



FOREST HISTORY

SOCIETY

Stewards of Your Past: Placing Your Organization's Records in An Archives

The history of your company or organization is important to its continued existence. Just as a person without memory is functionally impaired, so too is a company without a link to its own past. To a large degree, your company's memory lies in its records—the original letters, reports, photographs, financial statements, publications, and other documents that its directors and employees have produced and collected over the years. It is not uncommon to find that such materials can be extremely valuable for administrative, legal, fiscal, and public relations purposes. They give vital and unique testimony to the life and achievements of your company or organization.

The history of your company or organization may be important to your community, too. No matter what product or service the company has provided, it has shared in the heritage of a certain place and time. Your company's records, then, can also be part of your community's collective memory.

Most companies and organizations lack the resources or expertise to properly preserve their own records. Fortunately, there are places that are in the business of preserving history: the archives of your local, county, and state museums, universities, and historical societies. These professional institutions are the stewards of our past.

WHAT CAN AN ARCHIVE DO FOR YOU?

An archive is a place where historically significant documents are housed and cared for. If your records are deemed appropriate for an archive's collections, you stand to gain many benefits. An archive can provide the records with environmentally controlled storage, freeing up your own space. It can safeguard the records by overseeing their handling and use. More important, it can provide research access to the valuable information the records contain, both to representatives of your company and to the scholarly public. By placing the records in an archive, you take an important step toward their preservation—and you assure that the memories they contain will be kept alive.

WHAT DOCUMENTS SHOULD BE PLACED IN AN ARCHIVE?

Many of the documentary materials produced by a business are significant. An archive is interested in the documents of enduring historical value, those that best illustrate the operation of your business. Most often, such documents represent an "end product"—a final report, for example, instead of a draft. In any case, they should be inactive—that is, no longer regularly used for routine business.

The archive's staff can help you determine what to choose. To protect the privacy of your employees, restrictions on access may be negotiated if necessary. And if the archive is affiliated

with a museum, it may also be interested in artifacts from your company's past, such as equipment, products, uniforms, and memorabilia. Some of the documents of interest to an archive may include:

- Advertisements
- Architectural records
- Articles of incorporation
- Audio recordings
- Awards
- Budgets
- Certificates
- Clippings
- Correspondence of directors and managers
- Directories
- Handbooks
- Histories
- Financial statements
- Ledgers and journals
- Legal documents
- Marketing surveys and plans
- Memoranda
- Minutes of meetings
- Motion picture film and videotape
- Newsletters and other publications
- Organizational charts
- Pamphlets, brochures, flyers, etc.
- Photographs
- Planning documents
- Policy manuals and statements
- Press releases
- Reports (annual, departmental)
- Rosters
- Scrapbooks
- Stationery
- Subject files
- Tax returns

HOW DOES AN ARCHIVE OPERATE?

An archive is run by people whose first priority is the preservation of historical materials. They want to help you in every way they can to preserve your company's records, whether you decide to place them in an archive or not. They can discuss with you the historical value of your records, further explain the benefits of depositing them in an archive, and advise you on which archive would be best for them. In addition, the archive's staff will be responsible for the care of the records, and will continue to work with you as you use the records and periodically add to the collection.

Feel free to contact the archive of your local or state museum, university, or historical society for details on its operation. And, of course, the Forest History Society is a great resource for advice, and it may be the best place to permanently archive the records and history of your company or organization.

Here are a few general points to keep in mind:

- * An archive will generally welcome the opportunity to become your company's or organization's official repository. To assure regular contact, your company can add the periodic transfer of inactive records to the duties of an employee or officer. You may even want to enter into a contract with an archive, spelling out the conditions of the relationship to the mutual agreement of all involved.
- * Most archives are not-for-profit operations. Any financial contributions your company can make to help defray the costs of preserving its records would certainly be appreciated.
- * It is best to make planned, periodic donations of records. Annually, at the end of a fiscal year, is usually a good interval.
- * An archive operates a great deal like other businesses in that it cannot invest materials and labor in the preservation of items which it does not own. Lack of ownership can severely restrict an archive's control over a collection of records, thereby limiting its ability to properly care for it. It is usually in the best interests of both parties that the records become the actual property of the archive.

We encourage you to contact the Forest History Society to discuss your options. You can email us at library@foresthistor.org or call 919-682-9319.