

The Policy of the General Archival Administration for the Safeguarding of Business Archives *by Maurizio Fallace*

The *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio* (Code for the Preservation of Cultural and Environmental Assets) entrusts the State, (also referred to as the General Archival Administration, with the preservation of the national archival heritage, a delicate task requiring profound knowledge of all the archives under its protection.

The Archival Superintendence Offices, peripheral organs of the General Archival Administration, operate throughout the national territory by carrying out meticulous research upon which is based the important declaration of *notable historical interest*: an essential condition for the preservation of the items and their communication to the public.

During the 1970s, the preservation of business archives—which are usually private archives and occasionally public ones – increased in the superintendence offices, to meet the requests of researchers of economic history and then, once again during the mid 1980s, when attention was drawn to current archives. At this time, entrepreneurs themselves became involved with the possibility of managing their records. In doing so, they ensured proper archival sedimentation through the use of information technologies, which they hoped would create positive effects on their business interests and their corporate social role.

In fact, one of the top objectives of the General Archival Administration's policy of valorising business archives, is not only for its purely historical value, but also for the better management of the business itself.. A well-managed archives helps to control the flow of records; this favors the renewal of a business and provides the means for communicating a company's achievements to the public. It is now widely recognized that the valorisation of private assets, through private or public initiatives, is a socially useful activity.

The management of business archival heritage is somewhat problematic due to the wide range of materials that are handled, from antique handwritten records to digital ones. This requires versatile professional qualifications from all personnel in charge of preserving business' historical memory.

Indeed, several joint activities over the last few years for the recovery, preservation and valorisation of business archival heritage are encouraging. An outstanding example is the Ansaldo Foundation archival recovery project, a complex initiative with strong economic implications, aimed at turning Ansaldo's historical business archives into a real economical territorial archives for Ligurian enterprise. The project aims for the preservation of records produced by the businesses once controlled by Ansaldo, but also those from businesses of various industrial fields. In many cases, these documents are at risk of dispersion or even destruction

In addition, the Centro per la Cultura d'Impresa, which is responsible for the recovery of the archives of the Sidona private bank; a further case is that of the Enel Historical Archives which collects the records of over 1,200 electrical companies that merged into Enel during the nationalisation of electric energy suppliers in Italy. This archives is made up of about 13,000 linear meters of records, about 80,000 photographs, thousands of technical plans, books and specialised magazines and is now preserved in eight territorial buildings, once Enel divisions; currently they are

being transferred to a single building. Enel has started the ambitious *Archivio Storico Enel project* (*Enel Historical Archives*), which plans to collect these records in Naples and to create a “systematic” archives on the history of the electric power industry in Italy, thus going beyond the current fragmentary state of the documentation; and finally, to set up an online system for the electronic use and management of these historical archives.

At the end of the 1990s, a project of the Region of Lombardy and the Mondadori Foundation paved the way to the systematic management of important business heritages. They started, together with the State Archival Superintendence, a census of the archives of publishers in Lombardy. It is now possible to consult the “personal data” of 249 publishers censused, out of the 700 originally asked to contribute. This initiative was followed by a series of similar projects, for the initiative of the General Archival Administration, that involved other Italian regions: first of all Tuscany--more than 320 publishers questioned among which 149 answered the questionnaire sent to them; according to the official statistics, Tuscany is the third Italian region for the number of publishers, and the fifth for the number of books and copies printed. The regions of Lazio and Campania have also carried out publishing initiatives. Afterwards, the census (this time organized by the Mondadori Foundation together with the State Archival Administration and the Italian Publishers’ Association) was extended to Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Liguria thanks to a financing of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio delle Province Lombarde (a well-known savings bank in Lombardy).

The situation that emerged in Tuscany is somewhat inconsistent . Only a limited number of publishers or publishing groups, such as Giunti, Giusti, La Nuova Italia, Le Monnier, Olschki, has maintained a historical archives-- that is, a proper structure dedicated to the permanent preservation of records. Their series were declared of notable historical interest and certified by the Archival Superintendence, in order to confirm the general (cultural?) value of these collections that goes beyond the fact that they are private records owned by the publishers. Other noteworthy examples include Alessandro Olschki editor of many publications concerning its family’s publishing house and editor of the *Catalogo perenne* (*perpetual catalogue*). Moreover, it is important to name the Archives and the Historical Library realised by Sergio Giunti in the group that collects the records concerning the publishers Paggi, Bemporad, Marzocco, Martello and Barbéra, or the researches on the publishing houses La Nuova Italia and Le Monnier, sustained by the former owners, and their large historical libraries still preserved today.

A working group, created by the legislative decree of 2000 of the General Director for the Archives and formed by representatives of the Archival Administration, the Archival Superintendence, the Region of Lazio and the publishers Mondadori, Giunti and Olschki, worked out models of instruments to be used with publishers’ archives. These tools provide possible systems for the organisation and the management of current archives which allow not only their consultation to internal users, but also their preservation for future research.

The Superintendence Offices have also made significant efforts to safeguard the historical memory of large companies, such as FIAT, whose archives was declared of notable historical interest in 2002 by the Piedmont Archival Superintendent, following a complex procedure for the location and the description of the records. In 2005, the archives of FIAT AVIO was also declared of notable historical interest because its records document the activity of the Group FIAT through the 20th century, not only in the field of aeronautics (engines and airplanes), but also in those of large marine engines, gas turbine plants for the production of electric energy, nuclear power plants and other industrial activities acquired or started by the Group.

The Archival Superintendence of the Campania Region, in October 2002, approved the project of census and pre-cataloguing of the ex-Ilva archives in Bagnoli, financed by Società Fintecna S.p.A., in order to allow an immediate use of the records, of significant interest to the company. The work began with the rearrangement and the indexing of two fundamental series (“Personal Inserts” and

“Case Files”). At the same time, they censused all the records, a task whose results mirrored the complex history of the company that was founded after the creation of “Società Anonima Ilva per la Costruzione dello Stabilimento a Ciclo Integrale di Bagnoli” (Genoa, 1905) and has survived to the present through a series of institutional and structural transformations.

Nor have the Superintendence Offices overlooked the memory of the small to medium or skilled craft businesses either, many of which jealously preserve and pass on the memory of the contribution they have made to the modernization of contemporary Italy.

In scanning the list of the 170 business archives declared between 1986 and 2005 to be of notable historical interest, we notice an abundance of records produced by small industries from a wide variety of fields: from the Tonnara of Capo Passero in Sicily, one of the oldest in Italy (declaration of 2005), to the Fonderia Cavadini in Verona (declaration of 1999) active from the 18th century and ceased in 1974, whose owner preserves the family records dating back to 1709, believing that this heritage is invaluable to research, given the growing interest in industrial archaeology. A further example in Veneto, in 1999, the archives of the historic Calzaturificio Voltan S.r.l. in Strà, founded in 1898, received the official declaration of notable historical interest. The historical archives of the paper-mills in Buja (UD), declared in 2004, is also extremely relevant. It documents developments and reorganisations in the field of the Italian paper-mill industry from the middle of the 19th century thanks to the preservation of the records from 1832 to 1990 coming from many different Italian paper-mills (Cartiere Italiane Riunite, cartiere Sertorio, Besozzo, Cartiere Riunite Donzelli e Meridionali, Cartiera del Sole, Cartiera del Timavo e d’Arbatax, Cartiera Friulana etc.).

In the manufacturing field, we may point out the archives of the Manifatture Cotoniere Meridionali, whose historical importance was declared by the Campania Archival Superintendence in 1996. The records of this archives date back to 1835, period in which the Swiss Schlaepfer and Wenner founded the first industries in Campania.

Last but not least, it is important to name the 2004 declaration of notable historical interest of the archives of Società cooperativa “Sogni animati” in Turin, previously named “La Lanterna Magica”, because of its unique documentation in showing the activities of the producer and, at the same time, in witnessing an important part of the history of the cartoon cinema in Italy (*La gabbianella e il gatto*, *Le nuove avventure della Pimpa*, *Totò sapore*) which, towards the end of the 20th century, achieved high levels of quality, competing with the great American producers. The archives of this field, considered useful only for the production of a film, are easily dispersed, since producers and clients are no longer interested in the preservation of bulky documents, once the film has been released.

However, these records, if preserved, are not only important for cultural and historical use, but also document artists’ and producers’ rights, and this should not be underestimated.