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British Guiana

ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

**GENERAL REVIEW
AND
REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD
1959 - 1961.**

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REPORT ON THE ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT
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FOREWORD

The coincidence of the publication of the first Report of the Archives Department with the celebration of the 1961 History & Culture Week has no doubt prompted the Premier (in whose Ministry the Archives falls) to invite me to write this Foreword. The Archives is necessarily very closely connected with our history and culture and I welcome the opportunity at this time to associate myself with this Report.

I have no doubt that as the store-house of the Nation's records, the Archives will become in time the centre for the study of our history, and thus play an important part in encouraging the growth of that Guianese consciousness which History & Culture Week is designed to foster. The study of our past can supply the spark to fuse our various communities into a single nation.

With these remarks I commend the first Report of the Archives Department to Government Officials and the public.

C. V. NUNES ,

Minister of Education & Social Development.

October 24, 1961

REPORT
on the
ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION

Two years at the Archives have convinced me that a paper ought to be issued setting out the aims and functions of the Department and our plans for the future. Such a paper would not only enable us to satisfy public curiosity or remove the misconceptions about the Department, but would, I hope, procure for us that close co-operation of Government Departments and private citizens which is essential for our success. We have been credited at various times with being a library, a museum, an information bureau and even a depository for unwanted Departmental rubbish. These are serious misconceptions and can hinder our work at the Archives. It is therefore important that we should say what we are. And this is what this Report seeks to do.

The Archives is a Government Department charged with the custody of the Nation's official records. Records are created by Government Departments in the course of the discharge of their business. When the business that led to the creation of a particular record has been transacted, the immediate value of that record is at an end. But the record may have a further long-term value, to the administrator as a precedent or a guide or for the information it contains, or to the scholar for historical research. It is these records that have served the immediate purposes for which they were created but have a further long-term value that are our concern at the Archives.

The work of the Archives Department will unfold itself in the course of this Report. But I wish to say for the time being that the Archives is not concerned with the preservation of a few selected ancient documents connected with some important

personage or historical event and preserved for their antiquarian value. We are concerned with the preservation of whole groups or classes of records useful to the administrator or the scholar, and preserved, not as isolated pieces, but as organic units, in the order in which they accumulated as current office papers.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHIVES

It is fitting that we should begin with the history of the Archives. The history of the Archives is a sorry story of neglect and misadventure. Our records (the oldest about 250 years old) accumulated in a haphazard manner. About 5000 volumes of records of the old Colony of Essequibo were brought from Fort Island to Georgetown in 1812, but many of these appear to have been destroyed or lost during a fire in 1828, which damaged the old public building in which they were stored. Fortunately copies of some of these records had been made in 1777 by the Colony of Demerara and some of these survived. These were stored in another building until the present Public Building was completed in 1834, when they were transferred to it. The Central Secretariat was accommodated in the new building and its non-current records took their place alongside the older Dutch records. The records appear to have been stored quite early in the tower room or dome. In 1881 an attempt was made to sort them, but not much appears to have been done.

Towards the end of the century, however, an event occurred which showed the value of our records. This was the boundary dispute with Venezuela. A feverish search was now made in the Archives for documents to support our case. Local experts as well as experts from the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office took part in the hunt for documents. Writing later (1911) Rodway tells the story:

"If ever a country neglected its records more than British Guiana it would be hard to find. Current documents were of course properly kept and docketed, but those of real historical importance

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were treated as rubbish. At the time when I was gathering materials for my history, Sir Charles Bruce engaged me to catalogue the books in the Government Secretary's Office. Some of these were already falling to pieces, and the most valuable, at my suggestion, were bound..... But this was a small portion of the documents - the remainder were stored like bags of rice in a warehouse. When, however, it became necessary to search for evidence of a former control of the disputed territory, these bags were taken to two sheds at the back of the Public Buildings and emptied on the floor one at a time. What a mess! Loose books, parcels and documents, and printed papers, all more or less rotted by damp or riddled by insects, were thrown down and trampled on by the unskilled persons deputed to assort them...."

In spite of the lesson taught by the boundary dispute, the plea of Rodway and others, and the injunctions of the Colonial Office, nothing was done to improve conditions of storage or to appoint a custodian for the Archives until 1931. In this year, Dr W. E. Roth, a pensioner, was appointed Superintendent of the Archives, which post he held until his death in 1933. He was succeeded in turn by other pensioners, Mr J. G. Cruickshank (1935-45) and J. R. Muss (1945-53). The appointment of a Superintendent of the Archives did not mean the establishment of an archival institution. It was merely a step to ensure the preservation of the records housed in the dome of the Public Buildings.

However, by 1953, the awakening of national consciousness, the influence of the University College of the West Indies and enthusiasm of a few intellectuals combined to induce Government to take steps to establish a proper Archives. At the invitation of the Government, Mr C. V. Black, the Jamaican Archivist, came to British Guiana the next year to advise the Govern-

ment on the care of its records, and his report was submitted in 1955. As a result of the recommendations contained in the Report, the post of Archivist was created. I was appointed and assumed duty on 1st August, 1959.

On assuming duty, I found that the old Dutch records and those of the Central Secretariat and the Legislature were stored in the dome of the Public Buildings. Newspaper files going back to 1803 were stored in a room at the Labour Department, Kingston. The older records of Government Departments were still stored in the various Departments. A survey of the records in the dome soon revealed that a great deal had been lost. Neglect, indiscriminate destruction, rats, insects, humidity and "brown decay" had all taken their toll, and much of what had survived was in a bad state of preservation. In addition, the general state of the dome was simply chaotic. Papers, old and new, valueless and priceless, were strewn together side by side. Apart from the fact that it was small and leaked like a sieve, the dome was not suitable as a repository, and so at the beginning of 1960, we transferred the records hitherto housed there to the River Police Building, which was made available as a temporary repository. (A summary inventory of the records at the Archives is given in Appendix 11.)

3. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE ARCHIVES

The functions of the Archives are to receive from Government Departments all their non-current records that are of value for administrative purposes or historical research and make them available to officials or general researchers. Of these the official function is paramount. Official records contain information on every aspect of the activity of Government; some are invaluable as precedents or as guides to future action; some contain evidence of financial and legal commitments that must be preserved to protect the Government. They are, in fact, the great reservoir of official knowledge and experience, and the first function of the Archives is to preserve those that officials

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need for their own purposes. The duty of the Archivist to the historian or general researcher is secondary, even though ultimately it is the historian who will make the greatest use of the records preserved.

These functions involve a wide range of activities - the selection of Departmental records for preservation, the repair, rehabilitation and preservation of those at the Archives, the micro-filming of some as an alternative to repair, arranging, packing, labelling and listing those at the Archives, making them available to Government Departments or to the public and producing information from them in response to official and other enquiries.

In addition, for the Archives to be an effective research institution and a centre for local studies, it should compile an administrative history of the Country, build a research library, collect church and private records and procure lists or calendars or (microfilm) copies of records on British Guiana in other Archives, especially those in the United Kingdom.

4. THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED ON AT THE ARCHIVES

(i) The Review of the Departmental Records.

The biggest, most difficult and most urgent problem facing the Archivist is the review of the records of Government Departments and the transfer to the Archives of those worthy of preservation. Departmental records are still in the Departments that created them. Many have, of course, been lost - through neglect, the ravages of insects, rats and mildew and indiscriminate destruction. But there are still large accumulations in many Departments, especially the older ones like the Registrar's and the Lands and Mines. These either continue to be neglected or require valuable filing equipment and ever-increasing storage space.

It is essential that the records of every Department should be reviewed now and a decision made as to what should be kept and what destroyed. The review of Departmental records is a joint operation of the Department and the Archives. The responsibil-

ity rests with the Department, but the work must be done in collaboration with, and under the supervision of, the Archives. Generally speaking, in the work of review, the Department will advise on the administrative value of records, and the Archives on their historical value. C.S.O. Circular No. 5 of 1961 and the manual accompanying it on the Preservation of Departmental Records, issued to Departments on 26th May last, have already set out the work that has to be done in Departments. (See Appendix 1) It is now necessary for the Archives to have a team of Inspecting Officers to work in co-operation with the Departmental Record Officers of the various Departments.

I should like to repeat that the review of the backlog of records should be done now. Time is not on our side. Every day brings into existence new records in every Department. Thus the records increase in number, review becomes more difficult and the chance of damage and loss greater.

It is sometimes forgotten that the review of records, involving the destruction of valueless records and the transfer to the Archives of those of value, is of as much value to the Department as it is to the Archives. Not only will it put an end to the waste of space, equipment, and man-power caused by the continued retention of valueless records, but, even more important, it will engender greater efficiency and economy throughout the Government by bringing into service vital records of a few years back, so often lost under a mass of valueless material.

- (ii) Ensuring the safety and security of the Records transferred to the Archives.

Records transferred to the Archives should be housed in a fireproof building and kept on steel shelving, both as a fire precaution and as a deterrent to termite attack; they should be examined regularly for insect infestation or the presence of mildew, and if necessary, treated; they should be protected from the deleterious effects of the weather and direct sunlight, and - very important - from the grave dangers of unsuper-

vised access which could lead to the loss of the records themselves or to the information they contain being tampered with.

These things necessitate measures to make the repository weatherproof, the strict enforcement of the No-Smoking rule in the Archives, the regular examination, cleaning and treatment of the records, careful arrangement to prevent their being misplaced, strict rules for the custody of keys and constant supervision of researchers when records are being consulted.

These security measures are an important part of the work of the Archivist. Every document preserved at the Archives is in its own way unique and irreplaceable and an authentic record of a certain transaction, and it is most important that the record is not lost or its authenticity impaired.

(iii) Repairing and rehabilitating records.

Because of past neglect, bad conditions of storage and climate, a great deal of our records are in a poor state of preservation. Some of these can be repaired. (Others cannot be repaired economically: the problem they present is dealt with in the next section.) Those that can, must be repaired or otherwise rehabilitated as early as possible. We have begun this task. With the use of new principles and techniques, records which previously would have been regarded as beyond recovery, are repaired and returned to use. But a much bigger staff of binders is needed to cope with the work. Some equipment for our repair room has already been acquired, but more is necessary.

(iv) Microfilming records.

Many of our records are in such a poor state of preservation that they cannot be repaired except by expensive processes. This is true of our valuable collection of newspapers going back to 1803, and of the records of our legislature and law-courts, some of which go back to an even earlier period. These have suffered from bad storage and handling, from attacks by rats and termites, but

particularly from "brown decay" (caused by the use of inks of certain types which have an excessive amount of acid and of bad quality paper). In the case of documents in the advanced stage of brown decay, it is impossible to turn a page without cracking it or reducing it to powder. In such cases repair is impossible. In less serious cases, it might be possible to sandwich each affected page between two layers of silk gauze, but this process is very expensive. The only practicable answer to this problem is microfilming, which makes it possible for a photographic copy of a document in a bad state of preservation to be made available to researchers.

Through the courtesy of the University of Florida Libraries, we have been able to microfilm some of our newspapers. This is a beginning, but the problem can be solved only by establishing a microfilm section at the Archives.

It should be noted that a microfilm unit would also make it possible for copies of our records to be made available to overseas educational institutions and students and thus be a source of revenue.

- (v) Sorting, arranging and making finding aids or means of reference.

Archive sorting is not easy at the best of times: in the chaotic state of our Archives with a confused accumulation of miscellaneous material hoarded in the dome and now bequeathed to us it is an unenviable task. The basic principle of archive arrangement is that of "provenance" or "respect des fonds", which requires that records should be maintained in the organic units in which they accumulated originally. This principle of provenance enables a better understanding of the workings and character of the Department that produced the record, and it is only in this context that the full significance of the documents can be appreciated.

Sorting and arranging must be followed by listing. Documents are preserved so that they may be made available for use, and they cannot be put to effective use without proper "finding aids" in the

form of lists, inventories and indexes of various kinds. It is important that the Archivist should know what documents he has in his custody and where they are stored. This can only be done by proper labelling and the provision of lists of all the records in the Archives. But a bare list will satisfy only the basic needs of the Archives. If the Department is to be effective, it should have other finding aids, which will not only tell of the existence of a particular document or give an idea of what information it contains, but will also record what documents exist dealing with a particular subject. And so, in addition to the simple lists which tell what documents are at the Archives and where they are stored, there is need for detailed descriptive lists, inventories and indexes.

(vi) Acting as Consultant on Archival Matters.

The Archives Department is concerned with every aspect of the preservation of records. The work of the Department does not begin only when the records become non-current and are ready to be reviewed for destruction or transfer to the Archives. The Department is interested in records from the time they are created. The office papers of today are the archives of to-morrow and their treatment or arrangement as current office papers can affect their value as Archives. It is important therefore that advice should be made available to Departments on the arrangement and care of their current records.

Advice can be given on paper, ink and pens. Paper varies in quality and the Archives Department would be in a position to advise, for instance, that in the interest of economy, a cheap quality paper should be used for certain categories of records which are of ephemeral importance, but that a better quality paper should be used for certain records which have a long-term value. The Archives can also advise on the kind of ink which should be used for certain records and generally on the permanence of inks, carbon paper and ball-pointed pens.

The Archives Department certainly needs to give advice on files and filing methods and on registry systems on the whole. My observations

have shown that there is a crying need for this. Registry practices in many Departments not only make the review of records difficult but are cumbersome and ineffective in their everyday working. Some general suggestions on this matter have already been made in the manual on the Preservation of Departmental Records, but detailed advice can be given which will lead to speed and efficiency in Departments and facilitate the regular and systematic review of their records.

My investigations have shown, too, that records are treated with the greatest neglect at that intermediate stage when they have ceased to be current office papers, but not yet been reviewed for transfer to the Archives. The solution to this is, of course, prompt review, but if this is not possible then the records should be stored under proper conditions, every precaution being taken against their destruction by insects, rodents, damp or fire.

In these matters the Archives Department will work in close co-operation with the Organisation and Methods Division of the Finance Secretariat and the Fire Department.

- (vii) Producing records or the information contained in them to Government Officials and to the Public.

I have been dealing with the first broad aspect of our work - preserving our official records of value. Let us turn now to the second aspect - making the documents or the information contained in them available to officials and other researchers.

As I have said before, the first function of the Archivist is to preserve official records for official purposes. Apart from serving routine administrative functions as providing precedents or guides and protecting the rights of Government, the Archives can be of great help in the economic and social development of our Country. Research and surveys are indispensable pre-requisites to development. It is the duty of the Archivist to help Government in its quest for research material. During my attachment to the Colonial Office in the United Kingdom, I was able to see the dependence of

the administration on their Archives for research material. I am convinced that our Archives Department can play an equally useful role in this Country. I have, for instance, been able to produce a number of reports for the Land Development Department, which I think have been of value in the scheme for the development and settlement of the Interior. And I think that there must be a great deal of information on the growing of crops like cotton, cocoa, and coffee and on the types of soil in the various districts of the Country which can be of help to the Government in its Development Programme.

The Archives, is, of course, also useful to students and other researchers. In fact, it is probably true to say that ultimately it is the general researcher who will make the most use of it. Research students have been coming here from the University College of the West Indies and from English and American Universities, but an increasing number of Guianese have also been using the Archives. Political events in British Guiana, the institution of History and Culture Week and the competitions and other activities associated with it and the stress being laid in schools on local history have all caused a great upsurge of interest in our Country's past and led to a great demand for information or for access to records at the Archives. We have been of help in this sphere also, not only in producing records and information, but in giving advice on research methods and techniques. Much more can be done, however, with an adequate staff.

(viii) Collecting private records.

As Government Archivist I am primarily concerned with Government records. But Government records constitute only a part of the records of a country. The records of local authorities, semi-public and ecclesiastical bodies and private individuals and organisations are needed to supplement official records to give a complete picture of a country and its people. In the case of British Guiana, these types of records are doubly valuable because of the wide gaps in our official collection. It is therefore important that we should make a

special effort to acquire such records.

I have already made a general appeal for private records both here and in the United Kingdom. The Daily Argosy have given me twenty-six volumes of old British Guiana Newspapers, the Public Free Library one hundred and twenty-five volumes and the Daily Chronicle have promised to transfer what they have. The Mayor and Town Council of New Amsterdam have agreed to transfer their valuable old Minute Books going back to 1883 and the Mayor and Town Council of Georgetown have agreed to go into the question of the eventual custody of their records when they have been sorted and arranged and listed. The British Records Association in the United Kingdom has sent me one or two records on British Guiana which came into their hands and has promised to send me all future acquisitions.

But this is only the beginning. A tremendous amount needs to be done, and done urgently, if we are to save and acquire the few records that have survived and are still in the Country. The records of churches, friendly societies, social and sports clubs, literary, historical and scientific societies, business firms, chambers of commerce, trade unions and political bodies and private individuals provide a rich variety of material, from its very nature unknown to official archives. To these must be added artificial collections such as are found in lawyers' offices. These records are of the greatest historical value, and are, in particular, absolutely necessary for the study of economic and social history. For instance, there has recently been a great demand for information on working class movements in British Guiana, which our official records have been unable to satisfy. Unless immediate attention is paid to private records, very little would be left and important aspects of our national story would remain unknown.

(ix) Building a reference and a technical Library.

A reference library to be used in conjunction with the records is necessary for the Archives. We must build up a comprehensive library of books, maps, prints and drawings bearing upon the history

of the Country. In this connexion I am hoping that in due course the Archives will become a depository for all books and newspapers published in British Guiana.

A start has already been made here. We have been very fortunate in being able to acquire Mrs A. M. Fulton's library of books on British Guiana, some of which are out of print and rare. I am hoping that we shall be able to augment our collection by acquiring more of the rarer books from antiquaries and book-sellers abroad.

A technical library for the use of the Archivist and his staff is also a necessity, for it is important that the Archivist should be kept abreast of developments in Archive science. In this respect the journals of Archival Societies are important. We have already started to subscribe to "The Archives", the Journal of the British Records Association, and the "American Archivist," published by the Society of American Archivists, and I am arranging for "Archivum" published by the International Council on Archives to be sent to us.

(x) Compiling an Administrative History of British Guiana.

An administrative history of British Guiana is urgently needed. I said above that in accordance with the principle of "respect des fonds" records are maintained or arranged at the Archives in their original administrative groupings. To maintain these groupings and to sort and arrange disordered records properly, therefore, the Archivist needs an administrative history of the Country which would give the origin and development of every Department or Office, whether it has become defunct or still exists.

A knowledge of the administrative system is of value to the researcher also. It tells him in what group or class of records to look for the information he wants, and it gives some idea of the value of the records; for the full significance of a record can be appreciated only when there is a clear understanding of the workings and character of the

Department or Office that produced it. An administrative history gives life and meaning to the records.

Though we are a young nation and our history does not go far back in time, a knowledge of our administrative history is still essential, particularly because of the change from the Dutch administrative system to the British. Without this we would not know, for example, that for information on land matters before the last years of the 19th century (when a special Land Department was created) we must search the records of the Court of Justice and, later on, those of the Government Secretary's Office. Nor would we be able to appreciate the full significance of the Minutes of the Court of Policy of the years just before the middle of the 18th century unless we know that this was both an administrative and a judicial body and was made up entirely of officials of the Dutch West India Company.

(xi) Acquiring Copies of Documents in Overseas Archives.

Our aim is that the Archives should become eventually a local research centre and particularly a centre for the study of local history. It is partly for this reason that it is planned that it should be a repository for private as well as official records, and it is also partly for this reason that we are seeking to build up a comprehensive research library of all books, maps, plans, prints and drawings on British Guiana.

But we would need to do much more than this to make the Archives a real centre for local studies. We must have copies of documents in overseas archives. My investigations have revealed that there is a great mass of material on British Guiana in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. In some cases it may be possible to acquire the originals by gift or purchase, but in most cases microfilm copies will have to be made.

The overseas records on British Guiana include a few records in the Spanish Archives, a considerable amount in the Dutch Archives, and, of course, a mass of material in public and private

archives in the United Kingdom (See Appendix 111) Of these the biggest accumulation is the Colonial Office records at the Public Record Office. (See Appendix 1V) Some of the Colonial Office records and all the Spanish and Dutch records will have to be copied eventually if our Archives is to become in any real sense a centre for the study of local history.

The private records on British Guiana in the United Kingdom are comparatively few but they are most important. They include the records of the various missionary societies and of private families, which throw much light on social and economic conditions in British Guiana in the past. An example or two might show how valuable is the information contained in these private records. The Archivist of the Essex County Record Office tells me that he has a most valuable group of some 30 photographs and over 200 letters relating to Providence and Lewis Manor and other plantations in Berbice as well as in the rest of the Country. The letters, which cover the period from 1861 to 1893, are full of details of the running of the plantations, methods of cane cultivation, social matters and local customs. And the Archivist of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland says that he has a small group of letters and memoranda dated 1839-44 relating to Malgre Tout. It appears that in 1839 John Christy of Kircassock, County Down, Northern Ireland, after trading with British Guiana for a number of years, bought Plantation Malgre Tout jointly with James Archibald Holmes of Demerara. The property was sequestrated under rather unfortunate circumstances, and in the ensuing dispute it was alleged that "such glaring cases of injustice.....have been but too common in British Guiana."

It is most important that these records should be copied for use at the Archives. It will be some time, of course, before this can be done, but it is necessary to take steps now to ascertain what exists. I am in touch with record offices in the United Kingdom and I have already acquired some useful information, but a thorough investigation needs to be carried out now.

(xii) Establishing an Archive Museum.

An archive museum must be an important

section of the Archives. Here documents, maps, prints, drawings or photographs relating to the history of the Country would be presented in such a way as to attract attention, arouse curiosity and encourage further study.

In British Guiana where the Archives is a new Department now being established, the archive museum will be of special importance. It will not merely provide satisfaction or delight for the casual visitor or the tourist. It can perform an important educational and cultural service by inspiring students from educational institutions, and the curious generally, to follow up the story behind the museum pieces and thus engage in serious research. And it can help to make Government Officials and the public more record conscious.

(xiii) Publication of regular Journal and of Lists and Documents.

It is important that the Archives Department should publish a regular journal giving an idea of the work of the Department. The journal would contain, for example, information on the main groups and classes of records at the Archives and on new acquisitions, copies of documents of special importance or interest and articles and notes based on historical research.

Lists and documents should be published as the need for them arises. Generally speaking, the publication of selected documents should be undertaken by universities or historical societies, but I think that there is a case for the publication of documents on certain aspects of our history. This, however, can only be attempted when we have a good knowledge of what documents are at the Archives.

5. ESTABLISHING THE ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

I have dealt above with the work that needs to be done by the Archives Department. But apart from these specific activities, the Archivist must spend a great deal of time during the first few

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years of the Department in establishing it, not merely in the narrower sense of putting it on a legal footing but in the wider sense of selling the idea to the Country and gaining acceptance for it.

The policy of the Department had first of all to be determined. Were we, for example, going to restrict ourselves to official records, or were we going to aim at a National Archives which would include all categories of records? Whose should be the responsibility for determining what records should be preserved? For how long should records be retained in Departments before being transferred to the Archives? What should be the principles governing access to records? Our policy on most of these questions has already been worked out and it now remains to enact suitable legislation in the light of our decisions. Regulations will also have to be made under the Ordinance setting out the work to be done in Departments in relation to their records.

But rules and regulations are not enough. In British Guiana the Archivist is a pioneer and he must bear this in mind all the time. He must convince both officials and public alike of the value of the Archives. Government Officials, especially those of the Treasury, have to be persuaded that the existence of a proper Archives can promote economy and efficiency in Departments, and the Government as a whole has to be reminded that in helping to create a sense of community or national consciousness, the Archives performs a function of real national importance.

The pioneering spirit must also show itself in a readiness to seize every opportunity to secure the preservation of other categories of records. Local Government bodies, churches and private bodies and individuals who have records should be given voluntary help to sort, arrange and preserve these records, whether or not they are willing to deposit them at the Archives. A great deal of tact is needed in dealing with private citizens who have records, and perhaps in no other aspect of the Archivist's work in a Country like British Guiana is so much pioneering fervour called

for, as in this.

6. NEED FOR ADEQUATE STAFF

The foregoing paragraphs set out the tremendous amount of work that has to be done if we are to save the records that have survived and establish a flourishing Archives. The work is frightening. But it is important and has to be done, and a start has been made. It must, however, be prosecuted with vigour, and for this a much larger and adequately trained staff is essential.

The greatest need at the moment is for trained professional staff. Graduates, preferably in History, and with the necessary training in Archive Administration, are needed to work as Inspecting Officers in close co-operation with Departmental Record Officers in the review of Departmental records and their preparation for transfer to the Archives. There is need also for clerical staff to sort, arrange and list the records at the Archives. We are in the unenviable position of being unable to say what the majority of the millions of documents at the Archives deal with. And to these must be added typing, technical and subordinate staff (binders, paperkeepers and messengers) to deal with other aspects of the work already described.

The Archives is a common service Department with control over the records of the entire Service. Only with an adequate staff will it be able to perform its function effectively.

7. NECESSITY FOR AN ARCHIVE REPOSITORY

I should like to say, finally, that the construction of a specially designed and equipped archive repository is an inescapable necessity, and to urge that it should be given active consideration. The River Police Building, which we now occupy, is not suitable as a permanent home for the Archives. Its size, its location, its internal layout, the fact that it is not fireproof - all militate against its use as anything more than a very temporary repository. As regards size, there

is dire need at the moment for additional space to accommodate the influx of records at the Archives. But regardless of what temporary arrangements it might be possible to make for the storage of the records, the construction of a suitable repository is absolutely necessary. The repository should be specially designed and should be fire-proof and burglar-proof. It should also provide security against direct sunlight dust and gases, humidity and extremes of temperature, all of which could best be secured by means of air-conditioning. It should be specially equipped, and contain space for storage, repair and photographic work, search and exhibition rooms and a reference library. I have expressed the view that a suitable site for the repository is the vacant land in Company Path east of the Museum, if this could be made available. Whatever site is decided on, however, the question of the construction of a proper repository should be taken in hand now, and not continue to be shelved.

B. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I should like to repeat that a flourishing Archives Department can give tremendous help to Government Departments not only in routine administrative matters or in fostering economy and efficiency, but in providing research material or information on the bigger problems of social and economic development for the Country. As a centre for the study of our history, the Archives can also perform a useful educational function, especially now that we have come to realise that education must fit us for the community in which we live, and are consequently laying emphasis on local studies. The Archives can play a leading role in helping to make this new concept a reality. But perhaps the greatest service that the Archives can render British Guiana at this juncture, is, by resurrecting our past, to create among our diverse peoples the feeling of a common heritage and a common destiny, which is so vital for nationhood.

NOTE

This report is written in the first person, and in a personal style generally, to encourage that wide range of readers necessary if the objectives stated in the Introduction are to be achieved.

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APPENDIX I

THE PRESERVATION OF DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS

A GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS

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THE PRESERVATION OF DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS
A PROVISIONAL GUIDE FOR GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

1. AIM OF GUIDE

General Orders 316 and 317 make provision for the destruction of Departmental records no longer considered to be of official value and for the preservation of those of actual or potential historic interest. But in the absence of an Archivist and an Archives Department to which records could be transferred, these regulations were not observed. Now that an Archives Department has been established, however, it has become necessary for Departments to adopt a routine for the disposal of their records.

An efficient system cannot be adopted, however, until the past accumulation of records in Departments has been "worked through", those of no value destroyed and those of value transferred to the Archives for permanent preservation. This manual has therefore been issued to help Departments to deal with their backlog of records and so set the stage for the adoption of a permanent system for the review and disposal of their records.

It sets out briefly the objects and functions of the Archives Department and the principles which must be followed by Departments in selecting records and preparing them for transfer to the Archives. It is provisional: it is designed to deal with the special problems involved in reviewing a large accumulation of records and will be superseded by a permanent guide when this object has been accomplished.

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

Records are created by Departments in the course of the discharge of their business. When the business that led to the creation of a particular record has been transacted the immediate value of

that record is at an end. But the record may now have a further value: it may be useful to the administrator as a precedent or a guide, or to the scholar for research. A record which has served its immediate purpose but has a long-term value has qualified for admission to the Archives.

The functions of the Archives are to receive from Government Departments all their non-current records that are of value for administrative purposes or historical research and make them available to officials or general researchers. Of these the official functions is paramount. Official records contain information on every aspect of the activity of Government: some are invaluable as precedents or as guides to future action; some contain evidence of financial and legal commitments that must be preserved to protect the Government. They are in fact the great reservoir of official knowledge and experience, and the first function of the Archives is to preserve those that officials need for their own purposes. The duty of the Archivist to the historian or general researcher is secondary, even though ultimately it is the historian who will make the greatest use of the records preserved.

These functions are, of course, not separate or distinct or mutually exclusive. For instance, records preserved for official purposes are almost invariably of value for historical research also. But the distinction is important. It explains why the establishment of an Archives or Record Office is (or should be) regarded as one of the first duties of a Government. It influences the type of machinery that must be set up to review records, and, of course, the selection of records for permanent preservation and it affects policy governing access to records.

3. WORK TO BE DONE IN DEPARTMENTS

The responsibility for the selection and transfer to the Archives of records worth preserving rests with the Departments themselves. The Archives Department is responsible for co-ordinating the arrangements and supervising the

way in which they are carried out and participating in the final selection of records. It is important therefore that the work to be done in the Departments should be clearly set out.

The work of reviewing in every Department should be in the hands of a Departmental Record Officer. This should be a senior officer of the Department charged with the over-all responsibility for all its records. And it would be the duty of the Departmental Record Officer, in consultation with an Inspecting Officer from the Archives Department, to draw up a programme for the review of the records of his Department.

(i) Survey of the non-current records in the Department.

The first task of the Departmental Record Officer is to carry out a survey of all the non-current records in his Department down to within the last 10 years and make a list of the principal classes. (1953 is, from several points of view, suitable as a dividing line in the review of the backlog of records, but some Departments might wish to use a later date.) The records in Government Departments generally fall into the following classes:

- (a) Correspondence (Letter books, files, etc.)
- (b) Registers of Correspondence.
- (c) Other Registers (Ships, voters, immigrants, etc.)
- (d) Accounting Records.
- (e) Minute Books (of Boards, Committees, etc.)
- (f) Legal or Judicial Proceedings and Instruments, and Case Papers.
- (g) Maps and Plans.
- (h) Miscellaneous.
 - Laws, Ordinances, Rules and Regulations.
 - Reports of all kinds, blue books, etc.
 - Gazettes and newspapers.
 - Minutes and Debates of the Legislature.

Many Departments will have classes peculiar to themselves like Wills, Petitions and Proclamations. These should be included in the list as well as classes relating to functions of the Department which have become obsolete or have been transferred to other Departments.

The survey helps the Departmental Record Officer to acquire a knowledge of the records in his charge, their volume and value and the approximate time the review should take, and this enables him to draw up a programme for their review.

(ii) The Review

(a) Procedure.

The actual work of review may be carried out by a junior officer, possibly the clerk in charge of the Registry; for it is generally not possible to devote senior staff to this work. Fairly detailed instructions should, however, be drawn up by the Departmental Record Officer. Separate lists must be made of the records to be preserved and destroyed. The Reviewing Clerk will mark down for preservation records which are of value for both administrative and historical purposes. Since no routine of disposal has been developed in Departments, it is expected that in the review of the backlog of records in Government Departments there will be frequent consultations between the Reviewing Clerk, the Departmental Record Officer and the Inspecting Officer from the Archives. Broadly speaking, in the appraisal of records for preservation or destruction, the Departmental Record Officer will advise on their administrative value and the Inspecting Officer on their historical value. Any record which a Department wants kept for administrative purposes must be kept. In any case, when the review is completed and the lists ready, the Inspecting Officer will examine the records, and, in consultation with the Departmental Record Officer, determine finally what should be destroyed and what preserved. The review procedure need not be the same for all Departments: it need only be borne in mind that it must be a joint operation, and that the

needs of both the administrator and the scholar should be taken into account.

(b) Principles.

It is hoped that with the experience gained working through the backlog of records, it will be possible eventually to give detailed suggestions as to what papers should be preserved and what destroyed. In the meantime, however, some general hints are given here which may be of value to Departmental Record Officers. Every Department will want to keep the major records of its activities. Minutes and other documents which give decisions on policy, correspondence leading to significant activity, title deeds, papers containing legal proceedings, maps and plans, registers, memoranda of cases put through or operations carried out, are some of the types of records needed for administrative purposes. The Archives, through its Inspecting Officer, will advise on the documents which must be preserved for historical or general research. Such records will throw light on the history of the Department - how and why it was established, the work with which it was concerned, how it was conducted, and with what results. Under this category come, also, records needed for technical research and those dealing with persons, bodies, places and events and activities of importance.

There are however, certain specific categories of records which are subject to special treatment. According to Financial Regulation No. 240 certain accounting records must be preserved for certain minimum periods. These regulations aim to give legal protection to Departments: no archival principle is involved. The question of whether a particular accounting record has archival value should be gone into independently of its retention for a minimum period at the request of the Accountant General. (Generally speaking, a modern accounting record should not be permanently preserved unless it contains specially interesting information. The finances of a Department can be gathered from the Estimates. Old accounting records, however, dating back to a period for which few records are available,

might be a useful source of information.)

It is suggested, too, that no paper earlier than 1860 should be destroyed, and records between 1860 and 1910 should be destroyed only after the most careful examination. This is because of the fewness of our records before 1860 and the wide gaps in our collection between this date and 1910 - which give all records of this period a greater value than they would otherwise have.

Personal files of distinguished officers should be permanently preserved as of historical interest. It is suggested, too, that the files of all persons in bodies like the Police Force might be kept. (In any case, registers of such people should be kept.) Other personal files may be destroyed ten years after an officer has retired or died.

One or two sets of serial material like gazettes and blue books are also preserved.

Case papers should be considered on their own merits.

On the other hand, records which may generally be destroyed are correspondence of minor or ephemeral importance, minor accounting records after audit and expiry of the statutory term, agreements and contracts of temporary or minor importance, spare copies of minutes, progress reports, drafts, memoranda of issues and receipts and minor establishment records like attendance books, leave records and routine reports.

(c) Special problems connected with the review of the file.

From what has been said above, it will be seen that it is the correspondence files what will present the reviewer with the greatest difficulty. Correspondence ranges from letters of ephemeral interest to despatches dealing with policy. At the two extremes selection is easy. Files contain applications for employment, enquiries, returns, indents or anonymous letters are clearly destroyed. On the other hand, a file dealing with the organisation of a Department, or the way in which its

personnel were graded and chosen, or dealing with government policy on the work of the Department, would clearly be preserved. But between these extremes there will be a whole range of files where the choice will be less easy.

The problem is made more difficult by the registry practices followed in most offices. Files are frequently inadequately titled, or if adequately titled at the beginning, soon outgrow them. It is found, too, that no steps are taken to ensure that drafts, rough notes and supporting papers of a minor or transient character, are removed from the files after their purposes have been served or when the file is put away. (See General Order 316.) And, finally, files are generally allowed to span too many years: frequently the only factor limiting the life of a file is its thickness. As a result of these factors most files have to be looked through carefully before a decision can be made as to whether they should be preserved or destroyed. And files selected for preservation are found to contain a great deal of material of no value. Stripping such files of the ephemeral material is a time-consuming operation and not generally recommended, but this will have to be done in some cases when the backlog of papers is being worked through. With the adoption of new registry practices, many of these problems relating to files will be removed and reviewing will be comparatively easier.

(iii) Listing.

At the review, preliminary lists should be made of the documents which the Department thinks should be preserved or destroyed. These lists should give the number of the record (if it has one), its date and description. This will, of course, have to be adapted to suit the various types of records. In the case of minute books or registers, for example, a simple inventory which gives the extreme dates of each volume is enough:

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION COMMITTEE MINUTE BOOKS

DATE	DESCRIPTION
1934 Jan 3 - Dec 15	Volume 1
1935 Dec 24 - 1936 Nov 12	Volume 2

Files may be listed thus:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT: CORRESPONDENCE

FILE NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION
1164/28	1928	Chairman, Fyrish - Application for lease of 2nd depth of district.
5331/29	1929	Belair Country District - Estimates for 1929.

If there are many files for a particular year, it may save space if the year is given as a sub-heading and the date column dispensed with.

POST OFFICE

FILE NO.	DESCRIPTION
	1937
83/37	Issue of a new set of postage stamps.
142/37	Applications for licenses to sell stamps.
589/37	Increase of postage stamps.

After the Department has completed its review and made its lists, the Inspecting Officer will examine the records paying particular attention to those that have been listed for destruction. Discussions are then held between the Departmental Record Officer and the Inspecting Officer and a final decision made as to what should be preserved and what destroyed. The final lists are now made.

(iv) Transfer.

Records listed for destruction should be destroyed as confidential waste. They should not be allowed to fall into the hands of the public. Those destined for preservation should now be properly arranged, packed, labelled and transferred to the Archives. It is realised that some may be needed occasionally by the Department, but the Archives will arrange for them to be made available. If however, a particular record or class of records is needed continuously by the Department, it should arrange to keep it a little longer. But this

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should be the exception rather than the rule. Masses of non-current records in Departments either necessitate valuable filing equipment on the one hand, or are neglected on the other hand. And in any case, they always require ever-increasing storage space and impede efficiency.

Records transferred to the Archives are always available to the Department that transferred them. They may be made available to other Departments also with the consent of the transferring Department. But the public does not have access to them until they are fifty years old. (This, of course, does not apply to records to which the public has a statutory right.) The fifty-year rule applies to records at the Archives as well as in Departments. It aims at enabling a Government Officer to carry out his duty without the fear that his opinions will be made public during his lifetime, or at any rate, soon after they were expressed.

Under these conditions Departments should have no hesitation in transferring their non-current records to the Archives for preservation. The transfer releases space in the Department for other purposes. The records transferred are well looked after, repaired if necessary, protected from dust, mildew, termites and other destroying agents and made available to the Departments on request, while being kept closed to unauthorised persons.

4. FOR THE FUTURE

The immediate aim of this Guide is to help in the review of the backlog of records in Departments and the transfer to the Archives of those worthy of preservation. But this does not end the work of Departments in relation to their records. Records are coming into existence and passing out of active use all the time, and it is necessary for all Departments to establish a system for their regular review. In this the experience gained during the review of the backlog of records will be of great value.

It is not proposed to deal now with the establishment of a permanent review system in

Departments. This is for the future and will be done at an appropriate time. But it might be helpful if some indication is given here of what is proposed, especially in regard to files, which constitute the bulk of the records of a Department and pose the greatest problem. It is proposed that all files should be reviewed twice. The first review should take place when the file is about 5 years old. Any period from 2 to 7 years would be acceptable. At this review all files which the Department does not consider of any further value for its own purposes should be destroyed. The responsibility for decisions at this stage will be the Department's: the Archives will have no part in the review beyond seeing that it is properly carried out. It is felt that any file which a Department feels safe in throwing out after so short a period as having no further administrative value can be regarded as equally worthless for historical research. Files which have survived the first review should be given a second review when they are about ten years old. This should be a joint operation of the Department and the Archives, and files needed for purely research purposes as well as those of administrative value should be selected for preservation and transferred to the Archives.

It will be obvious that this procedure could not be adopted in many Departments without changes in their registry systems. For instance, it will be necessary for all Departmental papers to be brought within the registry system. Secondly, files must not be allowed to run for more than 7 years, and when given the first review, should be closed, further papers on the same subject being put in a new file. The assumption at the first review that a file is not likely to have any historical value if it has no administrative value holds good if the file is 7 years old or less, but not if it is more than 7 years old. Thirdly, files must be accurately and adequately titled. This will make it unnecessary to scrutinize individual papers within them when they are being reviewed.

It is realised that no single registry or reviewing system would suit all Departments.

Consequently these suggestions will have to be tailored to meet the needs and circumstances of individual Departments. But it is believed that the principle of a double review will generally be found to operate well, though the times of the reviews may vary from Department to Department, subject to the proviso that the first review must never be held when a file is more than 7 years old.

5. CONCLUSION

It is desired, in conclusion, to remind Departments that the proper care of their records, their regular and systematic review and the transfer to the Archives of those worthy of preservation is an essential part of their work. Our records provide unimpeachable evidence of the past, the study of which is necessary to create the sense of community or national consciousness that is so vital for our country's future. The preservation of our records, therefore, is not merely a matter of satisfying academic curiosity, but one of prime national importance, and the obligation of Departments in this task is as urgent and as indispensable as any other Departmental function.

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APPENDIX II

A SUMMARY INVENTORY OF THE RECORDS
IN
THE ARCHIVES OF BRITISH GUIANA.

1. Correspondence (1784-1935).
Consists of correspondence in Dutch of the Dutch West India Company and of the States General of the United Netherlands to 1803. From 1803 the correspondence is that of the Government (later Colonial) Secretary's Office. Includes letter books, despatches, files.
2. Registers of Correspondence (1838-1918).
3. Orders of the West India Company - Dutch (1747-1791) 25 volumes.
4. Orders of the States General - Dutch (1747-1794) 9 volumes.
5. Government Orders (1881-1958) 233 volumes.
6. Minutes of the Court of Policy (1744-1928) 448 volumes.
7. Index to Minutes of the Court of Policy (1776-1879) 16 volumes.
8. Minutes of the Combined Court (1831-1928) 338 volumes.
9. Debates of the Combined Court (1896-1928) 37 volumes.
10. Ordinances and Proclamations (1782-1953) 150 volumes.
11. Minutes of the Court of Justice of Essequibo (1735-1779) 8 volumes.
12. Emigration Certificates (1865-1917) 348 volumes.

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APPENDIX III

BRITISH AND EUROPEAN ARCHIVES
WHICH HAVE RECORDS ON
BRITISH GUIANA.

1. Record Offices in the United Kingdom.
 - i. Public Record Office, London.
 - ii. The British Museum.
 - iii. The Rhodes House Library, Oxford.
 - iv. The Archives of the London Missionary Society.
 - v. The Archives of the Church Missionary Society.
 - vi. The Archives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.
 - vii. The Wiltshire County Record Office.
 - viii. The Nottinghamshire County Record Office.
 - ix. The County Borough of Southampton Record Office.
 - x. The Essex County Record Office.
 - xi. The Library of H.M. Customs & Excise.
 - xii. The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

2. Record Offices in the Netherlands.
 - i. The National Archives at the Hague.
 - ii. The Zeeland Archives at Middleburg.

3. Record Offices in Spain.
 - i. The Archives at Seville.
 - ii. The Archives at Madrid.

ERRATUM

For item 13 see last page.

APPENDIX II (Contd.)

13. Miscellaneous.

- (a) Blue Books (1831-1943) 229 volumes.
- (b) Administration Reports (1887-1939)
96 volumes.
- (c) Official Gazette (1845-1958)
222 volumes.
- (d) Newspapers
 - The Royal Gazette
 - The Argosy 1803-1960
 - The Chronicle 360 volumes.
 - The Graphic