

## **Business Archives in the United States**

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### **Introduction**

Business archives programs in the United States in general derive their support from the companies that created the records and/or the institutions in which they are housed. Government support at either the national or state level for private (for-profit) business archives programs in general does not exist; on the other hand, grants and other support are available to non-profit institutions or universities that hold business records collections.

### **Legal Status for Private/Corporate Archives**

#### **National -**

In the United States, there is generally no legislation, governmental support or governmental incentive for companies to preserve their archival records. A few federal government entities have grant programmes that can provide assistance to public repositories that collect business records (but not to archival programmes within companies, since they do not provide grant funding to for-profit entities). The grant-providing entities include the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC – an agency within the National Archives and Records Administration) and the National Endowment for the Humanities. However, competition for those grants is quite fierce, and the granting agencies often take the position that the companies that deposited records with the repositories should fund processing and preservation efforts – which the companies are often reluctant to do.

There are few financial incentives – governmental or otherwise – for companies to save their archival records. At one time companies were allowed to take a tax deduction for the value of the records they donated to public archival repositories, but a change in the tax law in the 1970s essentially eliminated tax deductions for donation of archival records. As a result, companies that choose to save their historical records, either by maintaining an internally administered archives programme or by depositing the records in public repositories, generally are motivated by other factors.

In most cases, companies establish archives to capitalize on the strategic competitive advantages that can be gained by tapping into their heritage and brand history. In some cases, they are aware of their role in society and in business or industry and feel some responsibility to preserve and (possibly) to share that legacy with others. Sometimes they are motivated by a desire to serve the communities, in which they do business, having recognised the impact of their operations on the local economy and way of life.

## **State -**

One important opportunity for funding grant projects comes through the State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs), which are funded by the NHPRC. NHPRC provides grant funding to the SHRABs (as part of an overall grant funding programme), who then decide how to allocate that money. Some SHRABs have provided funding for preservation and access to corporate records held by public repositories. However, it is a very small part of what they do, and is not a priority for most SHRABs.

An Internet search produced a few hits on various SHRABs. While the boards might have been created by statute, they do not possess any legal authority to require private organisations to collect records, but instead 'seek to identify, preserve, and provide access to a wide range of historical records which include not only those generated in the public sector which document the activities of state and local government agencies, but also those from the private sector which record the activities of private individuals, families, organizations, and corporations'. (See, for example, <http://www.state.tn.us/sos/statelib/thrab.htm>.)

Preservation of records is often addressed by SHRABs in a reactive fashion. The records in most need of attention, and that haven't been preserved to date, are the ones that get the attention. It is not known how much NHPRC funding goes towards preserving and sharing corporate records. However, certain state boards are more actively interested in caring for their business records – including in Minnesota, Maine and Connecticut. These state boards have granted funds to universities (or other nonprofits) that were looking to preserve the records of defunct corporations, or companies that were leaving their states.

## **Relationship Between Archives and Records Management**

In many large businesses, records management programs are separate and distinct from archives programs. Records management programs focus on the records the company creates in the course of business; compliance with legal and operational requirements as clarified in retention schedules; and the proper disposition of records once the retention period has concluded (or, in some cases, continued preservation in the archives for those records deemed historically significant or of long-term business value).

## **Institutions**

### Public Repositories

Below are listed some public repositories that collect business records:

- Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford – Dearborn, Michigan (the link to the website is <http://www.hfmgv.org/research/default.asp>)
- Hagley Museum and Library – Wilmington, Delaware (the link to the website is <http://www.hagley.lib.de.us>)
- Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University – Durham, North Carolina (the link to the website is <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/hartman>)
- Harvard Business School, Historical Collections, Baker Library – Boston, Massachusetts (the link to the website is <http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc>)
- Minnesota Historical Society – St. Paul, Minnesota (the link to the website is [http://www.mnhs.org/library/tips/history\\_topics/librarytopics.html](http://www.mnhs.org/library/tips/history_topics/librarytopics.html))

## Corporate Archives

It is difficult to determine the number of companies that have in-house archival programmes. More than 300 companies and business associations are listed in the Society of American Archivists' *Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada*, but there are undoubtedly more companies with archives than are listed in the directory.

- The *Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada* includes contact information for each archive in the directory, and, when available, information on the type of business represented by the holdings, inclusive dates and total volume of the holdings, a description of the holdings, conditions of access and the repository's hours of operation.
- The directory contains an alphabetical list by company name, and is indexed by the name of the archivist as well as by state or province.
- The directory is posted online at <http://www.hunterinformation.com/corporat.htm>.

## **Business Archives Associations - National**

### Society of American Archivists' Business Archives Section

#### *Membership and Role*

The Business Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) provides the single most important resource for sharing information and ideas among business archivists in the United States. There are currently approximately 300 members of the section, which meets once per year at SAA's annual meeting. Any member of SAA may join the Business Archives Section, as one of the benefits of SAA membership.

#### *Publications and Supported Initiatives*

The SAA Business Archives Section has directly or indirectly supported several initiatives, including:

- A manual on business archives (unfortunately, now out of print)
- A annotated bibliography on business archives and records management (also out of print)
- The *Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada* (mentioned previously)
- A Business Archives Section newsletter (See <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/bas/newsletter.asp> for online copies of the newsletter.)
- Programme sessions at SAA's annual meeting.

#### *Events, Forums and Colloquiums*

- The SAA Business Archives Section sponsored an International Business Archives Forum at Montreal, Quebec, Canada, in 1992, timed to coincide with a joint SAA/ICA meeting that year.
- Every year since then, the section has sponsored a colloquium at SAA's annual meeting, followed by an informal social event for business archivists.
- In August 2003, the section joined with ICA's Section on Business and Labour Archives to co-sponsor an all-day event at SAA's annual meeting in Los Angeles, California, with the theme of Globalization and Its Impact on Business Records.

## Corporate Archives Forum

### *Membership and Role*

The Corporate Archives Forum is a smaller, more informal group that has met once per year since 1998. It was formed as a way for members to exchange benchmarking information and confidential details on topics of mutual interest. Representatives from 17 different companies have attended various meetings since the forum was established, but at any one point no more than one dozen companies have been represented among the membership.

### *Topics of Discussion*

Forum meetings tend to focus on complex topics, particularly as they apply to multinational corporations. Some of the topics that have been covered:

- Knowledge management
- Fee-based strategies for archival services
- Documenting global activities of the business
- Techniques for capturing Web pages
- Web delivery of archival content
- Web content management
- Electronic document management systems
- Digital preservation
- Digital asset management systems
- Privacy, confidentiality and compliance
- E-mail policies
- Surviving mergers and divestitures
- Enterprise solutions to archives and records management
- Building partners and cultivating champions

### *Postings*

Summaries of Corporate Archives Forum discussions are posted on the following publicly accessible Web site as a way to share results of the discussions with a wider audience:

<http://www.hunterinformation.com/business.htm>.

## **Training for Business Archivists**

The SAA offers a professional education course entitled “Business Archives ... Establishing and Managing an Archives.” This three-day course, offered annually, provides attendees with an overview of archival theory and practice as applied within a corporation. It also offers the opportunity to tour corporate archives.

## **Online Finding Aids to Business Archives**

Several business archives repositories have posted online finding aids to their business collections. Some examples:

- Benson Ford Research Center:  
<http://www.thehenryford.org/collections/Collections/library.asp>
- Hagley Museum and Library: <http://www.hagley.lib.de.us/inventories.html>

- Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History:  
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/findaids/>
- Harvard Business School, Historical Collections, Baker Library:  
<http://www.library.hbs.edu/>
- Business collections at the Minnesota Historical Society:  
[http://www.mnhs.org/library/tips/history\\_topics/librarytopics.html](http://www.mnhs.org/library/tips/history_topics/librarytopics.html)

### **Journals and Literature**

There are no journals dedicated solely to business archives and records in the United States. Several professional associations publish journals that periodically include articles on business archives. Among them:

- Society of American Archivists (*The American Archivist*)
- Midwest Archives Conference (*Archival Issues*)
- Association of Records Managers and Administrators (*The Information Management Journal*)

There are many regional archival associations and speciality archives organisations in the United States, and several of them publish journals that occasionally reference business records. For information on these associations, see the following link on SAA's Web site:

<http://www.archivists.org/assoc-orgs/directory/index.asp>.

SAA published a special issue of *The American Archivist* on business records several years ago (Volume 60, Number 1, Winter 1997). Copies of this issue can be purchased from the SAA office (see <http://www.archivists.org/catalog/index.asp>).

SAA's publications office offers two books on the subject of business archives and records:

- *Corporate Archives and History: Making the Past Work*, Arnita A. Jones and Philip L. Cantelon, eds (Krieger Publishing Company, 1993)
- *The Records of American Business*, James M. O'Toole, ed (Society of American Archivists, 1997)