

ARCHIVES—WHAT ARE THEY?

THE ARTICLE by Roscoe R. Hill in the October, 1943, issue of THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST discusses ably the origin of archival terms and suggests an American usage. In doing so, he traces the origin of the term "archives" to the Greek noun *archeion*. The term could be taken back another step to the verb *archo*, I rule, and emphasis could be placed on the fact that an *archeion* was a depository of the ruler's documents and not those of private institutions or individuals. It was a place where the government's records were kept.

This suggests that we could limit the use of the term "archives" to government records, instead of, as now, using the term to designate all sorts of collections, public and private. We hear it applied to the official records of schools and churches, made up of manuscripts, periodicals, and books, and to the places where such material is kept; and the keeper of such a private collection is sometimes referred to as an archivist. Much simpler would be the limitation of the term so that "archives" did not extend beyond the field of government—federal, state, and local.

The term "archives" has been used so extensively to designate records that it would seem impractical to limit its use to depositories. Better would be to consider its primary use as referring to the records and its secondary use as referring to the establishment. If "archives" is used to stand for government records, then "archive" may remain the singular of that term as applying to one government document.

There will be, of course, a double meaning to the word "archives" if used both for the records and for the housing establishment. But we have other cases of such duplication in the English language without too much confusion. For the present the question could be postponed. Some future archivist might prefer to go back to the Latin *archivum* as the name for the depository, or he might become accustomed to speak of the national archives department or the state archives department.

The terms "archivist" and "archival" have had sufficient use to be accepted for what they designate. And "archivology" may well stand for the *logos* of archives. But if "archives" is taken to designate first of all official government records, then "archivalia" will be

superfluous, and we avoid taking on a strange sounding word that in German is all right but that in English sounds like a disease of old age.

Records is a term that has been used so long to designate recorded material of all kinds, public and private, that it is better to leave it with its broad meaning.

JACOB HODNEFIELD