

Non-governmental archives in Russia: between future and past

In contrast to many Western countries, Russian commercial (or non state) archives only started to operate as recently as 1998. In less than 15 years of their existence, the total budget spend for the commercial archive sector in Russia has come to equal the budget of all state archives put together. Things have changed very quickly and commercial archives are now present in all parts of Russia: in the central part, in the Caucasus, in the north, in the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. And significantly, the number of documents stored in commercial archives is growing every year by as much as 40-50%.

Archiving in Russia has several key historic turning points. With the advent of the first ever documents in Russia, which date back to the 10th century, there was the task of preserving them. The person responsible for this was known as a 'Larnik'. As well as their safe-keeping, he was also entrusted with collating them. So the larniks can be considered the first Russian archivists. And the first Russian list of documents, or rather catalogue, dates back to 1288. It later became part of the Ipatiev Chronicle, widely considered to be the very first scientific reference system.

The late 15th and early 16th centuries saw the emergence of special regional administrative offices or institutions known as 'Prikazy'. The *prikaz* system included the Prikaz Bol'shogo Dvortsa (Palace Prikaz), the Prikaz Bol'shogo Prikhoda (Finance Ministry), the Zemskii Prikaz (Zemstvo Prikaz, 1564; the chief police and judicial office for the city of Moscow), the Kazanskii Prikaz (Kazan Prikaz, 1560's), the Kazennyi Prikaz (Treasury). These institutions ensured the preservation, registration and use of documents improved. Large sets of documents were stored in these offices.

It is difficult to establish archiving as a specific sector through this period, because brief, one-off accounts were made by His Imperial Majesty's edicts only after the liberation of Moscow from invaders in 1614-1615 and after the big fire in Moscow on May 3, 1626. Despite the existence of prikazy, Russia had not yet clearly defined the process of archiving as part of records management. There were no really safe places to hold documents, and in times of need, documents would be relocated from one storage facility to another. The practice of the period was to make copies of original documents in order to create repositories of information. These repositories suffered serious damage as a result of war, poor storage conditions and natural disasters, such as floods and fires. The copies that existed were vulnerable too.

July 16, 1712 is a special date in the history of archiving in Russia. It is associated with the decree of the establishment of the first archive of cases from the ruling Senate, which was: "... to collect on a monthly basis and make lists of those orders with announcement of each case" and transfer them to the archive for permanent storage. That was how the Moscow Senate Archive was established as the first organised archive. In 1728, the Senate sent orders to all governors advising them to establish united government archives and municipality archives. In 1720, Collegiate Assessor A.D. Pochaynov was entrusted with the task of developing and describing diplomatic affairs and documents stored in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. But it was only in 1724 that the first historic archive in Russia was actually legally established – The Moscow Archive of Foreign Affairs Collegiate. It received six employees, a seal and the manager Assessor P. Kurbatov. It laid the foundation for creating a network of archives which accepted corporate and personal documents of scientific historical significance for state storage.

The 18th-19th centuries saw the growth of a number of other historic archives and the search began for the best scheme to systemize them. Archives would emerge, merge and get reassigned.

The first mention of a deliberate selection of documents for destruction dates back to 1829, when Nikolay the First put his resolution on the inventory of His Imperial Majesty "to sort out and select what's important and destruct the rest." A year later the Commission for sorting out archives in Saint Petersburg received similar instructions stating that "unclassified documents which will be of no use in the future can be destroyed after strict selection." That was the birth of a process we now call the 'appraisal of value of files and documents'. In subsequent years, most of the ministries developed special guidelines on how to analyse existing files and determine value. It included different categories of documents with specific retention periods. Even back then, they distinguished three main groups of retention periods: perpetual, temporary (5-20 years), and short-term (1-3 years).

Proposals for the creation of a unified state system of archives in Russia were endorsed by the government only in the 20th century. On June 1, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars adopted the decree "On Reorganization and Centralization of Archives in the RSFSR", which absorbed much from the previous projects and proposals made by archivists. Unified State Archival Fund of the Russian Federation was established. A special government body was created to manage archiving affairs - General Directorate of Archiving.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw great change. In 2004, for the first time, new law addressed private, non-state owned archives. For the first time, the system of document management referred not only to public authorities, local governments or state industry, but also to new private and commercial entities and individuals that owned and used archives. They exercised powers to ensure correct management within the newly prescribed by laws. Article 17 of the Law stipulated that they "...shall ensure safekeeping of archival documents, including documents on staff, during the retention periods established by federal laws, other regulatory acts of the Russian Federation and lists of documents...".

In practice, this requirement can be implemented in 3 ways, and custodians of documents that have no historical or cultural importance, are free to choose any of them:

- the conventional option is the creation of their own in-house archive with all the necessary equipment and staff;
- the creation of a 'shared' archive with other related entities, such as sister companies. Staff, equipment and storage facilities to be shared.
- outsourcing the documents safekeeping to companies specialising in document storage and archival services. This new service, simply didn't exist previously in the totalitarian state. It has proved to be extremely popular..

1998 saw the birth of the first commercial document storage and archive services company in Russia - OSG Records Management. It was an important part of the transition from a former state system to a competitive market economy. For the first time, private companies started operating in Russia. Unlike state-run business and institutions, private firms had sole responsibility for their official documents and were obliged to provide appropriate conditions for their safe storage. The number of documents generated by newly-formed companies increased dramatically.

It's interesting to note that the launch of this business coincided with a severe economic crisis in Russia. The value of ruble against the dollar dropped by more than 3 times. Many small businesses and banks went in to liquidation and others cut back on production. Against this backdrop, OSG Records Management still saw potential and gained a foothold in the Russian market. Companies were keen to cut the cost of running their own in-house archives which required expensive real estate and large numbers of staff and equipment. The services of off-site document storage became highly attractive to private companies. The first consumers were foreign western-owned companies and banks who had set up operations in Moscow and St-Petersberg. They

were familiar with the benefits that such services gave them including better archive design, security and cost savings. They were familiar with such services from their home markets. Despite initial reservations about handing over the security of their archives to others, Russian companies began to realise the benefits of outsourcing. It wasn't long before archives were being moved into new purpose-built document storage centres such as those owned by OSG Records Management.

In 2009, Federal law introduced a new article to the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation (CAO RF) - Article 13.25, "Violations of Legislation Requirements for Documents Storage," which established heavy fines for violating the prescribed retention periods - up to three hundred thousand rubles for legal entities. That gave commercial organizations another incentive to transfer documents to commercial archives. Plenty of in-house archives are poorly maintained and perhaps located in less than ideal locations prone to floods.

Today, there are more than two million organisations operating in Russia. Only 110 thousand of these are state run. So the demand for quality document storage and archival services is enormous. There are more than 100 archive companies operating in Moscow alone. The total number of documents stored in commercial archives in Russia runs into hundreds of millions. The total turnover of the 4 leading archive companies in this market in 2011 was more than 2 billion rubbles - almost equal to the entire budget of all state archives in Russia. According to experts, the market volume of non-state archival services in the central part of Russia alone, is more than 30 billion rubbles and is growing each year exponentially. There is healthy competition in the market, good news for consumers who can expect high levels of service and technology at a good price. New technologies, products and services geared to the Russian market continue to develop at a fast pace.

In this context, the Federal Archive Agency of Russia has chosen to be more business-minded and to move with the times. The past few years has seen the Agency has actively promoting liberalization and the creating better relations with the commercial sector. The Russian market for commercial archives is still young and there are no common standards and regulations that are accepted by all industry players and there are no specialised unions and associations.

The focus of the industry is gradually shifting towards the digital processing of documents and the creation of information and search systems for organizations. These technologies make it possible to synchronize management of paper documents, scanned images and electronic documents, creating a unified information

system. Documents are kept in purpose-built storage facilities with high levels of security. Advanced fire protection systems must meet the stringent requirements of the Russian Fire Service. Facilities include systems for maintaining specific temperature and humidity conditions despite huge climate fluctuations through the Russian calendar. Documents are kept in protective card boxes which are shelved on reinforced racking. Each box, folder and file in it has a number assigned. Barcode are used by more advanced companies. This is entered on to the system along with a description of contents so key word searches may be performed. When client needs to work with a document stored in the archive, they makes a request for retrieval. Documents may be collected or delivered direct to their office by the archival company's own couriers. Clients have the peace-of-mind to know that the contents of every box remains anonymous even to the archive staff who work in the facilities. And those staff that do have access to the computer system are not allowed in to the document storage area. In addition all archive centers have 24-hour protection security and CCTV. In the event of unauthorised entry, an alarm signal is sent to the guard station, the local police and a senior archive manager. To ensure fire safety, centers are equipped with multi-level sprinklers (sometimes gas-based), fire suppression system and smoke detection. Climate control systems maintain proper temperature and humidity conditions. The floor is 1 meter above the ground level. The first level of shelves is 10 cm above the floor. This gives flood protection. All vehicles used to transport documents from clients are equipped with GPS navigation systems so movements may be tracked online by clients.

Commercial archives companies in Russia also offer a wide range of additional services designed to keep documents in order including logging their description (cataloging), transportation, binding, document destruction after scanning to create electronic archives. This approach makes it possible to synchronize all activities and manage the documents in "one package". It eliminates the potential problem of two unrelated archives: paper and electronic. State and non-state archives today are coming closer together by integrating and establishing a system of cooperation. For proper development, they are looking at new knowledge and technologies that are best generated in a competitive market. Development of advanced technologies and management practices is the critical task of cooperation between state and non-state archives of today.