The Business Records of a Nation: The Case of Denmark

HENRIK FODE and JØRGEN FINK

Abstract: The authors present an institutional overview of archives in Denmark, followed by a review of the ways in which Denmark has developed a national program for dealing with the records of business. The essay also includes an overview of the development of the Danish Business Archives Centre and its programs, including its research and publication functions and its attempts to deal with the issues of volume, electronic information, and work regarding appraisal, inventorying, research, and national and international co-operation.

About the authors: *Henrik Fode has an M.A. in history from the University of Århus, Denmark, and since 1992 has been the director of the Danish National Business Archives in Århus. He is the author of books on Nordic history, small vessel trade in the Århus area, and the history of customs and customs administration in Denmark in the nineteenth century. He is chairman of the Danish Archives Society and has written several articles on social, economic, and business history.*

Jørgen Fink has an M.A. in history and a Ph.D. from the University of Århus, Denmark. He has written books about the Danish master artisans, business life in a group of railway towns, and the history of the Danish Federation of Employers. He is a member of The Danish Committee for Urban History and has also written several articles on social, economic, and business history.

THE COLLECTION, STORAGE, AND scientific use of records is a cultural act. This is obvious and no one would probably deny it. Nevertheless it is worth mentioning because it seems so obvious that it is often forgotten. This cultural perspective goes for private as well as public records, and business records are certainly no exception.

In the short run, of course, records are important in day-to-day operations, and the short run may be ten or twenty or perhaps even fifty years. This is not the subject here. The administrative and commercial use of records is important but will not be treated in this paper. It is sufficient to say that practical or commercial considerations do not provide a solid foundation for a responsible handling of records. Private as well as public records are part of the human heritage and are indispensable elements in the reconstruction of the past. But while public records are handled with care, private records are often left on their own, and this makes for a distorted picture of the past. In view of the importance that private enterprise has and has had in the formation of modern society, it is astonishing how little care is spent in preserving business records that document this fact.

The cultural perspective is our starting point not only in this paper but in our daily work. Although it can be forgotten in the midst of piles of records waiting to be inventoried, and with difficulties in obtaining space and shelves and shelter for ever-growing paper mountains, all our effort is performed as a cultural endeavour. We are trying to preserve an important part of the heritage of Denmark, and that makes it all worthwhile.

History

The interwar years saw a growing interest among historians in economic and social history. A research center was established in Copenhagen, Denmark, but the historians found, to their dismay, that source material was scarce. Someone then got the bright idea that business records might be collected. A committee was set up for that purpose, but little happened.

It was because of the energy and vision of one historian, Vagn Dybdahl, that, in 1948, the Danish National Business Archives (*Erhvervsarkivet*) was established in the city of Århus. The young university of that city was helpful in the establishment of the new institution and so were the municipal authorities. For the first fourteen years it was a private institution, but in 1962 it was taken over by the Danish state and has since been a public institution.

The takeover was a sign of appreciation of the work which had been carried out, and the contribution of this work to a significant increase in the study of the modern social and economic history of Denmark. It was also a recognition of the fact that the collections of private records had contributed to a fuller use of the public records as well. Research was a decisive element in the establishment of the institution. The public takeover took place as an enactment of parliament, and the 1962 act made it clear that records to be collected by the Business Archives should have "a substantial importance for research or for culture in general, and in particular should touch upon matters of a social character." In this way the cultural perspective was laid down by the act itself as the very foundation of the activity of the Danish National Business Archives. The public takeover has been of immense importance to the position of the archives. The economic foundation of the institution has become more secure. The importance of this should not be exaggerated, for public budgets can be cut down, as experience has shown us. So our position in no way is safeguarded beyond any danger, but it is better protected than it was before the public takeover.

In 1992, the Danish Parliament (*Folketing*) passed a new Archives Act which gathered all public archives together into one institutional structure, the State Archives (*Statens Arkiver*). The Danish National Business Archives, which, until then, had been a separate institution, became a member of this group of public archives. Included in this group are the National Archives, four Regional Archives, and an EDP Archives Office for electronic research materials. Some of the larger cities have preferred to establish public archives of their own and are free to do so, but they are under the supervision of the Regional Archives. In addition to these, in Denmark there are a number of private archives for special or local purposes, such as those for the history of the labour movement and for emigration history. Last but not least there are nearly four hundred local archives which work, each within their own region or municipality, to provide a detailed documentation of the history of local communities. They collect records of private provenance from local associations and businesses.

Over the years, this division of tasks among the private and public institutions has turned out to be far from optimal in the use of resources and the implementation of new initiatives. To better coordinate these efforts, the Archives Act of 1992 set up a committee on private records, where public and private archivists can discuss common policies on collecting records and making them available. Within the State Archives, the Danish National Business Archives is not the only repository for private records. The National Archives has a fine collection of private archives from politicians and personalities of social influence, as well as from cultural associations. The regional archives have corresponding private archives from their districts. But in these archives, private records are only a minor part of the collection. The only public institution to concentrate its operations on private records is the Danish National Business Archives, and consequently it has been endowed with the task of general supervision of the private records of Denmark.

The Collections

Since 1948, the Danish National Business Archives has acquired a collection of Danish business records which today contains about seven thousand units and fifty shelf-kilometers of records. Fifty shelf-kilometers are equal to approximately thirty-two shelf-miles. Distributed over the Danish population of five million, the collections amount to one mere centimeter (less than one-half inch) per inhabitant. All parts of the country and all sectors of business life are represented—all legal sectors, we should say. We have no brothels, no poachers, and no smugglers represented, and in all fairness we have to admit that we, of course, are not covering all sectors equally. Some definitely are more equal than others, to paraphrase George Orwell. Handicrafts and retail selling are best covered, which corresponds well to the composition of the Danish business community.

To give an impression of our field of work, here are a few words about Denmark and Danish business: Denmark is a small country situated in the northern part of Europe. It is about forty-three thousand square kilometers with a population of about 5.2 million people. Compared to the United States, it is eight times the size of Delaware or one-fifth the size of Minnesota, to mention two states of particular relevance in connection with business records. Danish business is a comparatively new phenomenon. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Denmark was an overwhelmingly agrarian country with a business sector but no freedom of trade. There *were* cities in the country, but only one really big city, Copenhagen, with a population of 140,000. In addition, there were about sixty-five provincial towns with between one thousand and five thousand inhabitants each, and that was it. Eighty percent of the population lived in the countryside. Here the manors were the forerunners of business in an economic sense, with the farmers, who populated most of the acreage of the country, somewhat less so. There was some fishing and shipping in the coastal areas, a little forestry, and no mining industry. Danish business life during the middle of the nineteenth century outside the agricultural sector consisted of a number of traditional handicrafts, some wholesale merchants, and a comparatively small number of retailing businesses.

After the liberalization of trade in 1857, the pace of economic activity sped up, and Denmark today is a country of city dwellers. Industry, trade, and services are the dominating sectors of business, although agriculture is still very efficient and important. Compared with the United States, Danish business is small business. The number of companies with more than two hundred employees is very low. The globalization of the economy means that a growing number of Danish companies are owned by foreign corporations. That means that subsidiary companies are becoming more and more common, and this makes the collection of business records more complicated. At the same time, the Danish business sector is growing because state-owned companies are being sold to private enterprise. The fate of the records of these former state companies is still to be decided. The Danish economy is also an economy of negotiation; that is to say that trade associations play a great role in economic life.

All this must be taken into consideration at the Danish National Business Archives. Our field of work is concentrated on the period since the middle of the nineteenth century, but most of our daily labour is occupied with the twentieth century and, in particular, the latter half of it. Records from the years before 1945 will always be welcome, but it is the time since the Second World War which constitutes our main field of work. Here we encounter the same problem that everyone does: an overwhelming amount of records. No one knows exactly how many companies and associations exist or have existed in Denmark in the years since 1945. We estimate that private businesses today number about four hundred thousand, the number of business associations about fifteen thousand (most of them local or regional, but about one thousand at the national level) and the number of personal archives is impossible to estimate. If we were to collect all records, twenty-five hundred shelf-kilometers (about two thousand shelf-miles) is the official estimate of the needed space, and that would probably not be adequate. Of course, we have no intention of collecting everything and thank heavens we have no obligation to do so. No private business is forced by law to place its records in any public or private archives. It is totally voluntary to do so, and we are quite satisfied with this condition. So we have to decide on an appraisal policy. The basic guideline is the demand of the act of 1962 that only business records of substantial importance with research or cultural significance in general be collected. We perceive acquisition, appraisal, retention, and destruction as one combined procedure. Appraisal for us is more a question of what we shall collect than a question of what we can destroy, but both operations are to be seen together. The way we try to undertake this combined operation might be called the ''Expanded Sector'' method. Before presenting this method, we would like to state some general principles of collecting and appraisal as we see them.

Principles of Collecting

In the early years of the Business Archives, great efforts were exercised in collecting records from old merchant houses from the provincial towns, frequently with roots dating back to the seventeenth century. As a consequence of the specialization of merchandise, this type of business was in the process of disappearing completely after World War II. Later, stress was put on securing industrial records from the 1840s, and most recently, on materials from service and business associations from the 1870s until the present day. In a society with a mixed economy such as the Danish one, this is a category of source material that illuminates all aspects of economic life. It includes not only associations of entrepreneurs within the same trade or industry, but also of employers. A third priority is the region in which the Business Archives are situated, and where the collecting activity has been particularly intensive.

As mentioned, the volume of the total collection is approximately thirty-two shelf-miles, and our future collecting activity has to be undertaken with a view to the collection already at hand. According to the Archives Act, we have to be very resource-conscious. For this reason, priorities must be assigned very carefully. The aim is to collect and make available a representative picture of the Danish society. Today, the degree of coverage is less than 1 percent.

Obviously, it is impossible to establish mechanical criteria for the collecting of records from the private sector. One can merely indicate the elements in such a collecting policy:

- the social importance
- the research value
- the value for legal or social documentation
- pioneering efforts
- extraordinary importance within a local area, an industry, or a topic
- particularly well-preserved or complete collections of records
- particularly old records
- records of unique documentary content

The task of collecting within the private record sector is a critical and selective process. Therefore, one cannot establish mechanical collection targets in the form of definite proportions of the national aggregate amount of records. The collecting work is guided only by regard for the research value of the material. In practice, this takes place by a combination of varying considerations and methods, of which the following few may be indicated:

- the collecting of typical record holdings
- particular coverage of special fields
- the collection of key record holdings
- the preservation of representative sections of certain files dealing with the same matter

Appraisal of Business Records

In appraisal, three general rules are to be followed. They are relevant for private as well as public records.

Rule 1: No destruction of records that would be irresponsible from a professional archivist's point of view.
Rule 2: Clear and straightforward guidelines for retention/destruction of records.
Rule 3: Economy of work.

Each and every one of these three general rules are to be respected when appraising the records and none of them can be neglected, but in practical use rule three is by far the most important. It is possible to imagine and formulate guidelines for destruction of several groups of records that are not only clear and straightforward but professionally responsible as well (so that rules one and two are respected), but that are without any meaning from the perspective of work economy because the price (in working hours) for each shelf-foot is far too high. Normally, destruction decisions at the item-level are not possible.

Having stated the three principal rules of appraisal, we shall now turn to the two principal ways of appraising: routine appraisal and elaborate appraisal. It is this last point, the elaborate appraisal, where the ''Expanded Sector'' method is to be found.

Routine appraisal is what we undertake when collecting or receiving a particular archives or deposit (although we no longer accept deposits [unless compelled to do so], but only gifts). Such a routine appraisal is normally guided by views of the use and importance of this particular archives seen in isolation. We try to take care that records with very little informational value are destroyed. This goes for invoices, postal cheque forms, and so on. We try also to make sure that bundles of identical copies are not kept for retention. Normally, this will be part of the inventorying process. In all probability, item-level appraisal cannot be totally avoided, but should not be undertaken systematically. The important matter in regard to routine appraisal is that it is guided by concern for one isolated archives.

This approach is not satisfactory. Even the routine appraisal has to be guided by more comprehensive considerations than regard for a particular archives (provenance). The archives or provenance in question should be treated as belonging to a group. If it is a company—for instance, a grocer's shop—it should be seen as an example of this particular branch of trade, and appraisal decisions should be made accordingly. That is to say, records that, in a narrow company perspective, might be destroyed should perhaps be retained if they contain information which for that particular branch of trade is rather rare. Or vice versa, records that otherwise would have been retained may be destroyed if this kind of record is very well represented in the archival collections of this particular kind of trade. To some degree, considerations of this kind have been used in our ongoing routine appraisal, but more elaborate guidelines for appraisal have to be worked out. We are trying to find or devise better tools than we have. This is the starting point for the Expanded Sector method.

The next kind of appraisal is the *elaborate* or *systematic appraisal.* This can be undertaken at different levels. We have suggested the economic sectors or branches of trade as one level, but it is possible to mention other levels, such as a geographical region, a social class (small tradesmen, for instance), and so on. It is important to notice that if one chooses the economic sector to define appraisal activity, other possible fields of study are neglected. It will therefore be important that the economic sector approach is combined with other considerations, and that is why we call it the Expanded Sector method. In Denmark, this form of appraisal will probably be in the shape of strategies of collection rather than strategies of destruction because we have far too little of everything, although law firms and dairies are outstanding exceptions.

The main point here is that appraisal should be undertaken in connection with the collection strategy, and that the starting point should not be the stock of records but the fields of research. This by no means implies that we should let research use decide and perhaps destroy records that have not been used in the past five or ten years. This kind of appraisal is breaking rule number one, which demands that appraisal shall be undertaken with professional responsibility. Taking fields of study as the starting point is to understand the records as more than mere objects. Their intrinsic value is to be taken into consideration, but it is important that appraisal is seen in the perspective of the potential use of the records, and that the evaluation of the informational content of the records is not seen in narrow perspective. We shall return to this point later.

We shall now discuss in greater detail the systematic appraisal which has been named the Expanded Sector method. As mentioned, we need better tools than we have, and one way of creating such tools could be to undertake systematic appraisals for all the economic sectors or major branches of trade. We can use the textile industry as an example. Systematic appraisal of the records of the textile industry would start with considerations of which processes historians want to document. This means that it will be necessary to make an overview of the history of this branch of industry. It is possible, by use of the official Danish Statistics to find out approximately how many companies existed at different times, which characteristics they had, where within the country they were situated, and so on. (We are talking about an overview, not a detailed examination.) Based on this overview, it is possible to establish criteria of representation chronologically, geographically, structurally (the question of the size of the companies), technically, socially (the composition of the staff), and so on. Having established a knowledge of the industry under investigation, one can decide which records are to be kept as a minimum to give a representative picture of this industry. We are not talking about adequacy as we have seen in some of the American methods; we lower the level of ambition and just talk about some minimum collection which will make it possible to give a representative picture, for example, of the textile industry in Denmark. Perhaps that is what is meant by the word "adequacy," but our phrase sounds more modest.

Having decided on this minimum collection, we can turn to the existing collection (including what is known to exist in other collections such as local archives) and find out if we are actually covering all the topics that need to be covered. In most cases, this will probably be the basis of a collecting strategy. We do not cover all that might be covered, but in the cases where we have more records than necessary to portray an industry accurately according to the minimum requirements, we now have a tool for systematic appraisal. Records that are superfluous when measured by the minimum standard can be investigated in order to decide whether there are other reasons for retaining them. They may have merits of their own. They may be remnants of something extraordinary, or they may have interest outside the branch or sector perspective. The minimum standard should never be a tool for automatic destruction, but a guideline for what may be deemed professionally responsible.

This kind of minimum standard of records which should be kept is not easy to produce, but it is possible to do it. Covering all the sectors of business will take a long time, but in our opinion it will be worthwhile. It will be interesting in itself, it will make routine appraisal safer, and it will provide a reasonable basis for discussions with historians about the historical processes they would like to document. It is not a task that is done once and for all. When we have worked our way through the entire business world, we can start again making revisions of the original minimum standards in the light of what will then be known about the particular branch or economic sector under investigation.

There is, however, one problem in connection with this kind of procedure which needs further discussion. In our example, the branch of industry was taken as the entity which was to be appraised. As suggested above, other items might be as relevant: chronological periods, geographical locations, and so on. It will probably be important to supplement this kind of procedure with other kinds of systematic appraisal to ensure, as far as one can make anything sure in these matters, that no important aspect is neglected. So what we are talking about is not the sector method but the *Expanded* Sector method. Compared with other methods of appraisal such as the Minnesota Method, the Expanded Sector method is, in many respects, in agreement. Both methods stress the importance of an overview of the field of work, the two steps of appraising/prioritizing, and the demand for conscious and well-considered decisions. Disagreement occurs in the fundamental understanding of the goals of appraisal and in the starting point of the operation. In the Minnesota Method the starting point is the records, the dreadful paper mountain; to us, the starting point is the fields of research.[1]

Perhaps one reason why the Expanded Sector method differs in these respects is that the authors of the Minnesota Method found the goal of adequacy and objectivity more absolute and more demanding than we do. Consequently, the authors have given up the whole idea of objectivity, where we have lowered the expectation without sacrificing the idea as such. We don't talk about adequacy—at least not in any absolute sense of the word—but just about some minimum collection that makes historical research possible. That is why we would never appraise the entire business community as a whole. We will never give up any economic sector prematurely and we will never prioritize one sector against the other in the way suggested in the Minnesota Method. To some degree, the prioritizing will be achieved by the very way we work. Our goal is to collect a minimum core of records for each and every economic sector, although a sector with few businesses and few employees needs fewer records kept than a big sector. The small economic sector will have a somewhat bigger share of the shelves than its importance in the economy entitles it to, but that is not a big problem.

By using the economic sector and not the entire business community, appraisal becomes easier. It is easier to establish an overview and to decide on the minimum core of records that has to be in the collection, and it is very easy to find out how much has already been collected and how much is still to be sought. But this method has its shortcomings, too. Appraisal becomes a protracted affair, in fact, an ever-ongoing endeavour, as appraisal is followed by reappraisal of already scrutinized sectors. That is not the greatest problem. The real shortcoming of this method is that, by choosing the sector as the entity of appraisal, other aspects are excluded. That is why the sector approach has to be supplemented with other approaches, and it is quite difficult to decide which, and how many, and how to operate them. Regional, social, cultural, and environmental considerations are to be taken into account, but other considerations might also be relevant, and this is probably a point where you can never be sure that you have not neglected something important.

The real shortcoming of the Minnesota Method from our point of view lies in the fact that it has chosen to concentrate on the rich, the big, and the successful—which definitely merit collection and storing—but tends to forget the simple and the common, and thus will end up with a distorted picture of the past. Business history is not made up

[1] For a discussion of the Minnesota Method, see Mark 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 *The Records of American Business*, edited by James M. O'Toole (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1997), 161-229.

only of success stories, and if we collect only those, historians will never be able to give a balanced and fair picture of the past.

Current Appraisal Practice

Except for the very early years of the Business Archives, we have undertaken routine appraisal to a greater or lesser degree. Of course we are trying to make sure that records which are not worth keeping are not kept. Whenever we find large series of routine material we try to reduce the amount by keeping only part of it. We use several techniques in that connection: keeping only every fifth or every tenth year, keeping only certain months in those years, keeping only records from certain locations, and so on. We probably do what all business archives do in this respect. The problem is greatest with more recent material. Business records from before 1920 or 1945 or even 1960 are rather scarce in Denmark. We are sometimes—when asking for more shelves and room—met with the demand that we reappraise our collection and destroy the amount necessary for the new collections. There are not many shelf-meters to be won in this way.

We have two main types of archives (provenances) in our collection: business associations and business companies.

The *business associations* are the most important part of our collection. The records of those associations can, for the matter of convenience, be divided into seven record groups.

1. *The board of executives, the steering committee, the elected leaders.* This group contains the minutes, papers, and correspondence relating to meetings. We do not destroy records belonging to this group. On the contrary, we are trying to microfilm them for safety purposes.
2. *Cases.* The main activity of the associations is the handling of cases, and normally this group will be the most voluminous, so appraisal is of particular interest here. If extra copies exist, they can safely be destroyed, but that is not common. Normally this group of records contains very different cases, so that destruction becomes very difficult. Destruction within single cases is normally far too expensive. An agreement can possibly be reached with ongoing associations so that, in the future, they will undertake some kind of routine appraisal before handing over the records, but it has yet to be determined what results such agreements would bring. In general, the cases of the associations are not apt for appraisal.
3. *Special cases.* In some associations, particular kinds of cases become routine, such as members applying for help in situations of scarcity (wartime), or matters like that. Here it will be possible to destroy parts of the records by one or more of the above-mentioned techniques.
4. *Statistics.* Now and then, identical statistical information can be found in two or more associations. If one is quite sure that the information actually is identical, one copy can be destroyed if the other is definitely being kept. In other cases there may be statistical information which is more or less identical. In some of these cases, one of the semi-identical series of statistics may be destroyed, but one must carefully judge the loss of information that occurs.
5. *Accounting.* This is normally not very important in the associations, and very often it has been destroyed by the association itself before the records are handed

over. This group probably can be taken in for appraisal, but no automatic guidelines can be established.
6. *Staff records/personnel records*. Material might be found here which can be destroyed, such as holiday savings, if wage books exist. But normally, the associations have retained this type of record in-house. It is not a voluminous group in our collections.
7. *Miscellaneous*. By nature a very heterogeneous group. It can be appraised if it is deemed worthwhile.

The second main group of archives consists of *the businesses*: the farms, estates, fisheries, handicraft workshops, factories, wholesalers, retailers, carters, shipping companies, railways, banks, insurance companies, mortgage institutions, lawyers, auditors, architects, and so on. Here, too, one can, for the sake of convenience, divide the records into seven categories almost identical to the associations, but with different content.

1. *The board of directors/management.* As we have all probably experienced, very little material exists that sheds light on the decision-making processes in companies. They are, in general, small businesses. We can see the outcome, but we normally do not know the deliberations that preceded it—the measuring of the pros with the cons. If records of this kind are ever found, for heaven's sake, keep them.
2. *General administration*. Here we find the correspondence and cases handled by the company. This is not a group which is easy to appraise. If there are long series of some routine character they can, of course, be destroyed, but in many firms this will not be so, and it may be too time consuming to appraise the group as such.
3. *Business activity*. This group differs from one economic sector to another. In industry, for instance, books may be found on the use of raw material, costs, calculations, and so on. In wholesale businesses, books on buying and selling, inventories of items in stock, and so on may be found. These are, to some extent, routine series and can then be reduced in volume, but no automatic guidelines are available. Individual company decisions must be made.
4. *Statistics*. This group is normally to be kept unless the information exists elsewhere.
5. *Accounting*. Here we find the bulk of material, the tons of ledgers that no one ever uses. Professor Michael Moss of Scotland has offered an apt description of accounting material in his book (edited by Allison Turton), *Managing Business Archives*, and we agree with his conclusions. Two points should be stressed here. First, accounting has undergone a great transformation, and it is important to describe this process and notice the major changes. In this connection, it is also important to notice the differences between commercial and manufacturing cost accounting. The second point is that it would be very helpful in appraising the accounting material if the above-mentioned minimum standards were established according to the Expanded Sector method. For instance, we have a combined wholesale/retail company where all records have been kept. This may be a good idea for one or two companies but it would of course be foolish to do so for a whole branch of trade. But let us destroy invoices with care, postal cheque forms with pleasure, and let no one ever imagine that mechanical guidelines are available for the destruction of accounting material.

6. *Staff records, etc.* This group is to be appraised in the same way as the "business activity" group.
7. *Miscellaneous.* This, of course, is a heterogeneous group too, but a point of more general importance should be mentioned here: it will be necessary to investigate the development of office practices and office techniques. Too little research has been undertaken regarding how daily work actually takes place in the offices of different kinds of firms in Denmark. This, of course, is important to know when judging the creation of the records. The advance of information technology will probably make this point even more important, giving archivists new tasks in establishing the contextuality of electronic records.

A final note on this short presentation of appraisal will be to stress again the importance of a dialogue with the scientific community. Elsewhere, there have been bad experiences with dialogues of this kind, but we still find it necessary to try. It is very important to know which kind of information the historians are eager to receive. This will be important when deciding our collecting strategy. This is not to say that we should omit collecting what we ourselves find interesting but we should listen to the demands of the historians and use this information as a supplementary tool in our efforts.

Making Records Available to Researchers and the Public

The Danish Archives Act of 1992 lays down, as a general rule, that public records are available to the public when the records are thirty years old. Collections of material that are particularly sensitive regarding individuals are, however, exempted from public inspection until they are fifty to eighty years old. In principle, these rules also apply to records of private provenance, but, as no private person, association, or company is obliged to hand over archives to the public, those who voluntarily do so are free to restrict its use.

A consequence of these rules of admission is that the *public records* must be collected, sorted, and catalogued by the time they are opened to the public. Records that are not catalogued violate the principle of free admission to information. On being handed over, the *business records* are mostly in poor condition as far as sorting and cataloguing are concerned. Since the transfer is voluntary, we cannot make demands. We do endeavour to establish a dialogue so that, from the archivist's viewpoint, future supplementary transfers may be received in a more desirable condition.

Hitherto, records have been catalogued according to the traditions of the individual archival institution, but in this field cooperation is also under way, with a view to establishing common cataloguing standards. Attempts have been made to link up various computerized indices, and plans have been presented for making record catalogues available on the Internet. In recent years, considerable efforts have been directed towards the production of catalogues of collections, the *Archives Guides*. The Business Archives have produced a comprehensive three-volume catalogue. The ISAD(G) standard will be introduced. This will make the record descriptions more uniform and facilitate their computerization on a common database. Another part of the policy of making records available is the production of the users' guides for certain types of record holdings, such as the records of employers' unions, banks, accounting material, etc. The guiding consideration is that the search room visitor should have the opportunity to prepare himself *before* going to the archives. A final aspect of this policy is that records with very frequent use should be offered on microfilm. In the case of the Business Archives, such material will frequently be the central minutes of the boards and committees of trade organizations or major companies.

The Danish National Business Archives, as mentioned, is part of the State Archives of Denmark. Actually, we are a *public* private records office, and, together with our colleagues, we are establishing an all-encompassing database where all records are to be registered. This probably will not be completed in our lifetimes. The idea is to start with the basic information at the level of provenances and major series of records, and then build the information according to the manpower available for that purpose. The most optimistic archivists believe that it will be possible to register every single volume or box on the shelves so that the customers who use the database can directly order exactly what they want. That, indeed, would be nice, but we are somewhat sceptical as to whether that can be attained. The database will be for use not only by the archivists in their daily work, but for the public as well. It will be a catalogue of the records in the Danish Archives. There will be links to small local archives and other private repositories so that all known records will be registered in the same system. The problem for us right now is to create a system of access for the public that is as multifaceted and open-ended as possible, while still making it possible for archivists to use it in their daily work. These are difficult goals to achieve.

Electronic Records

In the Nordic countries, including Denmark, it is difficult to work with computerized records if they are of private provenance. An Act of 1978 prohibits the collecting and storing of private electronic indices (for instance of customers, clients, etc.). They are not to be made available to the public. The Act demands that such indices be deleted if they contain data relating to individuals and have not been used for two years. Accordingly, considerable efforts are being made to argue that it is not the computerized records, as such, that are of interest to research, but information, regardless of the information carrier. This means that, until now, no private computerized records have been handed over to the Business Archives. We have been compelled to ask that the information created in electronic form be handed over in paper form.

Resources

The resources for the many tasks covered by the Business Archives are very limited. They correspond to about twelve full-time jobs, half of which are for the academically educated staff. It is obvious that the ambition level far exceeds what the resources permit. For this reason, planning and coordination with other institutions are a conscious attempt at utilizing the allotted resources in the best possible way.

It has already been mentioned that coordinating efforts in the fields of collecting records and making them available for research is one of the tasks assigned by the Archives Act. This has been implemented through the setting up of a "private records committee," which not only works with other business records but also with private records from general cultural, social, and scientific activity. In this committee, the Business Archives naturally enjoy a central position, but all types of institutions with an interest in the collecting of private records are represented. The whole private record area—not just business records—has been analysed by the committee, and it has endeavoured to create "distribution and responsibility lists." The aim has been to collect regional and local records, and make them available to the public on a local basis, while records of national companies and organizations should continue to be collected by the Business Archives. Further, the aim is to ensure that computerized indices include a common access to the material, regardless of its physical repository. Only in this way will it be possible to utilize resources optimally, since it must be realized that public authorities—be they state or municipal—will not be inclined to allocate larger funds to the activities within the field. In the years to come, the committee will prepare preservation plans. The problem is that it cannot enforce the implementation of its plans, but only recommend that the tasks which it has taken upon itself be resolved.

Research Policy

Research in the Danish Archives is facilitated by a rather liberal archives act. Public records are available when they are thirty years old unless they contain sensitive personal data (i.e., illness, addiction problems, criminal behaviour, etc.) or other confidential information. Private records are available, but, as the transfer of private records is totally voluntary, the creator is free to restrict their use and often does so. For instance, the trade and employers' associations normally make admission conditional on written permission by the association. Conditions of this kind are very strictly enforced.

From the start, the Danish National Business Archives has attached great importance to the use of the records. We have always tried to demonstrate that the material collected contains valuable information. This has been done through intensive research. The academically trained staff members are and have always been obliged to spend at least two-sevenths of their working hours on research relevant to the institution. This proportion of their work time, however, has often been supplemented by the use of release time.

One of the results has been the publication, since 1949, of the institution's own yearbook, *Erhvervshistorisk Årbog (Yearbook of Business History)*; and the publication of doctoral theses, such as those on the interplay between trade organizations and political parties, or on the social position of the middle class in the early industrial era. Analyses of the transition to a modern industrial society have occupied a prominent place, and so have studies of unemployment, of trade patterns and of individual categories of merchandise. Several doctoral theses have been written by Danish historians wholly or partly on the basis of the material of the institution, including studies of emigration, the establishment of modern transport systems, and the absorption of women into the labour force.

Regular courses are arranged for university students in the use of the record collections, and assistance is tendered to students of history, sociology, and economics, in their choice of subjects for the final paper they are required to write as part of their studies. Finally, it may be mentioned that, for many years, a conscious part of our policy has been the publication of books at different levels, from broad surveys with popular appeal to the purely academic treatises mentioned above. This means that the staff members have published not only monographs in their own right, but have also published in Danish and foreign journals and through commercial publishers. They have also taken part in the publication of text books for secondary schools and for universities. Always, the aim has been to demonstrate the possibilities inherent in private records, occasionally in combination with records of public provenance. It is no secret, however, that it has been a constant struggle to create widespread understanding and interest in our source material, since it frequently takes not only time but also special insight to use it.

Accounting records, for instance, are not held in high esteem, and in a way we understand this. It is actually quite difficult and rather time-consuming to use accounting material for historical research, and not many historians are doing it. This is a real problem. There are two possible solutions to this, the first being to destroy all this rubbish, recycle it to save some trees, and have the additional pleasure of available shelving. As you might guess, this is not the procedure we would recommend. On the contrary, we are undertaking an investigation to show the value of accounting records in historical analysis. "The pleasures of the ledger" might be the title of one of the papers. The fact that accounting records are difficult to use does not mean that they lack informational value—they don't. Consequently, they are to be kept, and if they have a low rating on a scale of frequency of use, the solution, in our opinion, would be to create tools to facilitate their use by historians.

Financing the Archives

Today, the Danish National Business Archives is supported by public funds. Major funding comes from the state, but the city of Århus—the second-largest city in Denmark and the home of the Archives—contributes significantly. In return, the Business Archives houses municipal records and makes them available to researchers and the municipal administration. In addition, a special research foundation exists in conjunction with the institution. In accordance with this foundation, money may be set aside for special purposes, not for the day-to-day operations, but for special research projects or to subsidize publication activities. A few companies and organizations make annual contributions to the foundation. It has, however, proved very difficult to secure contributions for the foundation in connection with the handing over of records. In companies and organizations, records are considered a liability, and as soon as they are no longer of administrative use, they must be discarded or made cost neutral—i.e., handed over to a public archives institution. It has probably become a part of Danish public culture that, as the public sector takes care of so much, business and individuals don't see such work as their responsibility.

This sets limits as to what, in principle, is another possibility: *commercial activity*. In this way, the institution can offer its services: the preparation of business profiles, anniversary publications, guides to record holdings, etc. The profit that accrues from such activities may be used by the institution at its own discretion. It goes without saying, however, that the economic possibilities in this market are rather limited. In this connection, it should be mentioned that we are reluctant to accept records from companies merely because the company pays. In our opinion, it is the quality of the information that is decisive when we choose what to collect and what to refuse. A too-close dependency on private goodwill is not a solid foundation for a cultural endeavour. A Finnish example has shown the difficulties which a partially privately sponsored business archives institution may run into if the main sponsor discontinues sponsorship.

In Denmark, independence from private economic interests has been regarded as desirable, and for this reason private monetary contributions have not been used for the ordinary running of the archives, but may be directed into the above-mentioned research foundation. Our experience as a non-public institution during the years 1948 to 1962 testifies eloquently to the advisability of using the basic economic grants coming from public authorities.

National and International Partnerships

It goes without saying that an institution whose purpose is to document economic life must be very open to cooperation from every direction. This has certainly been the case of the Business Archives since the very start. The institution has cooperated with the large national trade associations, and has been a co-founder of *Dansk Arkivselskab* (the Danish Archives Society), whose membership is drawn from the documentalists of Danish economic life. For many years, close ties have existed with *Sammenslutningen af Lokalhistoriske Arkiver* (the Danish Association of Local History Archives), an association which today numbers about four hundred members (local archives) throughout the country. The Business Archives has arranged courses and lectures about record management and related subjects, and has supervised the voluntary work of the local archives. Recently, this work has been backed by a paragraph of the Archives Act, which demands the setting-up of a coordination committee.

At the international level, the institution has, since its inception, kept in touch with Nordic developments, and has kept a close watch on activities in the field of private records and, in particular, business records. It may be noticed that the Business Archives was a founding member of the European Association of Business Archivists, and, since its beginnings, has been active in the Section on Business and Labour Archives of the International Council on Archives. It is our wish to be able to take full part in the growing trend towards international cooperation.

Conclusion

In 1998, the Danish National Business Archives will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. Through all these years, the basic mission has remained the same: to collect privately produced records relating to Danish economic life and put them at the disposal of research, in the broadest sense of the word. The working methods have, however, changed from more-or-less haphazard collecting campaigns of the difficult first years, to more determined and resource-conscious efforts. At the same time, we have had to increase the efficiency of these efforts, since competition for public money has become ever more fierce because the public budget for cultural activities is under siege by a growing number of new initiatives.

It is clear that the Business Archives can no longer work exclusively on a national or even Nordic basis, but must engage itself with increasing vigour in international cooperation. Through such efforts, the institution will receive new inspiration regarding the work of collecting records and making them available. Research projects should also be seen in an international perspective. Initiative has consequently been taken for a number of conferences with foreign colleagues and researchers, where appraisal of records and the problems of making them available to the public, together with research issues, are discussed, all with the aim of enhancing the value of our collection of records and increasing public use of it. Today, so much information is produced that it is necessary to evaluate and discard records very harshly—much more so than it was only a few years ago.

There can be little doubt that the establishment of a public Danish National Business Archives has been of decisive importance for understanding the interplay between the public and the private sectors, just as studies in the records of private companies have contributed to a much more varied picture of the history of business life. In several cases, such studies have exploded myths about decisions, events, and business activities in general.

Also important is the fact that the Danish National Business Archives' economic foundation has been provided for by public means, without any external interference. It has been correspondingly important that a valuable cooperation has existed with the large trade associations and companies. Without support from these, it would hardly have been possible to develop the Business Archives.