictions, and the opening of many new records for research.

Conclusion

Our exchange visit to the USSR was fascinating, though frustrating in its brevity.

³³See F. I. Dolgih and O. A. Mihajlov, “Computers in the State Archives of the USSR,” *UNESCO Journal of Information Science, Librarianship and Archives Administration* 5 (October-December 1983): 235-42. Very little has appeared in English about the Soviet guidelines for electronic records. The article cited in this footnote relates primarily to two databases being produced by VNIIDAD, one of World War II casualties, the other of records related to the architecture of Moscow and Leningrad.

Soviet policies of appraisal and accessioning are different in many ways from those in the United States, based largely on different historical assumptions concerning the purpose of archives. The differences are instructive in some respects; Soviet innovations such as expert appraisal commissions, contractual assistance staffs, registers of valuable records, and expanded agency archives could be adapted usefully in this

country. Many traditional Soviet appraisal and accessioning practices are changing as a result of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The process of change in archival matters seems to be generally positive in effect thus far, despite the economic and organizational dislocations. If these positive trends continue, Soviet and American archivists will have increasingly similar practices and concerns in the years to come.