

The Newly-Established Pirelli Foundation for the Valorization of the Group's Historical Records *by Chiara Guizzi*

Pirelli Historical Archives: Origin and History

The first nucleus of the Pirelli Historical Archives was created as a result of a milestone celebration. At the beginning of the 1940s, as the 75th anniversary of the company's foundation drew near, the top management decided to put together an extensive catalogued fond on the historical evolution of the company, which had grown to be a large international group. At the beginning of 1942, Mario Luzzatto, a Pirelli manager who had been forced to resign under the anti-Semitic racial laws, was given the task of writing «historical summaries regarding the development of the company for different occasions when they might be needed».

The preliminary work of collecting the records necessary to trace the company's history from its foundation (in 1872) up to that moment led to the creation of the first records collection of the Historical Archives. Luzzatto, assisted by a retired colleague, Gaetano Sermattei, inspected the archives of the company and took the most important files or single records. When it was not possible to have the original record (i.e. minutes of the company's institutions) partial or complete typed transcriptions were made.

Because of the increasing frequency of air raids on Milan, Luzzatto decided to photograph a substantial number of records in order to work safely on the images in his house-shelter in Baveno, on Lago Maggiore, where he had been evacuated with his family. His work was providential, since a large part of the archives was partially destroyed by a bombing in August 1943 that damaged and burned out the Pirelli plant in Milan. Mario Luzzatto was taken from his house in Baveno and subsequently killed by the German SS along with all his family in September 1943.

At his death, the records for the *Storia delle industrie Pirelli* (History of the Pirelli Industries) – as he had entitled his historical research – were complete referring to the period between 1872 and 1920; whereas following that time, there were only some references to records he had found but not yet extracted. His assistant Sermattei, using these references and Luzzatto's notes, continued to collect records until the 1940s obtaining them from the repositories that had not been destroyed by the bombs. After the war, the collection of the records was entrusted to the personnel of the Post and Archives Office, who worked on it on a yearly basis, analyzing only the printed records used for both internal and external use: balance sheets, price lists, catalogues, leaflets, advertising publications, circulars and corporate journals.

Towards the end of the 1960s, when *business history* started to attract interest in Italy, the Historical Archives was consulted for the first time by historians and researchers and in 1972, thanks to their interest, The Pirelli business archives became the first in Lombardia to receive official recognition of its “high historical interest” from the National Archival Superintendence Office. In time, the Historical Archives was extended with important sections such as advertising, audiovisual and photographic records as well as documentation about the acquisitions regarding the Pirelli skyscraper and the Bicocca Project. The only step left to be taken was the creation of a proper Historical Business Archives: the work of evaluating and selecting and organizing the enormous patrimony preserved in the repositories of the group.

The Pirelli Foundation and its Future Challenges

The Pirelli Foundation was created in July 2008 according to the wish of the three leader companies of the group (Pirelli & C., Pirelli Tyre, Pirelli & C. Real Estate) and of the Pirelli family. The aim of the Foundation is to promote and publicize business history and culture through projects that document business reality and its transformations – as exemplified by the recent photographic reportage on work at Pirelli commissioned to the photographer Carlo Furgeri Gilbert –, publishing initiatives, exhibitions, conferences and through the preservation and the valorization of the patrimony of the group.

The first act of the new foundation was the relocation of the Archives in a new headquarters in the Bicocca area on the northern outskirts of Milan. The center has been completely restored and equipped according to the highest preservation standards and will be opened at the beginning of 2010. From this point, an extensive reordering, cataloguing and valorization project will be launched that focuses on the existing records in the Archives, but also on enlarging the fonds with new records from the repositories of the group. The Foundation will become the reference point for the organization of the entire records management system, thus helping the Pirelli company to face some crucial and pressing challenges in contemporary records management such as the preservation and the management of digital archives.