

Declassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NND No.

785015

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Declassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NND No.

785015

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THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES RECORDS (POSNER)
NOV. 1943

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THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Records Administration Circular No. 5

November 1943

THE ADMINISTRATION OF CURRENT RECORDS IN ITALIAN PUBLIC AGENCIES¹

By Ernst Posner

As government in the modern state has expanded and intensified its activities, regulating or at least touching upon practically every phase of the life of a nation, the records produced and kept by public agencies have assumed increased importance during armed conflict. The invader has realized that they are essential tools without which he cannot hope to carry on or to control the administration of a subjugated country and to exploit its human and material resources, while the elements of resistance have discovered that in their fight against the conqueror the destruction of records may be a weapon as powerful as the dynamiting of railroads and the blowing up of bridges. That records must play an equally important role when the Allied armies attempt to restore normal life in the liberated countries and to govern those of the enemy is clear enough. It follows that the future administrators of these countries should have available to them information as to the place or places where records, especially current records, are kept in the public agencies of a given country and as to the manner in which such records are arranged and made accessible for purposes of reference.

A study of the administration of current records in a foreign country is surrounded with major difficulties. It should be based on personal observation or, if that is not feasible, on realistic descriptions of prevailing practices and actual conditions. Unfortunately such descriptions are lacking for practically all countries. In their absence, filing manuals and regulatory documents constitute the only types of source material that can be used. It must be kept in mind, however, that they are intended to set standards and to determine procedures and that in using them there is danger of describing not what is done but what ought to be done. In addition to these general difficulties, a study of Italian records administration is hampered by the fact that the more recent administrative documents and pertinent literature are not to be found in American libraries. What is available suffices to give a picture of organization for and procedures of records work that were prescribed for Italian public agencies

¹This paper by Dr. Posner, a former archivist at the Privy State Archives in Berlin and now Adjunct Professor of Archival Administration at the American University, was prepared at the request of the Archivist of the United States, for the assistance it might render in the administration of occupied territory. Because it is believed to have value for persons interested in the problems of records administration, it is published in the National Archives series of Records Administration Circulars.

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at the beginning of the twentieth century and that are known to have remained in force down to the early thirties. It is not impossible that during the last decade changes in the organization of records offices and in filing methods have occurred, which, because of the lack of up-to-date information, could not be considered. The following discussion, however, reflects conditions and practices that are believed to have prevailed down to the present war.

In the handling of records, the following steps are distinguished by Italian writers on records administration: (1) The receiving and distributing of incoming communications (apertura del corriere); (2) the registering and classifying of incoming and outgoing communications (registrazione); (3) the preparing of fair copies of outgoing communications (copiatura); (4) the dispatching of outgoing communications (spedizione); and (5) the arranging and preserving of incoming and copies of outgoing communications for purposes of future reference (archiviazione).

This study will be concerned with the registering, classifying, and arranging of an agency's records, which are the major processes in records administration proper. The handling of incoming mail and the preparation and dispatch of outgoing mail will not be discussed, although in smaller agencies one unit or official may be in charge of all the work connected with the handling of records.

The papers received and prepared by an Italian public agency or any other organization and preserved by it for future reference are called its archives (archivio), a distinction being made between current archives (archivio corrente) and storage archives (archivio di deposito). In common parlance, however, archivio without a qualifying adjective has come to mean the current records that are preserved and serviced in the immediate neighborhood of the records-creating offices. The units that are charged with their administration in an Italian public agency are variously designated as office of registration (ufficio di protocollo), office of classification (ufficio d'ordine), archives (archivio), or registry and archives office (ufficio di registratura e di archivio); the last-named term alone brings out the two main functions involved. Accordingly, a person employed in these units is called ufficiale di protocollo, ufficiale d'ordine, or archivista. According to usage in government manuals, the title archivista seems to prevail. In the following discussion the word "records" will be used for the current archives of an Italian agency, "records office" for the unit in which they are administered, and "records officer" or "file clerk" for the person in charge of their administration.

The records offices of a ministry (ministero)—the equivalent of an executive department of the United States Government—and of other central authorities are usually staffed with a chief records officer (archivista capo), a first records officer (primo archivista), records officers (archivisti), file clerks (applicati), and apprentice file clerks (alumni d'ordine). Records offices may be established at the different organizational levels of a ministry. These levels must be explained briefly.

Each of the 15 Italian ministries is charged with the administration of a main function of government, with the exception of the Ministry of Italian Africa, which carries out various functions with respect to that area. Each ministry is headed by a minister secretary of state (ministro segretario di stato) and an under secretary of state (subsegretario di stato) as his assistant and substitute. The administrative, clerical, and records personnel that surrounds and aids the minister at the policy-determining level constitutes the office of the minister (gabinetto del ministro segretario di stato), while that of the under secretary forms his special secretariat (segreteria particolare). Within the ministry, the bureau (direzione generale), headed by a director general (direttore generale), is almost invariably the highest unit of organization and is in charge of one of the main branches of service that make up the ministry's jurisdiction. In the Ministry of War (Ministero della Guerra), for instance, there is a Bureau of Artillery (Direzione generale d'Artilleria), a Bureau of Engineers (Direzione generale del Genio), a Bureau of Logistical Services (Direzione Servizi Logistici), and so on. The central accounting office (ragioneria) of a ministry and the inspection service (ispettorato or servizio) of a technical branch may hold a rank equal to that of a bureau. As a rule each bureau is broken down by subfunctions into divisions (divisioni), headed by a director chief of division (direttore capo divisione), and divisions are divided into sections (sezioni), under a chief of section (capo divisione), who supervises the work of a number of counselors and clerks (consiglieri and segretari). Generally speaking, the organizational breakdown of a ministry is fashioned after the pattern of a French ministry and is decidedly more uniform and more rigidly rational than that of the executive departments of the United States Government.

According to the "Regulations for the Records Offices in the Central Agencies" (Regolamento per gli uffici di registrazione e di archivio nelle amministrazioni centrali), approved by royal decree of January 25, 1900, a records office was to be established in each bureau, in major units equivalent to a bureau, such as the office of the minister and the central accounting office, and possibly in the division in charge of personnel administration. Some ministries that in 1900 had records offices attached to the divisions, however, retained them at this level, and study of Italian Government manuals indicates that even many sections have their own records offices, a trend toward decentralization of records administration that is not surprising in view of the increasing amount of paper work. Thus it would appear that records offices may exist at practically any level of organization of an Italian ministry.

In regard to the field offices of the Central Government, records administration in the office of the prefect (prefettura) of the province, the powerful executive organ of the Central Government and of its Ministry of the Interior in particular, warrants a few remarks. It seems that as a rule one unit, staffed with records officers and file clerks, administers the records for the secretariat of the prefect (gabinetto) and for the different divisions of the office, which are staffed by administrators.

clerical, and accounting personnel. Unless changes have occurred recently, the important office of public security (ufficio di pubblica sicurezza), which, although enjoying a certain autonomy, is subordinate to the office of the prefect, has its own, well-regulated records office.

In the thousands of communes the organization for records work depends, of course, on the size of the commune. In smaller places, the municipal secretary does all the work connected with the handling of incoming and outgoing communications and is the official keeper of the records. Middle-sized cities with a population of from 20,000 to 40,000 have their municipal office (ufficio comunale) organized in a number of divisions, one of which, called secretariat and general affairs, assists the mayor (podestà) in the supervision of all business, administers personnel matters, takes charge of correspondence, and keeps the records. Major cities, finally, have an organizational set-up comparable to that of a Government ministry, which calls for decentralization of records work.

As befits a strongly bureaucratic administration, methods of handling and keeping records have been made the subject of detailed regulations, which were issued for the agencies of the Central Government, for the field offices of the different branches of service, and for the communes. These regulations are all based on the same general principles and have remained in force over long periods of time. Records work of the communes, for instance, is still governed by the "Instructions Concerning the Management of Municipal Records," issued by the Ministry of the Interior on March 1, 1897. Such lack of change in procedures is not surprising. Because of the poverty of the country, funds for salaries of officials and for office maintenance were always small, a situation which undoubtedly became even more acute when fascist Italy embarked upon a policy of military expansion that went far beyond its resources. Under these circumstances, procurement of modern office and filing equipment for Government agencies was certainly out of the question, and such equipment, more than anything else, might have supplied the impetus for adopting improved methods of handling and keeping records. What little steel Italy had went into battle-ships, tanks, and guns, not into filing equipment.

The unit that in all Italian agencies is used for purposes of record keeping is the dossier (fascicolo). Each dossier contains the records pertaining to one transaction or case (pratica or affare), and for that reason pratica has become a term frequently used for the dossier itself. A case or transaction is defined as the actions of an agency in the handling of a specific matter falling under its jurisdiction, regardless of whether the initiative has come from the agency or from a person or organization outside. The dossier, accordingly, is composed of the papers (atti) made or received in connection with a single case or transaction.

The arrangement of the dossiers of a records office is determined by a classification scheme (titolario), which reflects the functional, and indirectly the organizational, breakdown of the agency that the records

officer serves. (As an example, a part of the 1901 classification scheme of the Ministry of the Marine is given in Appendix A.) Uniform classification schemes are prescribed for field offices and communes but are not always adhered to in practice. In the records office of a bureau (direzione generale), main headings of the classification scheme are taken from the various functions of the bureau to which, in terms of organization, the divisions correspond. Each main heading falls into a number of classes (classi), which, as a rule, coincide with the various sections of the division, and, within each class, subclasses (sottoclassi) reflect the fields assigned to the officials within the section. Main headings of the classification scheme, classes under each main heading, and subclasses thereunder follow each other in the order of the importance of the units whose records they cover (ordine di autorità). Thus, for instance, the main heading for a division of internal administration and personnel matters would precede all other main headings of the same classification scheme. In addition, the classification scheme is devised in such a fashion that under each main heading the records relating to general and policy matters, to special cases, and to miscellaneous business are brought together.

The classification schemes prescribed for field offices and communes are simpler than those of central agencies. They have main headings (categorie), taken from the major functions of the agency, and these fall into classes that are not further divided.

Within the subclasses (or classes in the case of noncentral agencies) logical arrangement of dossiers is not attempted. Dossiers are either kept chronologically in the order in which they have been constituted, receiving progressive numbers or possibly the permanent registration number of the transaction or are arranged alphabetically according to the names of agencies, organizations, or persons to whose affairs they relate. The position of the dossier in the class or subclass, that of the subclass in the class, and that of the class under the main heading is permanent and expressed by means of a formula or a symbol. The first elements of the formula are the abbreviated titles of the main heading, the class, and the subclass. If a symbol is used, a roman numeral may represent the main heading, a letter the class, and an arabic number the subclass. In either case the exact position of the dossier is indicated by the name of the agency, organization, or person or by the number assigned it.

It seems probable that the principles of classified arrangement, as explained above, have been retained in recent years without major change. As in other countries, application of the Dewey decimal system was apparently discussed, but experts, such as the Italian archivist and writer Casanova, thought it unsuitable to the organization of records.

It should be possible under a system of classified arrangement of dossiers to locate material on the basis of subject matter without using finding aids other than the classification scheme. Italian regulations, however, prescribe the keeping of daily registers and of indexes, which enable the records personnel to control the handling of every single document and to follow it to its place in the files. In central agencies

a daily register (protocollo) is supposed to be maintained for each main heading (titolo) because, as against a general daily register, separate registers are thought to expedite the process of registration and to facilitate the segregation and transfer of files to another agency, should redistribution of functions make this necessary. In noncentral agencies, all incoming and outgoing communications are registered in one daily register.

The daily register may be of the analytical or of the so-called synthetic type. In the analytical daily register (protocollo analitico), a new registration number is assigned to every incoming communication. Two varieties of the synthetic register (protocollo sintetico) exist: the daily register with fixed registration numbers (protocollo a numero fisso) and the alphabetical daily register (protocollo rubrica). In the former, all communications belonging to the same transaction are listed under a common number, while in the latter entries are made under the names of correspondents, alphabetically arranged. In either case, sufficient space must be left for the registration of a certain number of communications.

As a rule, one register serves for the registration of incoming as well as outgoing communications. The pattern used covers two pages of an open book. The analytical register, for instance, shows in the columns of the lefthand page the following characteristics of the incoming document: Number and date of registration, cross references to earlier or later documents, the name of the sender, the content of the communication, its date, and the number of enclosures. On the right-hand page, the name of the recipient, the content and date of the answer, and the number of enclosures are entered. The column at the extreme right gives the class, subclass, and dossier in which the document is to be found.

The daily register is a bound book and on its back its character, the year, and the registration numbers contained therein are noted. A new register is started each year. Unless the register is of the alphabetical type, it must be supplemented by an alphabetical index (rubrica or indice alfabetico delle registrazioni), which lists under the name of each correspondent the subject matter and the registration number or numbers of all communications exchanged with him and their classification. Separate parts may be provided for agencies and organizations and for private correspondents. (See Appendix B for blank form used in the ministries.) Indexes, too, must be renewed annually with the resulting inconvenience that frequently more than one index must be consulted to trace an extensive correspondence. To remedy this situation, some agencies have replaced the indexes by a permanent alphabetical card catalog of the American type, which had come into use in the more progressive Italian libraries.

Papers that have been properly registered, classified, and indexed are added to the dossiers to which they belong or are made up as dossiers if they pertain to new business. An exception, however, is made for material of temporary value. It is merely assembled in bundles and stored in the neighborhood of the permanent records to which it is related. This is

intended to facilitate the segregation of material of no permanent value and thus to prevent too rapid a growth of an agency's files.

Within the dossier records are arranged so that the most recent document is on top. Dossiers are protected by cardboard covers (copertina), 0.36 x 0.28 m. (14.2" x 11"), which are of a different color for each main heading of the classification. Noted on the covers are the name of the agency or office whose records the dossier contains, the subject and date of the dossier, the formula or symbol that determines its position in the files, and the single documents that have gone into it. (See Appendix C for blank form of a dossier cover.)

All dossiers in the custody of a records office are listed in inventories, which must be distinguished from the classification scheme. While the latter serves as a guide in classifying papers, the inventory (registro dei fascicoli) is a list of dossiers that have actually been created and are to be found on the shelf. Records offices of central agencies are required to have separate inventories for each class or even subclass, while in field offices and communes an inventory may cover all the dossiers of a main heading. (See Appendix D for blank form of an inventory.)

Dossiers are preserved in boxes of strong cardboard (caselle), which are placed vertically on open shelves. The boxes carry on their backs labels in the color of the cover of the dossiers that they contain. Main heading, class, subclass, and dossier numbers are shown on the label. If dossiers are kept in alphabetical order, the label tells the letters of the alphabet contained in the box.

Only current dossiers are preserved in the records office. Those that are noncurrent must be segregated at the beginning of each year and set aside as storage archives (archivio di deposito). The storage archives of a smaller agency remain under the charge of the records personnel that administers the current records. In the ministries and other central agencies, on the other hand, the storage archives are administered by a separate unit, which receives noncurrent records from all the records offices of the agency and administers them through personnel of its own. Although in storage, dossiers are retained in their previous arrangement.

Theoretically noncurrent dossiers are to remain in storage for a period of 10 years, whereupon those lacking permanent value must be eliminated. Permanently valuable records are to be transferred to the archival establishments of the state, those of the ministries and other central authorities to the Archives of the Kingdom in Rome (15 Via degli Astalli), and those of field offices to the state archives of the province in which they are located. In reality, however, this regulation is not always observed. Many provinces do not yet possess archival establishments to which noncurrent records can be removed, and, as a result, they remain with the agencies where, frequently, they are neglected. In the national capital, many ministries and central authorities have retained all or practically all the noncurrent records as, for instance, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, War, Marine, Aeronautics, Colonies, Justice, and

Finance. Full-fledged archival establishments to care for the noncurrent records of the Ministries of War, Navy, and Aeronautics have developed. They are under the general staffs of these three branches and are designated as historical offices with a title such as ufficio storico del comando del corpo di stato maggiore. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Historico-Diplomatic Office (Ufficio Storico-Diplomatico) of the Bureau of General Affairs (Direzione generale degli Affari generali) administers the storage archives as well as the so-called historical archives of the Ministry.

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APPENDIX A

Part of the Classification Scheme of the Ministry of the Marine

(Ministero della Marina)

Approved December 15, 1900

Grandi reparti (Major units)		Titoli (Main headings)	Uffici speciali (Special offices)
Bureau of Naval Construction	1	Construction material service	Div. I. Naval con- struction
	2	Naval engineering per- sonnel; mechanics, employees, designers; laborers	Ditto
	3	Ship engine service	Div. II. Engines
	4	Machinist personnel with officer rank	Ditto
	5	Accounting and manage- ment (of material and labor for the naval construction branch)	Div. III. Account- ing for naval con- struction
Bureau of Artillery and Armament	1	Artillery, portable arms, and ammunition	Div. I. Artillery and ammunition
	2	Naval armament	Ditto
	3	Underwater weapons and diving service	Div. II. Underwater weapons and elec- trical material
	4	Electrical service (physical and chemical)	Ditto
	5	Personnel and labor (artillery and armament)	Ditto
	6	Accounting and management (of artillery and arma- ment material)	Ditto

(Classification scheme continued)

Grandi reparti (Major units)		Titoli (Main headings)	Uffici speciali (Special offices)
Bureau of the Merchant Marine	1	Studies of a general character and statistics	Office of General Affairs
	2	Port personnel	Ditto
	3	Maritime police; harbor installations; disbursing offices and fund for disabled seamen	Div. I. Maritime police and disbursing offices for disabled seamen
	4	Beaches; ports; fisheries; salvage; savings bank for the seafaring population	Div. II. Ports and beaches
	5	Compensation for construction; subsidies to ship-owners; refunds of duties; maritime fees; consular rights	Div. III. Maritime subsidies and levies.

Note: Classes and subclasses under the different main headings are not included. Frequently two main headings are set aside for the records of one division. Undoubtedly this classification scheme is no longer used by the Ministry of the Marine.

APPENDIX B

Blank Form of an IndexDirezione generale _____
(Bureau)Titolo _____
(Main heading)Classe _____
(Class)Anno _____
(Year)Indice delle registrazioni
(Index of registrations)Parte 1^a
(First part)

Persona (Person)	Oggetto (Content)	Numeri (Numbers)						Rubrica (Letter)
								A
								B
								C

Parte 2^a
(Second part)

Ufficio (Office)	Oggetto (Content)	Numeri (Numbers)						Rubrica (Letter)
								A
								B
								C

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APPENDIX C

Blank Form of a Dossier CoverComune di _____
(Commune of)Oggetto (Content)
_____Anno _____
(Year)Categoria _____
(Main heading)Classe _____
(Class)Fascicolo N _____
(Dossier number)Carte e documenti componenti il fascicolo
(Papers and documents making up the dossier)

Data e numero (Date and number)	Data e numero (Date and number)	Data e numero (Date and number)	Data e numero (Date and number)	Data e numero (Date and number)

APPENDIX D

Blank Form of an InventoryDirezione generale _____
(Bureau)Titolo _____
(Main heading)Classe _____
(Class)Anno _____
(Year)

Sommario dei fascicoli (Summary list of dossiers)	Numero ordinale del fascicolo (Number of dossier)	Annotazioni (Remarks)

RECORDS ADMINISTRATION CIRCULARS

- No. 1. Records Management in the National Recovery Administration, by G. Philip Bauer. Dec. 1942. 7 p.
- No. 2. Current Aspects of Records Administration: The Archivist's Concern in Records Administration, by Philip C. Brooks; The Control of Records, by Willard F. McCormick; Scheduling the Disposition of Records, by Robert H. Bahmer; War History and Records Activities, by Harry Venneman. Feb. 1943. 19 p.
- No. 3. The Functions of Records Officers in the Federal Government, by Philip C. Brooks. Feb. 1943. 3 p.
- No. 4. Records Administration in the Construction Organization of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, by Robert Claus. Mar. 1943. 10 p.
- No. 5. The Administration of Current Records in Italian Public Agencies, by Ernst Posner. Nov. 1943. 13 p.

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