

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

EDWARD F. ROWSE, Editor

The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Historical Units of Agencies of the First World War, by Elizabeth B. Drewry.
Bulletins of the National Archives, Number 4. (Washington, D.C. July, 1942. Pp. 31.)

The publication by the National Archives of Miss Drewry's study of the organization and activities of the historical units of government agencies during the first World War is indeed timely. Although admittedly not an exhaustive treatment of the subject, the study is sufficiently complete and revealing to make it required reading for the large number of administrative analysts and official historians currently engaged in recording the war-time experience of the federal government. Since the work of these analysts and historians is justified principally on the grounds that the record which they compile will be valuable, now and later, to administrators and others, they should, by the same token, be more than casually interested in a record of the experience of their predecessors.

Miss Drewry's study reveals clearly a number of shortcomings in the official historical activity of the first World War that deserve emphasis because of their pertinency to the problems of today.

First: the lack of co-ordination of effort. The State, War, and Navy Departments, the U. S. Shipping Board, the U. S. Fuel Administration and the several other agencies that did more than pay lip service to the historical program, each defined objectives and devised procedures without reference to the plans of the others and without benefit of a central guiding authority. This deficiency has been met in large part today by the formation of the Committee on Records of War Administration; but only in part since the committee's activity is restricted to the field of administrative history. There is a genuine need for the extension of over-all planning to all fields of historical interest as well as to the more prosaic problems of records management.

Second: failure to keep the historical programs within the limits of what reasonably could be accomplished. In the War and State Departments, particularly, the planners failed to keep their feet on the ground, and as a result accomplishments were less than they should have been.

Third: failure to define clearly and at the outset the scope and nature of the projected official histories. Whether these were to be collections of selected documents or formal narrative histories was a question unresolved in most cases until the war was over. Today in many of the historical projects, emphasis is placed on the current analysis and reporting of administrative

activity. This kind of history writing, which often takes the place of and presumably is superior to the ordinary reporting of government agencies, forestalls many of the criticisms usually levelled against "official" histories.

Fourth: failure to deal effectively with the problem of records. Although all agencies, according to Miss Drewry, recognized the importance of keeping an adequate record of their activities, there is no evidence that any agency gave thought to the problem of controlling the volume of records, and, except for the operational records accumulated by the War and Navy Departments, there was little planning for the future storage and organization of the files.

The facilities of the National Archives should solve the problem of future storage, but control of volume cannot be accomplished without energetic and intelligent action on the part of the producing agencies. Two methods of attack, not necessarily alternate, are being applied to this phase of the records problem. In some quarters the official historians are planning the establishment of selected bodies of records to contain the important, the policy making documents of permanent value. Such a program implies that the file room "files" are to be given secondary consideration and left to shift for themselves; it also raises a host of procedural difficulties concerning the mechanics of obtaining and handling the records to be placed in the special files. In other agencies efforts are being made to keep the regular files within manageable limits by prompt elimination of the routine, ephemeral and unimportant materials. The latter efforts are sponsored by the archivists and the records officers. Considerably more could be accomplished if these two groups, the official historians and the records officers, pooled their resources and experience for a joint attack on the problem.

ROBERT H. BAHMER

The Navy Department

Photographic Reproduction for Libraries, A Study of Administrative Problems, by Herman H. Fussler. (Chicago, Illinois. The University of Chicago Press, 1942. Pp. 218.)

The last decade has witnessed a rapid rise of interest in the general field of microphotography. To many individuals engaged in library, archival, and allied fields, the process of miniature photographic reproduction seemed to offer a universal solvent for their ever increasing snarl of problems. But like the alchemists of the Middle Ages, the universal solvent proved to be at least in some cases a will-o'-the-wisp. In solving certain problems it created others which were equally perplexing.

The realization of the limitations of microfilming marked the start of its true usefulness. That this goal might be more easily accomplished and to prevent a discrediting of the whole field through misdirected zeal a textbook for the librarian has been needed. Mr. Fussler has to a considerable extent sup-

plied the information needed by the non-technical user of microphotography in the library field.

Although the volume is primarily designed as an aid to librarians, it will prove useful to all those who are confronted with problems of reproduction, preservation, and security of records in the broadest sense of the terms. In the preface Mr. Fussler carefully limits the scope of his work as pertaining "to those matters which might affect library policy and to those fundamental problems which a library administrator must face when considering the use or the production of photographic reproductions." He has avoided detailed discussions of the technical problems of photography and has wisely confined most of his contribution to the results of his own experimentation in the Department of Photographic Reproduction of the University of Chicago Libraries. Thus the material presented is based on first hand information and may well serve as a guide for those engaged in similar fields.

Mr. Fussler has divided his treatment of the subject into two general sections: Part I, The Bibliographic Aspects of the Problem; and Part II, The Technical Aspects of the Problem. Part I is designed to give the reader a broad and rather general background, while Part II contains factual information and technical suggestions relevant to the arrangement, equipment, and operation of a microphotographic laboratory and library. There is also included a selected bibliography and a selected list of sources of equipment and supplies for photographic reproduction, as well as a useful index.

Throughout the volume Mr. Fussler has treated his subject with guarded enthusiasm and although he has sought to present an impartial study, it is evident that at least to his way of thinking the solution to many problems which confront the record and library administrator may be found in microphotography. The volume is a distinct contribution and will be more than useful in directing the administrator along sound paths of better service.

HUGH M. FLICK

Washington, D.C.

Notes on Preservation of Records, issued by the Imperial Record Department, New Delhi, 1941. (Simla. Government of India Press, 1941.)

This publication consists of a series of four articles concerned with the subject of restoring and fumigating records and papers and has been prepared by the Imperial Record Department of India for circulation among the archivists and librarians of that country for the comments and criticisms which it contains. The notes and extracts are from discussions which took place at the Baroda session of the Indian Historical Records Commission in 1941.

The first of the articles consists of extracts from the proceedings of the meeting wherein the problems of restoration and fumigation are posed without debate, and attention is called to the causes of deterioration and the fact that restoration is being done both by the use of the silking and lamination

processes. Something of the relative cost of these methods is given together with the cost of fumigation by the vacuum chamber method.

The second of the articles is a note by Dr. B. S. Baliga wherein he opposes the use of lamination and suggests a cheaper method of fumigation than that of the vacuum chamber. The arguments advanced in this note are answered in detail by Dr. S. N. Sen in the third article. The chief interest of the publication to United States readers consists of the accuracy of the questions and answers in this debate.

Dr. Baliga's objections to the lamination of documents center chiefly around the belief that the process is an extremely technical one which subjects material to physical and chemical changes the full purport of which cannot be determined by laboratory test, and that the process has not been in use long enough to see what natural results will obtain. His argument is bolstered by opinions from various individuals and agencies connected with English archives. Since this same argument is still being advanced in the United States by honest objectors it is extremely interesting to note how thoroughly and efficiently it is answered by Dr. Sen who apparently has gone further than most archivists in his study of these problems.

Of the points made by Dr. Baliga one at least is based on a misunderstanding of the chemical nature of cellulose acetate foil which he mistakenly believes to be closely related to such nitrate products as celluloid, and the others are made either in ignorance or disbelief in the conclusions reached by the full tests conducted by the U. S. Bureau of Standards. (See "Protection of Documents with Cellulose Acetate Sheeting," by B. W. Scribner, printed in 1941 as National Bureau of Standards Misc. Publication M168 and reviewed in *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, IV (1941), 200-201.) Dr. Sen is careful to point out in his rebuttal the significance of these tests which have clearly indicated the stability, legibility, and freedom from distortion found in the laminated document. He adds further evidence to the validity of this method of restoration by citing the full approval given to it by the archaeological chemist of India. Later developments in the field, including the process of removing the acid condition from old papers as used in the archives of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Georgia are too new to have entered into the discussion.

In the matter of comparative costs Dr. Sen is again able to show that Dr. Baliga's conclusions both as to the cost of lamination and fumigation by the vacuum chamber method are in error. These conclusions were based largely on the initial cost of the machinery necessary to put the processes in operation, and did not take into account the relative cheapness of materials used and the vast amount of labor and time saved with these newer methods. This taken together with the superior ends achieved in both processes seem to justify conclusively Dr. Sen's opinion that they are sound, efficient, and reliable and worthy of institution wherever possible.

The final article in the publication consists of a note by Mr. K. Sitrama Iyer on a new "sulph-arsenical insecticide" which he considers of importance in controlling the ravages of insects. This chemical as used by him is applied in solution to that part of the book "between the covers and the first leaf" and is believed by him to be both economical and effective. No comments by others on the treatment are printed. It would appear, however, that before adoption such a method should be subject to such rigid tests as have been applied to lamination to determine possible deleterious effects the solution might have upon paper thus treated. In all new procedures archivists in general should be aware of how the laboratory can aid their efforts by subjecting paper to accelerated aging tests and noting such results as changes in Alpha cellulose content, copper number, pH, and folding endurance.

The papers in this publication are of considerable interest and value and provide, within the limitations of their lack of knowledge of the newest procedures, as good a general discussion of the pros and cons of lamination and vacuum chamber fumigation as are available with the pros coming off an easy winner.

W. J. BARROW

Virginia State Library

Procedure Manual for Records Management. (Washington. United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Plant and Operations, September, 1942. Pp. 16, and 28 exhibits.)

The Communications Division of the Office of Plant and Operations in the Department of Agriculture is one of the few units of organization operating at the central departmental level, whose duties lie wholly within the field of record administration. The present manual was prepared by this division in fulfillment of the duty of the department to provide for "the orderly custody and preservation" of its records, and is meant to be used as a guide by the Communications and Records Units attached to the various bureaus and offices, in the "maintenance and control of correspondence and related records." The basic procedures described in the manual are designed "to establish a uniform system of records management operations in the Department." While it is admitted that absolute uniformity may not be feasible, it is suggested that "it is possible to effect basic uniformity in methods of operation."

In sixteen pages of text, with the aid of some twenty-eight exhibits consisting of pictures, forms, outlines, and schedules, there are clearly and simply explained the various procedures comprising a complete and well-rounded system, in which every essential need seems to have been provided for. One gets the impression of an orderly and intelligent designer striving for simplicity.

Notable among the features of this system is the classification plan, called by its inventors the "Subject-Numeric System." It comprises certain "primary subjects" arranged in alphabetical order; while subordinate to each primary

subject and arranged as nearly as possible in alphabetical order, are the "secondary subjects," to which are assigned "numerical suffixes." In like manner, the subdivision of the secondary subjects are arranged thereunder as nearly as possible in alphabetical order, and assigned numbers. The arrangement of the folders in the file drawers conforms to this plan. By way of example, if one wished to find the file on "overtime," under this system, the code would be "Personnel—12—2," the classification outline indicating "Personnel" as the primary subject, "Hours of duty" as the secondary subject, and "overtime" as the tertiary subject. A "relative index" is included so that all the secondary and tertiary subjects may be readily located.

Under this classification system, the primary subjects vary in scope, their choice as primary subjects depending upon the degree of activity of the agency with respect to the subject matter involved. Where there is a great deal of activity resulting in the accumulation of record material on many of the phases of subject matter, proper correlation might result in fourth, fifth, and sixth degrees of subordination. In such a case, the primary subject is broken down into its more specific parts, which are made into new primary subjects. Thus, logical classification is kept down to the minimum, alphabetical classification being substituted as it becomes more intensive.

Another outstanding feature of the system recommended here is the manner of arranging the material within a subject classification, called "continuity filing." It provides for the assembling in chronological order of all correspondence and papers relating to a specific transaction. These are fastened together and kept apart from the chronological subject file, but are included therein by means of "continuity reference forms."

In the opinion of the present reviewer the standards set forth in this procedure manual are so far above the prevailing standards of government record keeping, that its careful perusal is recommended to all who are confronted with problems in this field. While there may be reservations in the minds of some, with reference to certain parts of the plan and its applicability to all types of material, certainly this manual is one of the best that has yet been produced, and may be considered a mile-stone on the way to the establishment of higher standards in what has been called the "low-pressure area" of public administration.

HELEN L. CHATFIELD

U. S. Treasury Department

The Year's Work in Archives, by Irene J. Churchill, N. Dermott Hunt, and Hilary Jenkinson. (London, British Records Association, 1942. Pp. 37.)

American archivists who have been wondering about the impact of the war upon public records activities in England will find answers to many of their questions in this interesting publication. While the authors point out that

they "have been able only to give a few examples of current happenings not (as we would have liked to do) a complete summary," nevertheless they have succeeded in presenting an interesting and thought-provoking account of English experience many aspects of which are not without significance to the American archivist.

Strangely enough, the nation-wide paper salvage campaign seems to have been the starting point in England of a movement which is having widespread effect in making the general public more archives conscious. In this connection some three hundred representatives in localities scattered throughout the country have been appointed "to offer gratuitous help whenever a custodian desires advice as to what he ought or ought not to keep." For the information of the Regional Commissioners for Civilian Defense there has been published a directory of places where records of all kinds are or might be stored. Finally a pamphlet entitled "First Aid to Manuscripts," in a succession of forms, has been published by the Law Society, summarized in Church Papers, issued by the British Records Association Bulletin and circulated generally to public departments.

Public education through professional groups seems to be developing rapidly. Lawyers are being appointed to membership on committees concerned with record evaluation and members of the clergy are being put in personal touch with their local depository and its work. In this latter connection widespread public interest was created by the scheme for the microphotographing of early parish registers of which more than a thousand parishes availed themselves before the end of the spring of 1940. This undertaking has brought to light new material, such as sixteenth century paper registers, and has demonstrated "That in many Parishes the storage arrangements are or have been such as to make the survival of the Records a miracle."

The rapid development of local interest in the problem of records preservation has been greatly helped, also, by the activities of such agencies of governments as the county councils. These bodies have authorized the expenditure of public funds for the duplication of records and they have accepted responsibility for the care of thousands of historical documents such as deeds and local court rolls. Local depositories of all types, record offices, archaeological societies, libraries, and museums have also accepted the responsibility for records preservation and have taken in large quantities of church and family records.

The local advisory groups, mentioned above, have stood ready at all times to advise with government agencies, professional or business firms, and private families regarding the value of particular types of documents or groups of records. This development has placed new emphasis upon the problem of appraising both public and private records. Public records covered by the Record Office Act are appraised by inspecting officers who prepare and submit disposal schedules to Parliament. Under war-time conditions the normal pro-

cedure has been modified to permit the destruction of "useless" records before expiration of the specified retention period provided the inspecting officers have first been consulted.

The new emphasis upon the disposal of "useless" and the safe preservation of valuable records has resulted in an increased interest in records duplication by microphotography. A comprehensive scheme, planned and financed in the United States, for the microphotographing of important manuscript and other material in British collections, was started during 1941. This scheme, which is directed by the American Council of Learned Societies, sponsored by the Library of Congress, and financed by the Rockefeller Foundation, is designed (1) to develop a permanent film library of British research material in the United States and (2) to safeguard such material from the present risk of war-time destruction.

The facts thus far outlined would seem to prove that, without question, there has been a widespread development in England of public interest and concern regarding both public and private records. Our next question relates to the archival profession, as such, and the extent to which its growth has been affected by war-time conditions. In this connection the report reveals a state of affairs in 1942, as regards archival work, which is much more cheerful than most British archivists would have dared to anticipate in 1939. Many members of the profession then thought that depletion of staff and economies in expenditure, inevitable in war-time, would kill it, but although hard hit, the authors report that "we find no lack of interest in the technique of the profession, plenty of local institutions somehow managing to carry on, and even occasionally fresh posts created and fresh appointments made."

The big problem, from the professional point of view, has been providing for the safekeeping of the records. This aim is being met primarily through evacuation which has most often taken the form of dispersal, sometimes abroad and sometimes to safer storage areas in England. Because of this action there has been enormous disturbance of the pre-war location of records which are now scattered far and wide about the country. This dispersal has greatly complicated the problem of repair as well as that of archival reference service. In general, it is pointed out, repair work has been much curtailed, but, although reference service is restricted and more complicated, nevertheless every effort is being made to make records available for scholarly as well as for official use. Accession of records as previously pointed out, "persists steadily in spite of the War," but the work of arrangement and identification has necessarily suffered. In the field of publications there have been some delays but the comparatively few instances of suspension are more than counterbalanced by continued and new publication activities.

American archivists, evidently, are especially anxious to learn to what extent English archival depositories have been destroyed or damaged as the result of war-time air raids. The authors of this report point out that, for many

reasons, it is impossible to report fully upon this subject. Reference is made, however, to the evacuation of more than seven hundred tons of records from the Public Record Office, which body would seem not to have suffered particular harm. Likewise the keeper of manuscripts of the British Museum reports that its records have not suffered as a result of air raids. Other agencies such as the Institute of Historical Research, the Northern Ireland Public Record Office, the Scotland Register House, and the National Library of Wales report little or no damage to their holdings. The chief instance cited on the negative side is that of the old company records relating to the colony of Southern Rhodesia, housed in London, which were completely destroyed. Regarding this event the authors of the report state: "We have read with great, if painful, interest the official report of a Parliamentary debate on this occasion, in which all speakers recognized and deplored the gravity of the catastrophe."

In addition to the agencies above mentioned the report discusses the activities of the Historical Manuscripts Commission; public and private local record offices, libraries and museums; the Imperial Record Department of India, and, in the United States, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Harvard College Archives, the Clements Library of the University of Michigan and the Yale University Library. In the section relating to the National Archives tribute is paid to Dr. R. D. W. Connor, first archivist of the United States, retired, and a cordial welcome is extended to Dr. Solon J. Buck, Dr. Connor's successor, "who has made himself known to European Archivists in more than one visit." Finally a brief note refers to the activities of the Society of American Archivists and to the publication *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST* and states: "We heartily wish that members of our profession in the United States may gather what small profit is possible from the War, as we have done, in the shape of added experience and knowledge; and that, unlike us, they may not have to pay a heavy price for it."

DORSEY W. HYDE, JR.

The National Archives