

Archives in the Federal Republic of Germany

by HEINZ BOBERACH

In the Federal Republic of Germany the archives of the Federal Government, the eleven states, the towns, other self-governing institutions and private persons exist independently of one another.¹ It was only in 1871 with the founding of the German Reich that a central German state was formed. The present archives of the states (Länder) are the continuations of similar institutions in the territories (states) that had exercised governmental powers in Central Europe since the Middle Ages. By comparison, the institutions of the Holy Roman Empire up to its fall in 1806 were of secondary importance; their archives have been partly lost, the rest being preserved in the Austrian State Archives in Vienna, with only a few remaining holdings in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) in Koblenz is therefore different from the National Archives in Paris, London or Washington in that it is only responsible in theory for records of the period before 1806: *de facto* the only old holdings in its possession are the records of the Supreme Court of the Reich (Reichskammergericht) which go back to the beginning of the sixteenth century. From 1815 to 1866 the sovereign German states were united in a federation of states, the German Confederation ("Deutscher Bund"). The records of its institutions, a relatively small number, are preserved in the Bundesarchiv.

The Bundesarchiv is therefore primarily the archive office of the government and institutions of the German Reich from 1871-1945, of the German administrations in the Western Occupied Zones 1945-1949 and of the Federal Republic of Germany since 1949.² The responsibility for these records was laid down by a Cabinet decree which established the Bundesarchiv in 1952. At that time, however, it was already clear that even this task could only be partially realized. Those official files of the government of the German Reich that had not been destroyed in the Second World War were to a large part in the custody of the former Reichsarchiv Potsdam in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the rest held in the custody of the United States and Great

1 A general introduction to problems of German archives is given by Friedrich P. Kahlenberg, *Deutsche Archive in West und Ost. Zur Entwicklung des Staatlichen Archivwesens seit 1945* (Düsseldorf, 1972). Notes on individual archives may be found in *Minerva-Handbücher Archive im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Berlin and New York, 1974).

2 See *Das Bundesarchiv und seine Bestände. Eine Übersicht*. 3. ergänzte und neu bearbeitete Auflage von Gerhard Granier, Josef Henke, Klaus Oldenhage (Boppard, 1977).

Britain.³ The last-named holdings were returned to the Bundesarchiv in the sixties; the others, together with files confiscated by the Soviet Union, are today held in Division I of the Central State Archives of the GDR in Potsdam; there they are not easily accessible to researchers from the Federal Republic of Germany. This means that the Bundesarchiv has only a small number of official holdings from the period before 1918 and that those of the Weimar Republic 1918-1933 are also very incomplete. It is only for the years of the Nazi regime, especially for the period of the Second World War, that one can say that about half of the surviving holdings are kept in the Bundesarchiv, the other half in Potsdam. The Bundesarchiv received above all the greater part of the written material from the central institutions of the Nazi party and its organisations, and from the German armed forces. Therefore it is only for the last thirty three years that the total amount of records of the German central authorities could be appraised by and transferred to the Bundesarchiv.

In these circumstances, it was essential for archivists to make every effort to acquire documents that can complement the existing official material and provide a substitute for what is missing. They have succeeded in acquiring records of political parties and organisations and, especially, of a large number of private papers of important politicians (among others, of several Reich Chancellors), civil servants, military officers, scholars and scientists. Of equal importance is the fact that the Bundesarchiv considers official records to be not only textual material but also photographs, films, sound-tapes and discs. Within the Bundesarchiv a stock of visual materials (Bildarchiv) has been established with 2,5 million photographs and 16,000 posters. The film branch at first limited itself to documentary films and especially weekly newsreels which had been commissioned by governmental authorities, but has developed gradually to become a collecting centre for movies as well. Finally, it is necessary to mention that the Bundesarchiv is acquiring microfiches of archival sources concerning German history in foreign archives; the largest single project at the moment is the filming of records in the U.S. National Archives relating to the American military presence (OMGUS) in Germany.

The Bundesarchiv is under the direct supervision of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. It has three divisions in Koblenz: I. dealing with general matters and organisation, II. handling official records, III. dealing with non-official records and non-manuscript materials; in Freiburg a Division IV caters to military records. For the holdings from the period before 1866 and for personal military records there are branches in Frankfurt and Aachen. An intermediary records centre (Zwischenarchiv) in St. Augustin, near Bonn, holds files of the Federal ministries as long as they are still required. In all, there is a staff of about three hundred and thirty, of whom about sixty are qualified archivists. All archival materials can be used for scholarly research, journalistic or private purposes thirty years after the files have been closed, personal records being open thirty years after the death of the person in question.

Besides the Bundesarchiv there are other Federal archive offices. In dis-

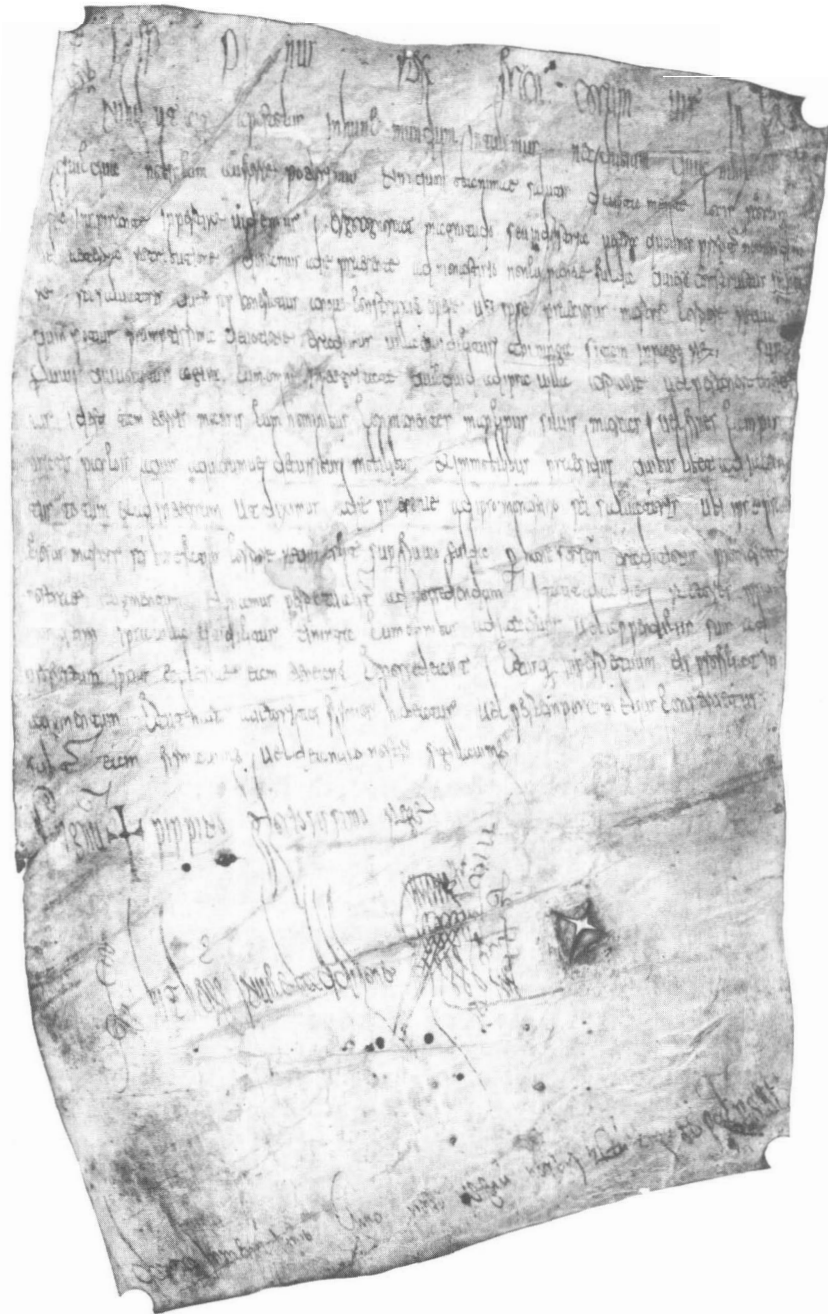
³ See *Captured German and Related Records. A National Archives Conference*, edited by Robert Wolfe (Athens, Ohio, 1974), and the *Guides to German Records Microfilmed at Alexandria, Va.*; 74 volumes since 1958 and still continuing.

cordance with the guidelines set down by the Federal Government of the responsibilities of the Bundesarchiv, the Foreign Office in Bonn has its own political archives office including also records from 1867-1945. Both Houses of Parliament, Bundestag and Bundesrat, are not obliged to deliver their records to the Bundesarchiv and retain their own archives. The Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) has however decided to use the Bundesarchiv. The Bundesarchiv itself gives up all claim to the records of Federal authorities responsible for regional and local affairs, with the exception of Army units. As far as such materials are of archival interest they are taken over by the archives of the states.

The forty six State Archives of the states Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Hessen, Niedersachsen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein and the cities of Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg have nearly all a much longer tradition and older holdings than the Bundesarchiv. With the exception of the Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein and the three cities, each state has main state archives (Hauptstaatsarchiv) for the records of its higher administrative authorities, and state archives responsible for the lower regional and local authorities. The archives of states and territories no longer in existence are preserved partly in the main state archives and partly in the state archives of the district where the former seat of government was. The largest and most important main state archives is the Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv in Munich. There the original documents and records of the Dukedom and Electorate of Bavaria from the twelfth century onwards and of numerous monasteries and territories, acquired by Bavaria in the course of the centuries, have been brought under one roof. At the same time it is the central archive office of the modern Bavarian state from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day. Another important state archives is located in Marburg. In the archives held there of the Electorate of Hessen, annexed by Prussia in 1866, the oldest document existing in German archives is to be found, a charter of Pipin King of the Franks dated A.D. 760, for the abbey of Fulda, which became part of Hessen in 1803. The Central Archives of the Prussian State, which reached an end in 1945, continue to exist in Berlin as the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz and must be considered as state archives; however most of its holdings are now in the German Democratic Republic.

Among the archives of the towns and local communities, 469 in all, there are also some with very old and important holdings. The great political and economic role played by Cologne, Frankfurt, Nuremberg and Lübeck in the late Middle Ages and early Modern Age is reflected in their archives. The same is true for some archives of the noble families, who lost their rule in 1803 to the predecessors of the present states, but kept part of their documents and records, for example the Archive of the Princes of Thurn and Taxis in Regensburg or the Archive of the Princes of Fürstenberg in Donaueschingen. In contrast, the records in the archives of the Catholic dioceses and of the Lutheran State churches are mainly from more recent centuries.

Since the end of the nineteenth century numerous private archives have been established in Germany. Most of them serve large business firms, but are accessible to a limited extent to scholarly researchers. These include archives of



The oldest document in German archives. A charter of Pippin, King of Franks and father of Emperor Charles the Great, for the Abbey of Fulda, A.D. 760. (Marburg State Archives).

the electrical business corporation Siemens in Munich or the business archives (Werksarchiv) of Mercedes Benz in Stuttgart. Regional economic archives, such as das Westfälische Wirtschaftsarchiv in Dortmund, take over the records of smaller enterprises in one area. In the last few decades the archives of the main political parties, which were established as foundations, have added the most recent type of records, among them those of the Social Democratic Party in the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, which has party records and personal papers of politicians even prior to 1939. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's personal papers have also been taken over by a foundation in his former residence in Rhöndorf, near Bonn, an institution more or less comparable to the Presidential Libraries in the United States.

In all these various archives one can expect to find sources relevant to the history of North America in general and Canada in particular.⁴ One main area of interest are the records concerning the operations of German troops in English service during the American War of Independence 1776-1789. Such material, including officers' personal diaries, is to be found mainly in the Archives of the Landgrafschaft Hessen and the Herzogtum Braunschweig in the state archives in Marburg⁵ and Wolfenbüttel, and further, in the Murhard'schen and State Library in Kassel. In some cases the records concerning German emigrants to Canada, existing in very many archives, go back as far as the end of the eighteenth century, although the majority come from the nineteenth century. Documentary proof that Canada took in refugees from Germany during the Nazi regime exists in various archives. Information on the political relations between the German Reich and Canada is contained in records in the Political Archives of the Foreign Office in Bonn, with complementary material available in the Bundesarchiv. The occasional interest shown by the governments of the German states in Canadian problems as early as 1800 and the first half of the nineteenth century can be seen in Bavarian and Hessian records. The archives in Hamburg and Bremen contain abundant sources on trade and shipping connections, including even reports on treaties between the United States and Canada concerning new shipping lines. The archives of the Protestant Church provide evidence of the intensive relations between Protestantism in Germany and Lutheran communities in Canada, such as the Protestant-Lutheran Church Council. The Deutsche Ausland-Institut had done research on the settlements of German immigrants in Canada, the results of which are in the Bundesarchiv. Finally, many published and unpublished travel descriptions from Canada exist in German libraries like Charlevoix, *Histoire et Description de la Nouvelle-France* (1744) in the library of the former Helmstedt university.

Most of the German archives today face similar problems which are discussed at conferences, conventions and in periodicals.⁶ One such problem is

4 More detailed information is given in *Americana in deutschen Sammlungen. Ein Verzeichnis von Materialien zur Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika in Archiven und Bibliotheken der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und West-Berlins*. Zusammengestellt im Auftrag der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien, 5 Bde, Vervielf., (München, 1967).

5 See *Hessische Truppen im amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg. Index nach Familiennamen*. Bearbeitet von Eckhart G. Franz u. a., 5 Bde, (Marburg, 1972-1976).

6 From the point of view of the Federal Archives some of these problems are discussed in *Aus der Arbeit des Bundesarchivs. Beiträge zum Archivwesen, zur Quellenkunde und Zeitgeschichte*. Herausgegeben von Heinz Boberach und Hans Booms (Boppard, 1977).

the need for a law to provide a satisfactory final definition of the relationship between administration and archives. The responsibilities of neither the Bundesarchiv nor the state archives are set down in this form. As a result, difficulties may arise repeatedly when archives wish to claim their right to take over records. A legal definition should also lay down that official records also include films, photographs, sound tapes and discs and machine-readable records. The right of the citizen to secure unlimited access to official records when a fixed period of time has elapsed, normally thirty years, is more easily guaranteed by a law than by internal regulations of access. However, the archives will have to take into account that this right of the citizen can conflict with the right of each individual that his personal data in official records remain confidential. A satisfactory solution to this problem, a compromise between freedom of information and privacy, is not yet in sight. Increasingly the German archives have had to note that the official files handed over to them are so poorly organized that their appraisal and indexing is made considerably more difficult. This has led to new fields of work. Archivists are endeavouring to improve records management in the government authorities. They hold courses and lectures on relevant problems, yet this new responsibility for the archives is seldom defined officially and depends in many cases on voluntary cooperation.

Voluntary cooperation will also determine in future the relations between the various archives, which are independent of one another. A conference of the Federal and State archive administrations deals with these matters as far as the government archives are concerned. Its members are the President of the Bundesarchiv and one representative from each state. Twice a year under rotating chairmanship, they discuss questions of general interest. Conference committees discuss problems of microfilming and automatic data processing. The Society of German Archivists (Verein deutscher Archivare) provides a forum for discussions with non-government archives as well. Every year it organizes the German Conference on Archives (Archivtag) with general discussions for all participants and special meetings for the archivists of single branches, at municipal, ecclesiastic or business levels. This forum also provided the first opportunity to discuss the problem of competition that has arisen between Federal and State archives on the one hand and the archives of political parties on the other, when they wish to acquire the personal papers of politicians who have held important government posts.

Without doubt one of the problems most worrying German archivists, as also their colleagues in other countries, is that of appraisal. Considering the constant increase in the number of records produced by the authorities, the solution to this problem is of decisive importance for the future of archives; for their capacity will not be able to preserve more than perhaps ten percent of this number. Instead of rejecting worthless material, the attempt is being made to select material of historical and social importance and gain fixed criteria for doing so. When indexing archival materials some German archives have begun to use the possibilities offered by automatic data processing. First of all, alphabetical indices of persons, places and subjects have been drawn up automatically. In the meantime the automated printing of lists and finding-aids in which individual data can be sorted according to several given criteria is well past the experimental stage. For three years now the Bundesarchiv has been in

possession of a small computer with a storage capacity of 67,5 million bytes on discs, four displays, a tape unit for 9-track/1600 b.p.i., a central processing unit and a printer. The possibility of storing data from archival materials in data banks in such a way that direct access is possible by automatic retrieval has been studied in detail, but as things are at the moment the possible benefit does not seem to justify the necessary expense and effort.⁷

In the last few years the German archives have attached great importance to facilitating historical research and to informing the public more extensively than in earlier years about their holdings and work. In addition to the customary publication of sources and inventories, finding-aids to the different holdings are duplicated, the supply of microfilms in rolls or as microfiches saves journeys to the archives, news-sheets of the different archives draw attention to new acquisitions. Exhibitions have been recognized by many state and city archives and by the Bundesarchiv as an effective way of making many people acquainted with archival work. Modern techniques, for example slide-projectors and tape-recorders, have been used here with success.

Archives institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany are aware that they can only master new tasks if the training of archivists is constantly related to practical requirements. This is a subject of lively discussion. As all archivists receive their professional training in only two training centers, Marburg and Munich, there are good prospects that this requirement can be fulfilled.⁸ New tasks and possibilities could arise for the archives from the plans of the federal government to establish a network of information systems for the various sciences. A planned information centre for historical research is also to provide information on archival holdings. Research has begun into how this can be done without encroaching upon the autonomy of the individual archives.

For the discussion of all such problems the archivists in the Federal Republic of Germany have two periodicals at their disposal. Since 1876 a volume of the "Archivalische Zeitschrift" has been published annually in Munich; the publisher is the Generaldirektion der Staatlichen Archive Bayerns (Postfach 20 05 07, D-8000 München 2). The articles deal at some length with archival problems and subjects from the auxiliary historical sciences. Special interest is shown in new archives buildings, and regular reports bring information on the contents of foreign periodicals. The articles in the periodical "Der Archivar", published quarterly by the Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (Mauerstr. 55, D-4000 Düsseldorf), are shorter and more topical. It has a large section for news and also includes references to legal regulations concerning archives and a systematic bibliography of German and foreign publications.⁹ Special prob-

7 See paper produced for the Eighteenth International Congress on Archives (Washington, 1976) by Heinz Boberach and Wolf Buchmann, "Advanced Technologies and the Expansion of Archives Access", which was based on practical experience at the Bundesarchiv.

8 See the reports of Hans Philippi, "Die Archivschule Marburg", and Hermann Rumschöttel, "Die Archivarsausbildung in Bayern", in: *Scrinium. Zeitschrift des Verbandes österreichischer Archivare*, 17 (1978): 7-35.

9 A bibliography of all publications of archives in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1945 was published as a special issue of "Der Archivar" in 1971: "Übersicht über die Veröffentlichungen der Archivverwaltungen und Archive in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1970", zusammengestellt von Hans Sdmitz und Hannelore Tiepelmann.

lems of business archives since 1967 are discussed in “Archiv und Wirtschaft. Mitteilungsblatt für das Archivwesen der Wirtschaft”, published by “Vereinigung deutscher Wirtschaftsarchivare” (Editor: Dr. Lutz Hatzfeld, Mannesmann-Archiv, Postfach 55 01, D-4000 Düsseldorf).

Résumé

L’auteur trace un bref historique du traitement des archives en République fédérale allemande et soulève le problème de la division des peuples et de leur archives. Il est également fait mention de quelques problèmes auxquels sont confrontés les archivistes de l’Allemagne de l’Ouest—surtout ceux que pose l’évaluation de documents.

The Way it was . . .

“Today a man with a chain saw or his partner with a rubber-tired skidder can each earn in a day what their fathers earned in a month. A mechanical tree-harvester, articulated like some prehistoric monster, driven by a *hard-hatted* ‘woods technician’ snug in a streamlined cab high above the stumps, can produce more pulpwood in a day than his father, with a bucksaw, could cut and stack in a month. Modern camps — two men to a room, showers, game rooms, TV, cafeterias — confound the old-timers.”

From *The Lumberjacks*, Donald MacKay. McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited. Toronto. 1978



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