

Archival Brinkmanship: Downsizing, Outsourcing, and the Records of Corporate America

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Abstract: Mergers, restructurings, and consolidations have always been part of American business. There has never been a time since the rise of the modern corporation when companies have not bought other companies, restructured their operations, entered new businesses, and consolidated, sold, or spun off operations. In addition to these realities, the terms downsizing and outsourcing—and all that they portend for employees—have become bywords as business—and not only business—seeks to wring more productivity from the workforce. These trends have inevitably affected corporate records. Archives and records management units have been closed and records destroyed or transferred to warehouses, while the rate of establishment and growth of in-house corporate archives has diminished greatly. If one believes that the records of business are an integral part of American history, and that the place of corporations in that history needs to be documented and accessible, then the fate of those business records and the archives themselves is a matter of some importance. This essay explores the progression of events in the past twenty years, and reviews both the expected and the unexpected results that downsizing and outsourcing have actually produced for archives.

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MERGERS, RESTRUCTURINGS, AND CONSOLIDATIONS have always been part of American business. More recently, downsizing and outsourcing have become part of the lexicon of business—words feared by employees at every level, including archivists. But even these terms describe events that have been realities for many years. There has never been a time since the rise of the corporation when companies have not bought other companies, restructured their operations, entered new businesses, and consolidated, sold, or spun off operations.

Much has been said about the process described by that odd word “outsourcing,” surely one of the more peculiar terms to emerge from current attempts to discuss and redefine corporate restructuring. In its simplest sense, outsourcing means the decision to acquire products and services from outside the corporation that might otherwise have been supplied from within, and the term has even invaded archival discussions, at least those among business archivists. No one, whether an engineer, accountant, secretary, or vice president, wants to have the job they hold eliminated by a decision to outsource the work they do. Losing a job for any reason is unpleasant, but there is undoubtedly a special pang connected to the inference that someone else can do one’s work more efficiently and at less cost.

Mergers, outsourcing, and the like have inevitably affected corporate records. Archives and records management units have been closed, records destroyed or transferred to warehouses, and opportunities to establish new archives unrealized. If one believes that the records of business are an integral part of American history, and that the role of corporations in the economy needs to be documented and accessible, then the fate of these records is a matter of some importance.

The Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis are home to the headquarters of many major corporations. The Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) is by far the largest archives operation in Minnesota, and is the only one to hold a large number of corporate archives outside the creating entity. With the Hagley Museum and Library in Delaware, it is one of the two largest repositories of corporate archives in the United States. The much-discussed Records of American Business Project—a major effort to rethink issues tied to the appraisal and use of corporate records—was led by staff at the Hagley and the Minnesota Historical Society.¹ The major ideas generated by the RAB Project are given in essays contained in the book *The Records of American Business*.²

Changes in corporate ownership and structure have created opportunities as well as problems for business history in Minnesota, and a review of what happened to the records of five corporations will illustrate the Minnesota Historical Society’s response to both. In particular, these brief case histories should clarify the route by which the records of four major corporations came to the Society, and the not-so-happy reality of a fifth case as well. The archives of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads and their more than five hundred subsidiary companies held at MHS have been written about before, and are not part of this discussion.³

¹James E. Fogerty and Mark A. Greene, “The Records of American Business: The Project and an Approach to Appraisal,” *Business Archives: Principles and Practice* 73 (May 1997): 1-19.

²James M. O’Toole, ed., *The Records of American Business* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1997).

³Dennis E. Meissner, “Corporate Records in Noncorporate Archives: A Case Study,” *Midwestern Archivist* 15 (1990): 39-50.

American Crystal Sugar Company

In 1973, considerably before the wave of 1980s buyouts, the American Crystal Sugar Company was purchased by a coalition of Minnesota and North Dakota sugar beet growers and became an agricultural cooperative. It remains the largest buyout of a stockholder-owned company by a cooperative, and is now one of the largest sugar beet processors in North America. Founded in 1899, American Crystal was headquartered in Denver and at one time or another operated plants in California, Colorado, Montana, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, and North Dakota. Originally concentrated in California and Colorado, by 1965 the company's production was centered in Minnesota and North Dakota, with 85 percent of its output coming from plants in the Red River Valley of the North.

Increasingly dissatisfied with distant and unresponsive management in Denver, Red River Valley beet farmers organized a successful drive to purchase the company from its public stockholders, in the process becoming the owners of a major agricultural business. Shortly after the purchase, the corporate headquarters moved from Denver to Moorhead, Minnesota, in the heart of the land that provides the company's revenues. That move obviously affected the company's records, as did the transition from New York Stock Exchange-listed corporation to agricultural cooperative.

In 1974, having eyed the distant American Crystal records for years, the Minnesota Historical Society began a series of discussions with company executives about the records. This began a laborious process destined to continue intermittently for seven years. Company management was unsettled—many of the Denver-based executives had either left the company or not been invited to move to Moorhead. New management, and the old that remained, were preoccupied with expanding operations and in dealing with the novelty of a board of directors composed of farmers who now owned the company. The novelty was two-sided of course, and what some executives did not know about farming was matched by some farmers' lack of understanding of the workings of a corporation. The road was rocky and lined with worries about the level of debt incurred to buy the company. Repeated discussion about the records went nowhere.

Negotiations over the records were complicated by the frequent changes in Crystal's executive suite, and the inevitable breaking-in period that followed the arrival of each new CEO. In 1981, aided by Aldrich Bloomquist, Crystal's Vice President for Public Affairs, and by William Dosland, the company's Chief Counsel and Corporate Secretary, a Society representative finally was granted the opportunity to make a detailed case for acquisition of the records of American Crystal that preceded the 1973 acquisition. By 1981, difficulties in locating corporate records needed in the business and shrinking storage space in the headquarters building had made a good many members of middle management aware of the records—or rather the lack of information about them.

In a meeting that proved to be a turning point, the corporate comptroller expressed his frustration with the difficulties in locating records in the basement storeroom and in Colorado. The latter bit of information was especially important, because company staff had held that all Crystal records had been sent from the Boston Building in Denver to the new headquarters, with some stored in leased warehouse space in Moorhead. The existence of corporate records that had for years been sent from Denver for storage at the company's plant in Rocky Ford, Colorado, was news to both the Society's staff and to some executives as well.

The Rocky Ford plant had been closed in 1971, and was used only for bulk storage of sugar while the company explored its sale and that of the more than six thousand acres

of farm and range land that surrounded it. An impending sale meant it was necessary to remove the records in storage and that cost, combined with tight storage in Moorhead, finally brought negotiations to a head. Several additional factors proved helpful, among them Al Bloomquist's great interest in sugar industry history, and the fact that the papers of William Dosland's service in the Minnesota legislature had been given to the Society for its Northwest Minnesota Historical Center. He was pleased with the transfer and with the care provided to his papers, and understood some of the work involved.

As a result, MHS staff were allowed to inventory the records in both Moorhead facilities; the resulting document and location maps provided the first comprehensive information the company had on its records. Indication of someone's earlier concern with historical records was documented when the survey uncovered a small, red leather volume entitled "Company Archives." It listed various records that had been gathered by an unnamed amateur archivist at the company's Denver offices in the 1950s.

The survey culminated in a brief meeting with the president and board chairman of American Crystal. The presentation was handled jointly by the Society's representative, Bloomquist, and Dosland; the deal was closed; and the contract was finally signed. Possession of a signed contract began a hectic four-month acquisition process that involved a survey and evaluation of all records in Moorhead and Rocky Ford. Society staff spent a week in the Colorado warehouse, appraising records and reboxing those selected for transfer to the Society and separating them carefully from the remainder. As with many such operations, the pressures of appraisal were great. There was no second chance, for records rejected for retention were scheduled for destruction the following week. The removal of historical records was accomplished by the company within a week of the survey, and the records arrived in St. Paul with the other historical records transferred from Moorhead. In all, over forty-five hundred cubic feet of records were surveyed, and about three hundred cubic feet selected for permanent retention. A guide to the collections was published after processing, and it graces the desks of many American Crystal executives today.⁴ Relations with the company remain strong, with oral history and surveys of current records a part of the regular plan of work.

Peavey Company

Founded in 1874 to market grain acquired in payment for farm equipment and hardware, Peavey Company grew to be one of the largest networks of rural grain elevators between Minnesota and the Pacific Northwest. Emblazoned across the western United States on hundreds of grain elevators, the red and white "PV" logo became one of the most visible symbols of agribusiness in that vast region. Begun by a young Maine merchant named Frank H. Peavey, the company passed through his two daughters into the hands of their families, the Heffelfingers and the Wells. A private company until its first listing on the over-the-counter market in 1969, Peavey Company had no corporate archives.

Attempting to document the Minnesota grain and food processing industries, and mindful of the company's upcoming centennial, the Minnesota Historical Society contacted Peavey in 1973 to discuss its records. The request was predictably channeled to the public relations vice president, who expressed only tepid interest and no commitment for a records survey. He professed himself sympathetic and interested, but was in fact without authority

⁴*Guide to the Records of the American Crystal Sugar Company* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1985).

to undertake the survey. Five years later the Society initiated another contact, and was again routed to public relations, this time to another vice president who was sincerely interested but also without authority and disinclined to seek it.

By 1982, merger mania had hit the normally sedate food industry, and the possible sale of a controlling interest in Peavey was widely rumored. Bidders for the company were a diverse lot but all from outside Minnesota, and the possibility that Peavey records would be moved or destroyed following an acquisition seemed likely. The attractiveness of Peavey to potential acquirers—it had just completed a mammoth export elevator at Kalama, Washington—and the growing indication that members of the founding families wanted to diversify their investments meant that time was short.

This time the Society's contact with the company went through different channels, in part due to a decision to begin with oral history. That change in tactics resulted from the desire to acquire *something* documenting the company's development, and by the cold reality of previous failure to gain access through direct requests. A decision was made to interview Frank T. Heffelfinger II, the family's senior member in management and the company's vice president for administration. Although initially cool to the idea, he agreed to be interviewed and, as preparation, arranged for the interviewer to inventory company records stored in the Peavey Building in Minneapolis. Of related family interest was a recent MHS interview with Elizabeth Bradley Heffelfinger, a political power in Minnesota and wife of a former company chairman. Her papers had been given to the Society as part of her interview process.

The inventory uncovered a remarkable cache of records, including those of country elevators, subsidiaries in food processing and farm supply, and Frank H. Peavey's correspondence and account books. The first acquisition for the Society, however, was unanticipated—a handsome oil portrait of Frank Peavey painted by August Fournier. The Society's art curator was pleased, but the records remained locked in storage. A small group of photographs and account books were transferred to the Society as part of research for the oral history project. A contract covering the company's records was drawn up and submitted, but it remained unsigned.

In 1984, the oral history sessions were completed, adding valuable information on company operations and family history. Frank Heffelfinger's interest in the company's history was intensified by his involvement in negotiating the sale of the company to ConAgra, Inc., a major agribusiness based in Omaha. The impending sale of Peavey, and with it the threat of greatly reduced operations in Minneapolis that would vacate much of the company's space in the Peavey Building, fueled concern over the fate of the records. The oral history interview concluded as the sale became final, providing an opportunity to detail the negotiations as they unfolded. The records contract, however, remained mired in confusion over who was empowered to sign it, and by the disinterest of Frederic Corrigan, Peavey's chairman. Corrigan's lack of interest, though tempered by Frank Heffelfinger's support, and his refusal to consider transfer of his own papers as part of any contract, further delayed the proceedings.

When the sale became final, corporate staff was reduced rapidly and space was vacated floor-by-floor. By mid-1985, the contract had finally advanced to the office of Peavey's corporate counsel, aided by the continuing support of a now officially retired Frank Heffelfinger, who had retained an office on the executive floor. MHS staff continued to prod gently but carefully to avoid antagonizing people burdened with the task of consolidating Peavey and ConAgra operations and concerned with their own futures within the company. After another agonizing wait, the contract was suddenly returned with Pea-

vey signatures in May 1986. Peavey had remained a semi-autonomous ConAgra subsidiary, and the contract bore the signatures of Peavey officials in Minneapolis. There was, and remains, no indication of ConAgra interest in the transaction. Records noted for permanent disposition on the inventory (but not all of them) were transferred to the Society in July, and the transaction appeared complete. Society staff were concerned for the remaining records, but no further transfers were made.

A few years later, the missing records were mentioned during the course of a conversation with Rosalie Heffelfinger Hall, daughter of Elizabeth Heffelfinger and a member of the Society's Executive Council. Through a family member still employed by Peavey, she initiated contact and found that the records in question were still held at the company. For whatever reasons, the company's storage space had not been vacated as had the office space, and all of the remaining records (with the exception of Corrigan's), were sent to the Society in 1989. They were followed shortly thereafter by Frank Peavey's diaries, a gift of Rosalie Hall's brother. The diaries are excellent, adding a personal dimension to the corporate archives. The Peavey archives are largely complete to the time of the merger, and Peavey Company is very different today as a ConAgra subsidiary. As a footnote, a subsequent Society exhibition of Minnesota portraits included the Fournier painting of Frank Peavey.

Northwest Airlines / Republic Airlines

Acquisition of the archives of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads and their hundreds of subsidiary companies made transportation a major focus of the MHS corporate collections. The fact that the Twin Cities was also home to major national and regional airlines made extension of that focus a natural undertaking. Northwest Airlines had become a large national carrier with a particularly strong presence in the trans-Pacific market. Until 1981, it was, in fact, known as Northwest Orient Airlines.

Former Minnesota Historical Society director Russell Fridley was instrumental in initiating contact with Northwest in 1981. The original point of contact was the vice president for public relations, who had custody of a large set of corporate records used in preparation of a company history. Society staff inventoried these records and others late that year, discovering in the process that the company's recordkeeping had been erratic over the years. A major factor appeared to have been the exceedingly cost-conscious management by a Northwest CEO famed for his attention to balance sheet detail. He had departed Northwest in 1980 after more than twenty-five years, and stories of his concern with expense control were freely recounted. Though told separately, many stories revolved around his occasional descent upon departments requesting additional filing cabinets, and the on-the-spot application of his own particular sense of records retention and disposition. Drawers full of noncurrent records would be removed, and the need for new filing cabinets thus disproved.

Despite these periodic depredations, much remained, and the MHS inventory team located files detailing the growth and development of Northwest's national route system, its Asian markets, and the conservative fiscal management that made it one of the most consistently profitable carriers in the country. There was some difficulty in negotiating the contract given the competitive nature of the airline industry and the issue of control of the records, but no serious problems developed and the contract was signed in 1982. In fact, the company's ingrained frugality made formation of its own archives all but impossible, and the prospect of ready access to records it would not have to store itself made the

Society an attractive partner for Northwest. Several transfers of records followed over the succeeding years, and the Northwest archives grew steadily.

Linked to the acquisition of Northwest's records—though the linkage was unforeseen—are the records of Republic Airlines. Begun as an inter-company air transport for the Four-Wheel Drive Company, it became Wisconsin Central Airlines and later North Central Airlines in the 1960s as its routes expanded. During the 1970s, North Central Airlines became the largest regional carrier in the nation. It finally gained national status with the acquisition of Southern Airways and Hughes Airwest, themselves the products of regional mergers, and became Republic Airlines in the process.

MHS staff initiated contact with Republic in 1982, shortly after the contract with Northwest was signed. The first contact was channeled to the Republic museum, one of only two in the industry at that time. The museum director, a member of the public relations department, presided over a fine collection of uniforms, plane models, maps, directories, schedules, scrapbooks, and other memorabilia, most of it from North Central and its predecessors. She was interested in advice on the storage and display of artifacts, and such advice was provided. Republic's records were discussed without resolution; it was clear that the museum director regarded the Society's overture with mild alarm, believing that the removal of anything relating to company history might jeopardize her work and perhaps her position. In fact, the museum held no corporate records beyond the scrapbooks, and the director did not wish to accept any.

The company museum having proven a dead end, intermittent contact continued during 1982 and 1983, conducted with care to avoid the appearance of conflict with the museum program. During that period, the company passed through a wrenching series of financial crises brought about by the stress of consolidating rapid growth, and was brought to the brink of bankruptcy in 1983. Stephen Wolf was brought in as CEO to save the company, and, aided by layoffs, wage reductions, and spectacular passenger growth, the company survived. But not without cost. The museum was closed, and its director became a part-time employee with duties confined to public relations.

Sensing that the corporate restructuring in progress would make the retention of noncurrent records unattractive, the Society renewed formal contact with the company in early 1984. Again the proposed contract was sent from the CEO's office to another department, in this case the corporate purchasing department which happened to have control of the records. An inventory was proposed and took place in mid-1984. It uncovered a wealth of material. A proposal to acquire the permanent records among those inventoried was submitted but went unacknowledged. Repeated inquiries about the fate of the records were greeted with indifference, and it appeared that the proposal had been buried.

In early 1985, the company suddenly contacted the Society with the news that a large group of marketing and merger records were ready to be inventoried. They included film, video, and audio tape documenting the marketing efforts of Republic, North Central, Southern, Hughes Airwest, Bonanza Airlines, Pacific Air Lines, and Southwest Airways. A new contract was prepared, the company offered to transfer the records, and preparations were made to pack and move them to MHS. The contract remained unsigned, however, despite the active interest of several key company employees. Suddenly, in September, the company withdrew its offer to transfer the records and returned the unsigned contract without comment. The reasons for this sudden reversal of policy remain unclear, but the game appeared to be over. Both Society staff and the Republic employees with whom they had been working were dismayed, but the reversal seemed absolute.

The following year brought further layoffs and restructuring, with rumors of records destroyed or simply lost in the shuffle. The layoffs cost MHS several friends within the company, and those who remained were powerless to reopen negotiations.

The end of this drama came suddenly in July 1987 when Republic was purchased by Northwest and merged into its giant neighbor. Realizing that Northwest's desire to cut costs, merge operations, and convert the Republic corporate headquarters to its own uses would endanger Republic's records, MHS staff contacted William Wren, Northwest's Vice President for Communications and the Society's designated contact at the company. The purchase had given Northwest control of all Republic assets, and the records could now be acquired under Northwest's contract with the Society.

Wren authorized the transfer of the Republic records to MHS within a week of contact. The records were found to be relatively untouched by the chaos at Republic; the nearly immediate conversion of the Republic headquarters building to a Northwest operations center made clear just how close they had come to destruction. With their arrival, the Society gained a major addition to its corporate holdings and transportation archives, and coincidentally documented the continuing growth of a company whose records it already held.

Pillsbury Company

The final component of this Minnesota sampler is The Pillsbury Company. One of Minnesota's oldest corporations, and one of the largest in the food processing industry, Pillsbury had no corporate archives until the 1980s. At that time, with its centennial at hand, the company contracted for a corporate history and began collecting records for use by the author. MHS was asked for advice on the formation of a company archives (the Society had assisted in the formation of an archives at General Mills) and recommended that the company form an archives and hire a professional archivist. This was done in 1986 and the historical collection was cataloged. While the archivist was eventually assigned other duties as well, Pillsbury's records were in good hands.

In 1988, Pillsbury became enmeshed in a furious takeover battle that pitted company management, employees, and the Twin Cities community against Grand Metropolitan PLC, a British food and liquor conglomerate. Grand Met won the engagement, and Pillsbury became the flagship of its U.S. operations. Restructuring inevitably followed, and 550 Pillsbury headquarters employees were eliminated within six months of the acquisition. Among them was the corporate archivist, and with his departure the archives slipped into limbo.

Concerned that limbo might lead to destruction in the name of efficiency, the MHS acquisitions staff, left without contacts in the new corporate structure, turned to Society director Nina Archabal for assistance. She contacted a member of the Pillsbury family who served on the Society's Executive Council, and he in turn wrote to the new British CEO of Pillsbury/Grand Met. That contact resulted in the opportunity for staff to visit the company, view the archival records, and obtain a copy of the major inventory. A proposal to acquire Pillsbury's archival records was submitted, and remains in force. The company is officially reluctant to decide the fate of the records, and has offered assurance that MHS will receive them should the company decide to dispose of them. To date, nothing has been resolved; the records remain in limbo and corporate restructuring continues apace. Aside from periodic contact with Pillsbury employees close to the records, little can be done in the face of indifference at the executive level.

This story does not yet have a happy ending. For the record, the Society would much prefer to see the archivist rehired and a new archives created for Grand Metropolitan Foods USA. There is no sign that this or any other option is being considered. News of the merger of Grand Met and Guinness into the oddly-named Diageo PLC⁵ has the potential to bury the Pillsbury Company's records and history under yet another level of corporate indifference.

General Mills, H.B. Fuller, Control Data

For the record, it is important to note that staff of the Minnesota Historical Society have been involved in the formation and support of corporate archives at companies such as General Mills, Inc., H. B. Fuller Company, and Control Data Corporation, and at Pillsbury, as noted above. In addition, Society staff have provided advice and counsel to scores of companies in Minnesota regarding options in dealing with business records.

The General Mills and H.B. Fuller corporate archives remain active examples of how very well corporate archives can serve corporate goals. Both are staffed by professionals with long experience and the ability to successfully negotiate the survival and growth of their operations in a corporate setting. Control Data Corporation closed its archives during a long period of insolvency and restructuring, and transferred a portion of its records to the Charles Babbage Institute at the University of Minnesota.

In retrospect, the Society's investment in working with Control Data and Pillsbury was successful. The eventual failure of archives in those companies was brought about by factors far beyond the control of any archives—factors that affected operations and employees throughout those corporations—and cooperation with archives at General Mills and H. B. Fuller continues. In recent years Society staff have, for instance, routed materials from the founding families of General Mills to that company's archives, even when the materials have come from members of the Society's own board of directors.

Outsourcing Corporate Archives: Conclusions from Living in the Real World

The reality of outsourcing has become a minor but not unimportant concern for archivists, especially in the wake of the celebrated closing of the J. Walter Thompson archives and its transfer to Duke University.⁶ Other developments have fed that concern, most notably the growth in consulting on archival operations provided to corporations by such firms as the Winthrop Group and the History Factory. Even the operations of such longtime business archives repositories as the Hagley Museum and Library and the Minnesota Historical Society have come under criticism from some business archivists, though they have done little more than pursue the same courses of action that they have followed for decades. In the current climate of concern, however, such major contracts as the Hagley's with Seagram and the Society's with 3M, have been seen by some business archivists as threats in the guise of outsourcing.

If the formation of archives within business is not easy, the transfer of corporate records outside the business is no less challenging. Though affiliation with a major corporation may have its glamorous aspects (and it does), the work involved is real and hard,

⁵Ernest Beck, "Liquor Giants Brew New Name in Greek, Latin," *The Wall Street Journal* (30 October 1997): B1.

⁶See Ellen G. Gartrell's essay in this issue of the *American Archivist*.

and the relationship is one that both sides must take seriously for it to prove successful. The examples of corporate records acquisitions at the Minnesota Historical Society offer an overview of major issues encountered in the process. The issues affect both companies and the archives, and include the following:

1. *Control.* Corporations and cooperatives may be publicly owned, more or less, but they are private enterprises with no legal or moral obligation to make their records available to the public. Transfer of physical custody, and thus of control, over the records to an outside entity often presents corporate executives with uncertainty. How will the company retain a measure of control when the records are stored elsewhere and will, in the long run, be owned by another organization? Control issues (many of which will center on the related issue of access) can be resolved in the contract covering transfer of the records.

2. *Access.* Chief among concerns over control is the question of access to the records. Most corporations wish to retain some control over access to their records for a stipulated period of time. The standard MHS corporate contract restricts access to those records created within the past twenty-five years. Older records are open to research without special permission; records covered by the twenty-five-year restriction are open only with the written permission of the company. To facilitate recurring access for corporate use of the records, the company is urged to name from one to three people who are granted unrestricted use of the records without prior permission. Most corporations avail themselves of this option; they may change the name of those granted such access whenever they wish. That element of access control satisfies both parties, providing a reasonable level of restriction for the company while ensuring eventual open use and ownership by the Society.

3. *Space.* Corporate archives are seldom small, although the size of the company and the complexity of its operations determines the amount of permanent records it will have. Corporate archives at the Minnesota Historical Society range in size from the nearly fifteen thousand cubic feet of records in the archives of Burlington Northern's Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads to the half-cubic foot of records for the Breen Stone and Marble Company. Size alone, of course, does not determine value, and the records of small businesses can be as important as those of multinational corporations. The latter have the glamour, of course, but at MHS we try to keep in perspective the relative merits of national and multinational companies such as the railroads, American Crystal Sugar, Peavey, Northwest Airlines, 3M, and the many smaller entities we hold as well. They are all important, documenting different aspects of business in Minnesota and across the nation.

The space commitment that corporate records demand is major, and one must balance it with the fact that use may be limited for some time by restrictions, and that, even when open, much of the use such archives generate may come from outside the state and from within the company itself. One is indeed serving as the company's archives. Within the past two years, for instance, the Society's Weyerhaeuser Reference Room was home for a brief period of time to a marketing team from Northwest Airlines' Tokyo office as they put together an Asian campaign celebrating fifty years of trans-Pacific passenger service. The reference room is frequently home to corporate lawyers and to researchers from other states in which the companies whose archives we hold have operations. The records of American Crystal, for instance, have probably been used more frequently by researchers from Kansas, Nebraska, and California than they have by Minnesotans.

4. *Appraisal.* Control, access, and space all affect appraisal, and are in turn affected by its application. The question of what to keep and what to destroy is one that has bedeviled corporate archivists for years, and the mountains of paper and electronic records now generated by even a mid-sized business exacerbate the problem. Various approaches to the issue of appraisal have been raised in recent years but have proven unworkable in the real world. The most recent approach to gain notoriety is the "Minnesota Method."⁷ Proposed as part of the Records of American Business Project, it takes a hard line on issues regarding which records to save and even which companies to document. Its conclusions have already generated international debate, as noted in a number of published essays.⁸ The debate is certain to continue, fueled by the reality that sheer volume makes appraisal critical. Indiscriminate acquisition or rejection is clearly not acceptable.

Commitment and the Payoff

Keeping corporate archives—in particular the ongoing records as opposed to a static collection of corporate history—demands commitment of a special sort. The public is not your only client; the company is as well. If you have no commitment to the company, the collection will quickly become static and the relationship will not prosper. Commitment of this sort does not always come easily to archives in public institutions, but it is crucial. It is also rewarding, as company personnel come to value the services a well-organized archives can provide to current operations. And the payoff to both organizations can be rewarding as well. A spectacular testament to the value of such relationships at the Minnesota Historical Society came during Northwest Airlines' worldwide celebration of its storied half-century of service across the Pacific. It chose the Minnesota History Center—the Society's new \$80 million headquarters and home to its many corporate archives—as the site for a glittering international party in celebration of the anniversary. It commissioned a Society exhibit commemorating the event, and continues to use the History Center for corporate meetings and staff gatherings.

Let me be specific again about one possible misunderstanding that has arisen in the past in archival circles about the MHS involvement as the de facto archives for a number of large companies. We greatly prefer to assist in the formation of corporate archives as we have done with General Mills, H.B. Fuller, Control Data, and Pillsbury. We cannot serve as corporate archives for more than a very small percentage of Minnesota-based companies. But, where companies will not consider establishment or support of their own archives, and their records fit our collecting policies, we will continue to actively pursue that function.

Outsourcing: The Brink of Disaster?

And so what of outsourcing and its potential to threaten the development of corporate archives? The best response may have been delivered at the San Diego annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists during a well-attended session devoted to the Records

⁷Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, "Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist's Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records," in O'Toole, *The Records of American Business*, 161-229.

⁸Among them: Susan C. Box, "Business Archives in the United States: Marketing in a Changing Environment," *JANUS* (1997.1): 57-61, and the essay by Henrik Fode and Jørgen Fink in this issue of the *American Archivist*.

of American Business Project. Following Elizabeth Adkins' comments on reality as seen by a corporate archivist (which form part of her essay in this issue), and close questioning of Michael Nash and myself on the terms of our institutional contracts with Seagram and 3M, respectively, a corporate archivist in the audience summed things up. "Companies will always look for options," he said, "and they'll select the ones they feel are best for them. Neither consultants nor archivists at places like the Hagley and Minnesota Historical Society can *make* companies choose an option they don't want. And the lack of options like those won't *make* them create a corporate archives, either." That is, perhaps, the home truth. The outsourcing of business archives in whatever guise is an old option. It has always been there, and it will remain.

Postscript

As luck would have it, there is breaking news as this issue goes to press. After years of frustration and disappointment, the Minnesota Historical Society was contacted by executives of Pillsbury/Grand Met and offered the Pillsbury archives. A contract is in negotiation, and it appears that the records of this highly important American corporation will be transferred to the Society in mid-1998. This exciting and long-hoped-for result is surely an affirmation of the virtues of patience, and tact, and—in the end—faith. We are grateful to our supporters who never stopped quietly working for such an ending to the story. It brings the records of one more corporate giant under our care, ensuring that the history of the Pillsbury brands will remain alive and well into the future.