Managing
Business Archives

Praise for *Managing Business Archives*

"*Managing Business Archives* effectively guides corporate archivists in understanding archival principles and determining when to pragmatically diverge from them. Business and non-business archivists alike will benefit from learning about the unique role the business archivist plays in the profession."

–Michael Bullington
McDonald's Corporation

"*Managing Business Archives* covers a lot of ground in a meaningful way. It thoughtfully, and pragmatically, discusses how archival theory and standards can be applied in a corporate setting. The authors clearly and succinctly walk through the many different responsibilities that corporate archivists hold and synthesize trends in both archives and business to help business archivists succeed."

–Dr. J. Gordon Daines III
Brigham Young University

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Edited by

Sarah A. Polirer

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Preface

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Sarah A. Polirer

*T*he impetus for writing *Managing Business Archives* is to improve the understanding of the nature of business archives and to respond to conversations on their perceived lack of open research, their function and operation, and how they survive in a dynamic business climate. Business models, and archives' place in them, vary worldwide based on cultural practices and regulations, so this book focuses on archives in the United States. This book will not discuss the history and development[1] nor the political nature of business archives but rather the practical application of archival theory and principles to business archives in the twenty-first century.

BOOK ARRANGEMENT

The book starts by defining business archives and business records. Each chapter, using the domains set out in the Academy of Certified Archivists' Role Delineation Statement, which "defines the knowledge and skills necessary for archival work,"[2] delves into the application of each domain in depth and discusses how the archival principles are applied. The chapter further explores the archival function (domain) broadly and provides practical suggestions that readers can apply. As organizations have different cultures and dynamics, they will need different solutions to problems. Each contributor has years of experience working in archives and business settings. While we don't have the final answers, we hope that the discussions will help reveal opportunities that may be present.

The introduction defines corporate/business archives and the records generated by the business/organization. It goes on to discuss the similarities and uniqueness of business archives, their place in an organization, and their reason for being.

In chapter 1, "Selection, Appraisal, and Acquisition: Understanding Records' Value," Ryan Donaldson discusses the identification and selection of materials for the collection. In the business archives setting, the objective of serving the business needs and requirements of the organization is critically important for carefully identifying and evaluating all potential acquisitions. Every decision includes a cost of some kind. The employees of the company are the primary creators and collectors. The key is to understand the way the company functions, the corporate culture, and the potential value that the records provide and counterbalance these knowledge points by adhering to the collecting policy criteria. The chapter also includes a survey of current practices by business archives.

In chapter 2, "Arrangement and Description: Balancing Use-Based Arrangement and Description," Paul Lasewicz employs the framework of use-driven arrangement and description (UDAD) to highlight the realities of corporate arrangement and description (A&D) and what makes sense for unique business environments. A&D in a corporate archives is notably different from A&D practiced in public repositories. There are two drivers which create that difference—the absence of a mission to share content externally and the fact that corporate archivists are the primary researchers in their archives. This chapter explores how these drivers make accepted professional standards for A&D less relevant to and therefore less suitable for corporate environments, and how they force corporate archivists to create their own flavor of A&D theory, objectives, policies, and practices. Lasewicz also addresses the realities and logistics of corporate A&D—establishing an approach to and guidelines for metadata creation, dealing with legacy descriptive content, creating metadata for digital content, understanding the impacts of technology, and balancing resources.

In chapter 3, "Reference Services and Access: Making Collections Relevant to Business Needs," Marie Force uses information gathered from interviews with business archivists when examining how tools, methods, and strategies are used in corporate archives to accomplish the four fundamental tasks of archival reference services and access. As information centers, corporate archives prioritize user services, but due to their mission, clients, and collections, they often diverge in practice from public repositories. Corporate archives work to meet the business needs of their parent companies, whose employees often request a quick answer to a question. They may allow varying degrees of public access, but you rarely find visiting hours, finding aids and public databases. Instead, archivists research and share findings and provide access to digital materials. The flip side of this remote access is that many corporate archives also hold large collections of objects and provide hands-on access for users, especially creative clients, requiring objects to travel or be available at the archival facility.

In chapter 4, "Preservation and Protection: Keeping Your House in Order," Scott Grimwood discusses the elements of design and layout, maintenance, security, and operations that a business archivist needs to consider when creating a sound environment for a business archives. The chapter includes practical examples of how three business archives coordinated with other parts of their organizations to achieve cost-effective work plans that made the most of available resources while still meeting the needs of the archives and their organizations.

In chapter 5, "Outreach, Advocacy, and Promotion: Marketing the Archives," Linda Edgerly and Sam Markham examine the role of advocacy and outreach in a business archives setting and

ways that may be useful to justify the cost of maintaining and managing an archives. The discussion includes an overview of contemporary tools, the capabilities of which are still being explored, and potentially useful and effective advocacy strategies in business settings. The authors draw on a range of resources, including a 2019 survey of practicing business archivists, to provide a practical framework for outreach and advocacy and insights that can be applied within archives regardless of financial resources, staffing, or the age of the archives.

In chapter 6, "Professional, Ethical, and Legal Responsibilities: Dealing with Professional Ethics, Copyright, Privacy and Access, and Accountability," Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt provides insights on how business archives balance both archival operations and the organization's mission to achieve the best outcomes for the archives and the organization within rules, laws, and regulatory requirements that deal with access, privacy, accountability, and professionalism. All archives are subject to the rules, laws, and regulations at their local, state, and federal levels. Archives in the business setting are also subject to those that affect their organization's business sector. They serve their own institutions and institutional missions, and their analysis needs to include a variety of perspectives. This chapter addresses such issues from the perspective of for-profit and nonprofit/not-for-profit organizations. It also briefly outlines commonalities between these types of archives and discusses concepts such as privacy and confidentiality, copyright, and standard archival ethical values.

In the book's final chapter, "Managing Archival Programs: Steering Your Craft Within a Sea of Change," Jamie Martin discusses the management of a business archives through her experience as a corporate archivist, relying on flexibility and versatility in an ever-changing, dynamic business environment. Unlike many public-facing repositories, there are no mandates for the existence of an archives within a corporate structure. Yet the benefits of an archives to a business are many: the ability to provide context behind current business decisions, chronicle the company's heritage, act as a source of historical fact, develop new product design, and protect a brand legacy, including patents and trademarks. It is not unusual for the corporate archivist to also be the corporate historian, curator, researcher, and digital asset manager. Martin describes the intersection of business skills, organizational culture, and archival skills. Business skills include business analysis, budgeting, financial, communication, project management, strategic planning, and prioritization. Most business archivists have one foot firmly in the past and another in the future, helping their parent institutions connect their legacy to their present and beyond. Change is constant, and organizations' priorities and landscapes are continually shifting.

During the writing of this book, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and civil unrest grew. Many business archives—indeed, all archives—needed to pivot and reprioritize work based on their organizations' decisions. At this writing, these events are still unfolding and there are still many lessons and takeaways to be discussed. We have tried to bring this to light where possible. Business archivists need to be flexible, adaptable, and creative so that they can pivot to meet organizations' changing priorities and needs. Ultimately, the archivist and the organization must determine how best to manage during difficult times. Hopefully, the practical discussions in this volume will assist in these dynamic decision points.

THANK YOU

The contributors and I would like to thank the business archivists who preceded us for setting the stage and for their oral and written contributions, and current business archivists for taking the time to respond to surveys and interviews, providing case studies, and continuing to publish and present information on issues that are relevant to business archivists. In addition, we would like to thank all of those with whom we have interacted professionally during our careers who have helped us make the best decisions possible for the archives we manage. Finally, we'd like to thank the Society of American Archivists (SAA) for publishing this work. There are many others to whom we'd like to express our gratitude—too numerous to thank individually—and to them we offer a heartfelt THANK-YOU!

We hope that those practicing and using business archives and managing organizational records and business records will find that the information in this book enhances their knowledge and that they gain insights and understanding of domestic business archives.

Sarah A. Polirer, CA, CRM

Disclaimer: The materials in this book represent our professional experience and opinions and are not the opinions of our respective institutions.

NOTES

1 For a summary of the history and development of business archives, see Christopher L. Hives, "History, Business Records, and Corporate Archives in North America," *Archivaria* 22 (January 1986): 40–57, https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11301.

2 The Role Delineation Statement defines the seven domains as Selection, Appraisal, and Acquisition; Arrangement and Description; Reference Services and Access; Preservation and Protection; Outreach, Advocacy, and Promotion; Managing Archival Programs; and Professional, Ethical, and Legal Responsibilities. Academy of Certified Archivists, "Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists," in *Handbook for Archival Certification,* rev. ed. (Albany, NY: Academy of Certified Archivists, 2019), 18–28, https://www.certifiedarchivists.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ACA-Handbook_Revised-_2019.pdf, captured at https://perma.cc/23U8-STR9.

Introduction

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Sarah A. Polirer

DEFINING A BUSINESS ARCHIVES

Before beginning the discussions, it is important to define the term "business archives." There are many types of business archives: from those that document the entire organization to those that specialize in only one aspect of the business (e.g., marketing, legal, architectural). Business archives are similar to and distinct from other types of archives (e.g., government, university, religious) and even unique from each other. Some may reside outside of the organization at a collecting repository while others may reside inside the business. What ties all types of business archives together is that each supports its parent organization in its mission.

Collecting repositories, such as those found at the Baker Library/Bloomberg at Harvard Business School, the New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division, the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University, or the Hagley Center for the History of Business, Technology, and Society, contain business records according to their collecting policies. These repositories are public driven and provide records as requested. The business collections generally comprise non-operating businesses. (Some active companies may deposit records, but those collections may have donor agreements and restricted access.) Additionally, business records are located throughout the country in specific business collections and in state and local historical collections (especially eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century records). These records are generally of defunct businesses. In some instances, current large businesses with a long history may have donated materials to a historical collection.

By contrast, corporate/business archives are largely private, with little to no public access granted directly to the material. The organization can be for-profit, nonprofit, or not-for-profit. The archives can be in-house, on deposit at another institution (for active/inactive businesses), heavily governmentally regulated, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), family owned, stockholder owned, privately owned, or global or local entities. The industries represented include, but are not limited to, transportation, insurance, utilities, consumer product, media (e.g., music, film, radio, television, art, literary, social media), technology, sport organizations, foundations, consulting, health care, religious, manufacturing, and architecture. Each industry sector has regulations as well as an internal compliance structure. The organization's legal formation and mission define the archives' role, including records access, but no one rule applies. Each organization will determine public records' access parameters and processes.

Organizational Structure

Corporate/business archives work the same as all organizational archives and start the basis of their work using core archival principles, but are pragmatic about their application. The archives is not a given at the organization; it is there because the need is recognized. Each organization type has its own set of idiosyncrasies depending on the industry sector but share the commonality that archives document, serve, and add value to an organization. The archivist's role is to see that the need and value continues to be recognized. Therefore, the archivist/archives plays a role in development of the collection and the services it provides to the organization. Business archivists need to leverage their knowledge of the organization and its culture to provide optimal results for the business and therefore the archives. The archivist needs to understand both archival and business-related items to leverage the archives and their archival expertise as well as their non-archival expertise to find opportunities in which to support the business's mission. In addition, business archivists need fundamental knowledge of how a business operates, special industry-related factors in the business they support, and the business's operation itself. Without value, the archives would not survive.

The variation of different types of businesses and legal formats help to define the collection policies; arrangement and description; reference and access to materials; preservation and protection; outreach, advocacy, and promotional directions; professional, ethical, and legal responsibilities; and archives management decisions. These functions are not mutually exclusive of each other. They will overlap and direct each other's policies and activities.

Business archives reside in many different organizational structures. No one alignment is correct or better than another. What is important is that the archives has management and organizational support to accomplish its functions. The nature of support, and thus the focus of the archives, may change over time, but in the long term, archival functions will grow and become well-rounded.

BUSINESS RECORDS

Business records are found in all departments of the organization: Finance, Legal, Marketing/Advertising, Communications, Sales, Human Resources, Facilities, Technology, and Product. These records are created to document the activity of the business cycle: creating and producing a

product to sell (e.g., creation, manufacturing, moving to market), selling the product (advertising/marketing), managing customers and products, complying with legal/regulatory review, tracking financial processes (e.g., sales, profits, loss, revenue, expenses), managing the organization (e.g., CEO, board of directors, president), and managing human resources (e.g., employees, benefits, payroll). Are all of these records archival? The best-practice solution is a records management program—as part of an established archives program, in a department outside of the archives, or as an outsourced function—in which the record is analyzed for the following values: administration/business needs, financial/audit review, legal/compliance, and historical/enduring.

A BUSINESS ARCHIVIST'S ROLE AND SKILL SET

The business archivist's (and the archives') main objective is to serve the business needs and requirements of the company. The archivist's role is to see that the organization continues to recognize the need for an archives and a professional archivist. Business needs can quickly change and are always evolving for the organization as well as the archives. In a critical difference from archivists working in other sectors, the business archivist often conducts extensive research for company colleagues as well as manages the collections, in effect serving in the additional roles of researcher and the organization's historian. The archivist's skill set must be well versed beyond archival functions and skills. Whether a lone arranger or part of a team, the business archivist must understand the culture of the business and align with the company's culture, values, and goals; business functions; historical value (secondary value of information—information created beyond the creator); and records management. Additionally, the skills required to be successful in the business environment include people skills, such as negotiation, networking, and change management; management skills, such as collections management, project planning, cost benefit analysis, risk assessment (including financial), and priority setting; and communications skills, including being articulate in writing and public speaking. The business archivist should also stay current in professional credentialing, knowledge, and best practices and have an entrepreneurial mindset. They must know their customers, collections, and working parameters to leverage the collections and their knowledge—both as professional experts (as archivists and historians) and subject matter experts (in how the archives' function and collections enhance the business)—to achieve the best for the business's current and future needs.

Overall, a business archivist must be flexible, adaptable, and creative to recognize the organization's changing priorities and needs. In seizing opportunities to meet those needs, the business archivist ensures the health, well-being, and currency of their business archives.