

Business Archives in Tuscany from 1982 to the Present

By Renato Delfiol

For business archives in Tuscany, the primary point of reference is the *Guida*, published in 1982¹ summarizing the results of a census started in 1979. Why that year? Because of the timely concurrence of three factors: first, the historical entrepreneurial leadership of Giorgio Mori, chairman of CNR's Commission on Industrial History, who requested that the Superintendence office conduct this census; second, the sensitivity, passion and determination of the superintendent at that time, the late Francesca Morandini; and third, the hiring of three new officials (including myself) by the Archival Superintendence office, understaffed up to that date. Looking back, the initiative would have been greatly limited if the institute hadn't acquired adequate funding for a car and travel expenses, practical decisions that were approved by Marcello Del Piazzo and Paolo Tournon of the central office of the Ministry who recognized the value of systematically gathering data on business archives.

The census wasn't the Superintendence Office's first safeguarding operation in this field; as a matter of course, archivists deal with all important fonds, whatever their origin. In 1959 safeguarding provisions were issued for the archives of Cantieri Orlando in Livorno and, in the following 20 years, another six safeguarding provisions followed for a number of business archives: Piaggio, Barbera Publishing, Sancholle Henraux in Seravezza, Terme di Montecatini, Società Mercurifera Monte Amiata and Sansoni Publishing.. This office was working at full capacity, since it was in charge of monitoring the archives of 284 municipalities, several public and private institutions as well as many family archives. In addition, many companies such as public banks were legally obliged to safeguard their archives and therefore, also fell under the guardianship of the Superintendence Office.

The supervision of of public sector enterprise archives started at the same time as that for private business. Since the legal structure of public companies such as Enel (energy) or Rai (public service broadcasting) was similar to that of private business, the archives of both categories were subject to supervision by the Superintendence. On the other hand, *entirely* state-owned business (Monopolies such as tobacco etc, the Post) were excluded from this requirement because their archives were already "administrated" by the State Archives. This latter situation has recently changed following the privatization of some state-owned

¹ See *Archivi di imprese industriali in Toscana. Risultato di una prima rilevazione condotta dalla Sovrintendenza Archivistica*, Firenze, Cnr-Soprintendenza archivistica per la Toscana (all'insegna del Giglio), 1982.

enterprise. The Superintendence offices are now responsible for the supervision of their archives as well².

In 1982, the *Guida* listed 93 companies in the census, excluding banks, which had begun to safeguard their archives independently, although not yet in Tuscany. This first volume was a good starting point. Frequently people ask our office if there is an updated version of the *Guida*, given that the number of the officially recognized or “declared” archives has increased. At present, there are around 200, some of which include inventories and others that list short descriptive notes. However, not all statistically surveyed archives have been declared.

Of course, an update is necessary because the published census now contains information that is no longer accurate. The first step would be to eliminate all records considered unnecessary by the company. The first declaration included the entire archives and implicitly, all the records not yet produced. In other words, the company, according to the law at that time (but also current law)³, should have asked us *then* for authorization to get rid of any records they considered superfluous. The court, whose decision was final in the case of an appeal, affirmed that the declaration of the archives was also valid for the future.⁴

On the other hand, the law has also proven to be at fault. Few entrepreneurs ever presented the list of records to be discarded. Should our office have denounced dozens of people for this fault? No entrepreneur wants more complication; so it was easier to put the declared records aside rather than puzzling over them every time one needed to request authorization to discard “useless” papers. As soon as I was placed in charge of this field, I began to declare only those records recognized as essential according to an agreement between the Superintendence office and the entrepreneurs⁵. This meant sacrificing some series in favor of better continuity for the totality of an archives. With the passing of time, corporate structures continue to change at an increasing rate. In corporate life, twenty years are an eon in which companies may have merged, failed, expanded, sold off business areas, re-located plants and so on. From an archival point of view, this could mean a change of headquarters, a transfer of files or repositories, or else finding alternative methods of preservation. Generally speaking, any transfer of this sort implies a loss of some records.

One should bear in mind that business archives, once censused, are not definitively acquired for consultation. They are not public institutions or family foundations whose archives are deposited in designated preservation structures. Companies are constantly changing; names, addresses, organization are continuously modified. Therefore, to communicate the results it is necessary to use a medium that can be rapidly updated: in other words, IT. For a printed publication, it would be preferable to create “territorial guides” for the purpose of studying the preconditions of an economic activity and its actualization in a certain geographical area, including businesses that no longer exist. A hard copy document provides an instrument that remains ‘stable’, even if the material conditions change. In the last

² Both the Presidential Decree 30th September 1963 n. 1409 and the current Code for Cultural Assets (legislative decree 22nd January 2004 n. 42) made a distinction between private and public archives and between their respective monitoring, the former were assigned to the Superintendence offices, and the latter to the State Archives. The Code introduced the distinction between for profit private institutions (in which commercial companies are included) and non-profit private institutions.

³ At the time, according to article 42 of the Presidential Decree 30th September 1963 n. 1409, at present of article 21 paragraph 1 letter d) of the decree law 22nd January 2004 n. 42.

⁴ See for example the decision of the State Council section VI 10th December 1999, p. 4

⁵ The concept of essentiality of the records is based on the definition by Paola CARUCCI, explained in the essay *Lo scarto come elemento qualificante delle fonti per la storiografia*, in «Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato» XXXV (1975), pages 249-264.

few years, the archival administration has begun to use the program SIUSA (unified informative system of the archival superintendence offices) also for these types of archives with the aim of publishing online the sources of private or public property controlled by the State. The results are encouraging and the filing programs are constantly developing that allow increasingly precise registration of the conditions.

In Tuscany our work has only begun. At the time of this writing, there is nothing online from this region and we are checking the data available for a series of important archives. I'll give an idea of the situation of the companies censused in the volume, providing new data or new situations for each field.

Having examined the work of preservation carried out up to now, it is clear that the *declaration of high historical interest* is of primary importance. From our experience, declared archives may encounter problems of dispersion or damage; however the same risks are greater and more difficult to manage if the archives have not been declared. In the case of companies, it is possible to achieve positive outcomes through agreements between the Superintendence office and the owner, or else with a public declaration of intent. We do not know how long these agreements are effective if the company folds or merges with other companies. Such events entail changes in the personnel (both management and executive). The declaration is also a starting point that guarantees access to the archives for consultation (except for reserved records).

Another precondition of the census is the existence of a designated structure where endangered archives can be placed. Up to now, we have used the spaces of various institutions throughout Tuscany. It is important to point out that administrators usually consider the declaration of an archives as more of a problem than an advantage. Of course, there are a few people in the major companies who understand the value of an historical archives as an instrument of promotion, but this is fairly uncommon. Although the ideal situation would be a public structure, our offices have managed to seek out a partner each time. More than once, with the help of the Chamber of Commerce, industrial associations, municipalities, provinces, and single companies, we have requested the placement of archives that can no longer remain in their own repositories. Some temporary spaces carry the risk of fragmenting an archives, which is then difficult to reassemble. It would be better to create an independent institution. On several occasions, we almost took that step, but it proved difficult to find financial support or the right project leader. There has been only one case where a private partner became involved in conducting a census: in Pisa (the second project), the Piaggio Foundation offered to be the structure of reference for the archives. The census, however, was never concluded due to other reasons.

Unfortunately, all endeavors to create new centers for the collection of archives failed. Attempts were made in the provinces of Livorno and Pisa, twice in Florence, once in Arezzo, and twice in Prato. These projects stopped for many reasons: lack of financial support, lack of institutional collaboration; some politicians who had given their support were voted out of office. Instead, we used existing preservation structures as alternative repositories.

The State Archives have played an important role: Florence collected the Sansoni Archives, the Superpila Archives, the Segnalamento Marittimo Aereo Archives (incorporated into to Nello Carrara's private archives, donated by his heirs), the Officine Galileo Archives (unfortunately, only a remnant of the original, although it includes a large fond of drawings), the Gover Archives, the Emporio Duilio 48 Archives (an institution for Florence that dates back to the 19th century). Other, more recently censused State Archives include those of: Saimon-Medicea-Maconf (companies dating back to the period from 1950 to 1980, which document the industrial history during Italy's economic boom), the remainder of Fonderia

Officina Cure⁶, Meoni, De Micheli Impianti, which contains thousands of projects for civil plants throughout Italy, the insurance company Firenze and the TV company, Emerson. Moreover, the State Archives in Florence acquired the historical records produced by Poste Italiane S.p.A. which completed the state records fond. It should be remembered that the State Archives in Florence preserves the oldest and most important archives of the companies once held by the courts (*Tribunale di Firenze, Atti in materia di commercio-Atti di società* since 1883) which, together with the ratification of the deeds of company foundation, allows us to reconstruct Florentine entrepreneurial activity from its beginning.

The Archives in Prato (a province created after 1982) acquired the Razzòli Archives (made up of three companies and the papers concerning their financial failure).

Arezzo acquired the Sacfem Archives as well as the archives of the cooperative business which subsequently carried on Sacfem's activities; the Archives of the historical Fonderia Bastanzetti and that of the Lanificio di Stia (only a few records). Lucca acquired the Molino Pardini Archives and will acquire that of Cicirini e Cantoni. Livorno preserves many fonds of the Cantieri Orlando and the new Borma Archives. Siena recently secured the archives of Delta Costruzioni, an important Tuscan housing association. Massa preserves the Bechini & Ciuffardi (marble) archives; Pistoia obtained the archives of the Conceria Cecchi di Pescia (tannery) and is willing to keep the archives of the Terme di Montecatini (thermal springs) if its administrators should decide to entrust it to a third party. Recently, the Pisa Archives acquired the archives of Nistri-Lischi, a very old publishing house, specializing in university handbooks, volumes dedicated to the history of Florence and contemporary Italian literature. On the other hand, it has not been possible to retrieve the records produced by Poste Italiane S.p.A.

Several municipalities also cooperated by accepting many archives: Florence accepted the archives of the Società Edificatrice Fiorentina, linked to the urban renewal of Florence in the 19th century; Pistoia, the San Giorgio Archives; Siena, the Sclavo Archives; Abbadia S. Salvatore, Massa Marittima and Montecatini Val di Cecina collected the archives of their respective mines; the municipality of San Giovanni Valdarno, the remainder of Ceraminter-Ironstone Archives (ceramic); Montevarchi, that of Cappellificio La Familiare (millinery); S. Casciano V.P., the remainder of the Officine Grafiche Stianti Archives (graphic design); Torrita di Siena, that of Unicoop in the area of Siena and Arezzo, including a number of small fonds for minor cooperatives; Sesto Fiorentino, that of Sitca-Cartiera Cini⁷ (paper factory) and some parts of the ceramics industry's minor archives⁸; Carrara collected that of the Ferrovia Marmifera (marble railway), which archives has been partially restored and has a good inventory.

Among the other public institutions, it is important to remember The Florentine Chamber of Commerce, which agreed to preserve the Longinotti Archives and the Lanificio Franchi Archives until they find another repository.

The University also took part in this rescue operation, agreeing to preserve the archives of Saivo (formerly Istituto Borosilicico). It is important to remember the Chamber of Commerce of Prato and its repositories, which, even before the merger with the Monti dei Paschi di Siena, accepted the records of Lanificio Cangiolì, currently held by the State Archives in Prato.

⁶ See R. DELFIOL, *L'archivio della cooperativa lavoratori Officina Fonderia delle Cure*, in «Ricerche Storiche», XXIII, n. 1 (January-April 1993), pp. 185 and following. It preserves records dating from the 1950s, when the cooperative acquired the old Fonderia delle Cure.

⁷ Actually this is the archives of Sitca; the archives of Cartiera Cini should be considered lost, apart some information in the Cini private archives.

⁸ Smaller than Richard Ginori Archives.

Many companies are increasingly reorganizing and valorizing the use of their business records, and this is a positive trend. . Some of these initiatives are currently in progress. Here is a list of those efforts in the order of their presentation to the Superintendence office. First of all, Enel (energy), which created a historical archives many years ago and which is now reorganizing its records with the help of an external group. Unfortunately for Tuscany, Enel archives are going to be transferred.

Whitehead Motofides (Alenia Whitehead) created an archives and an industrial museum including a part of the archives of the similar company, Gilardini and possibly one of its predecessor, Gallinari. I only know what was written in some publications and am still unable to speak from direct experience. It is a pity that nobody ever requested the professional advice of the Superintendence office to reorganize the archives.

The Cooperativa di Consumo Toscana-Lazio with headquarters in Piombino promoted the reorganization of the archives with our advice, entrusting it to professional archivists and achieving a remarkable inventory that includes a wealth of old industrial photographs.

The Solvay in Rosignano established a fruitful collaboration with the Archival Superintendence office thanks to its capable archivist, Fabio Fadda and in turn, began an interesting relationship with the municipality in Rosignano to valorize its archives with a project to create an on-line system for the consultation of its records inventories⁹.

Finally, it's important to remember the SMI, which created a common business archives (divided in two fields "historical" and "corporate") through the acquisition of large fonds from the archives of numerous Italian offices and from those of acquired companies. The headquarters of the business archives is in Limestre, where, with substantial investments, the records of the company were reorganized and reordered through up-to-date IT and archival systems. The final headquarters of the archives will be the plant of Fornaci di Braga under the auspices of the Foundation, currently under construction.

Even Piaggio, through its own foundation, is gradually rescuing the most important fonds from the enormous quantity of its records. We hope it will also host some endangered archives and maybe become the point of reference for a wider census in the future.

After all these initiatives, we can say that the works started in 1979 have led to many different results, all of them positive. Nothing greater has happened regarding the valorization managed by companies even if the last two cases cited above and the experiences of Pirelli (too early to judge), Enel, Whitehead, Magona d'Italia and Solvay seem to be important especially for the effects they can have on other similar companies. It's important to remember that Tuscany has never been the seat of large companies and that investing in intangible values like "image" or "history" may seem unjustified – it is not by chance that the main archival projects have issued from large companies or multinationals. On the contrary, the phenomenon of alternative preservation is preponderant, through entrusting the stewardship of the archives to entities that are different from the creators: both State Archives (institutions connected to records preservation by legislation and standard procedure), and municipalities that decided to take on the task of preserving the historical memory of their territories, including from a socio-economic point of view.

⁹ *Due archivi per una storia. Documenti in dialogo. Archivio storico della Società Solvay: censimento ed informatizzazione del fondo "Nascita ed espansione dell'agglomerato civile" (1913-1965)*, edited A. PORCIANI, Comune di Rosignano Marittimo-Solvay chimica Italia, 2005 (with enclosed CD).