

# Frost on the Walls in Winter: Russian and Ukrainian Archives since the Great Dislocation (1991–1999)

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## Abstract

Much has been written on Russian and Ukrainian archives since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most writings on this subject key on legislative and structural issues, the more formal aspects of the transformation of Russia and Ukraine into more open, democratic polities. This paper concentrates on the blood-and-bones reality of the effects of this transformation on the everyday life of archivists and their managers and administrators at various levels. This new “Time of Troubles” imposed heavy personal burdens on all who work in the archival service, and it posed extraordinary professional challenges. During the 1990s, archival directors and archivists in Russia and Ukraine faced a decade of extreme privation and trial, but they responded with a stoic heroism.

Much has been written about archives and archivists in Eastern Europe since the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the fall of the Soviet Union. While some commentators touch on the dislocation visited directly upon archival institutions and their workers, most do not. They write of matters professional and administrative: of institutional challenges and structural changes, of new legislation governing archives, of change in archival approaches and theory—all within the context of a changing political order based on new democratizing visions, on societal openness and more democratized mandates, and the like. They deal with the big picture. Only in passing, and far too briefly, do they write directly of the life of archivists and the harsh daily realities facing their institutions in Russia and Ukraine today.

I dedicate this piece to the memory of three former colleagues at the National Archives of Canada, who have died over the last several years—Dr. Ed Laine, Tom Nagy, and Dr. Hugo Stibbe.

This is the intent in this paper—to write directly about archivists and archival institutions in their flesh and blood.<sup>1</sup> By way of introduction, the article begins with a brief retrospective.

### **Archives and Archivists under the Soviet Order and the Great Dislocation**

Up to the mid-1980s, political imperatives, restrictive archival legislation, and institutional practices all combined to make research in Soviet archives very difficult. In the KGB tradition, archives were, first and foremost, a security instrument with operational value and utility. The archival system was regimented. Access was strictly controlled and far too many records were closed off, not surprising given that archivists wore the light blue uniform of the KGB into the early 1960s. Administrative hurdles enervated almost every potential user of archives. Access, if and when it came, authorized researchers to narrow viewing of only those files or portions of fonds deemed “necessary” for the completion of a project delineated by the researcher and approved in advance by officials in several ministries. Whether local or foreign, researchers had no direct access to control information regarding archival holdings, such as finding aids and file lists; the researcher could request material only through an “intellectual co-worker” assigned to “assist,” that is, to monitor and vet all requests for archival documents. The rigidities in this system could be either mollified now and then by personal rapport developed between researcher and “co-worker,” or aggravated by tensions domestic or international.

Many professional archivists realized that things in archives were not as they should be. They knew that publications based on archival sources were distorted and often jarred with the truth of the full record in their keeping. They knew full well that the governing ethos of the latter decades of Soviet life, *partiinost* (the Party principle governing all areas of human endeavor), often conflicted with the history of the past as preserved by the historical record. Some archivists also

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my own travel journals, kept during my eighteen visits to Russia and Ukraine between 1991 and 1999. Some of the information I present is based on personal observations; most came directly from archival workers at various levels, from line archivists right up to directors of archival institutions and officials in *Rosarkhiv*. Given the recent nature of this information, and that much of it was given to me on condition that I treat it as privileged, people and places need to remain anonymous. Several caveats are in order. I report what I was told. The Russian archival system, like Russia itself, is a vast and endless plain; I saw much, but I cannot say that I truly “know” it in all its detail and, thus, some of my personal observations may be impressionistic. Additionally, my visits to Russia and Ukraine have tailed away since 1999, with only a single visit in 2001; change often happens quickly, and thus some of what I say here may already be dated. I presented an early version of this paper to the Association of Manitoba Archivists on 23 January 2002 in Winnipeg. I am most grateful to Drs. Terry Cook and Tom Nesmith, as well as Diane Haglund of the AMA, for extending to me this invitation. I would also like to express sincere thanks to a number of people at the National Archives: Peter Delottinville, my section chief; Omer Boudreau, director-general of the Canadian Archives Branch; and Dr. Ian Wilson, national archivist, without whose support neither the Winnipeg presentation, nor this resultant paper, would have been possible.

knew that many hundreds of fonds lay in secret depositories, while others heard the whispers that suggested their existence. The long association of archives with the KGB/MVD (1925–1961)<sup>2</sup>, as well as ongoing practices that survived long after direct subordination to the state police organ was broken, grated on the nerves of many legitimate (i.e., formally trained) archivists, many of whom had grown weary of the formulaic grayness of intellectual endeavor in their institutions.

Thus, when Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* came upon the land in the 1980s, many archivists were prepared to support the new approach. They, perhaps more than any other profession of the Soviet order, knew of the dissonance between what was claimed about the past and what had been, between what had been gained and what might have been had the Revolution of 1917 not taken the course it did. In fact, archivists played a critical role in the de-legitimization of the Soviet order from 1987 to 1991. Out of their holdings came the historical evidence that damned the Party—its illegal and brutal seizure of power once it decided to ignore the Constituent Assembly; the cruelty of its rule; the concomitant destruction of decency, morality, and elementary justice as societal norms; and on and on. Many archivists, in the general spirit of Gorbachevan reform, supported the new openness and sought new methodologies to define their profession. For them the new age called for a heroic reconstruction of both archival and civic life, an almost euphoric challenge. At the same time, however, many archivists felt a visceral unease at the bruited root-and-branch change remaking society. However gray and uninspiring Soviet life might have been, there was also much to lose.

First and foremost, there was stability. One need not go back to the great historical crises of the past, when Russia's existence seemed to hang in the balance (the "Mongol Yoke," the "Time of Troubles," the Napoleonic invasion). The twentieth century alone had been a time of crises without end, a dark vale of travail and tears—the First World War, the Revolutions of 1917, the Civil War, the 1930s and Collectivization, the Second World War, the Cold War. The imprint of a century of pain was upon all. Like the Chinese, Russians at least had their "iron bowl," no small thing to lose for a society that had lived on the precipitous edge of want and denial for generations.

Second, from a professional point of view, there was a well-functioning archival system based on established and proven principles and procedures. Primary among these was the concept of the Single State Archival Fonds, wherein all historical records of the polity were held to be the inalienable property of the people. A pyramidal, well-regulated archival machine was run by the GAU (*Glavnoe Arkhivnoe Upravlenie*, the Main Archival Directorate), which itself

<sup>2</sup> MVD is the acronym for "Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del," i.e., the Ministry of the Interior, which generally ran internal police agencies. Following World War II, the KGB, the state security organ, answered to the MVD.



FIGURE 1. The author speaking with the late O. J. Matsiuk, director of the State Historical Archives in Lviv, Ukraine, November 1993.

was attached to the All-Union Council of Ministers; it also managed subordinate republic-level GAUs. Statutory ensconcing of archives established the archival system throughout governmental, social, and other corporate entities in Soviet life at all levels (all-union, republic, *oblast* [province], city, *raion* [county], state farm, industrial enterprise, etc.). An operational and methodological unity, based on fat regulatory codices, facilitated records management and archival administration throughout the Soviet Union.

Third, the archival system had an established place within the governmental structure. A progressive system of archival practice was in place. Law required all governmental agencies and corporate social entities to have archivists *in situ*. In all institutions, records creation and flow were constantly subjected to ongoing analyses; all record types were identified, record cycles fixed for record types, and ultimate disposition determined on the basis of records criteria established by constantly updated methodological codices. As a result, the transfer of records designated as “archival” occurred on a predictable and ongoing annual basis. No records could be destroyed without an appropriate disposition from the relevant archival authority. This is not to suggest that the Soviet archival system was trouble-free, or that all institutions co-operated as set out by legislation. Nonetheless, the archivist did not simply pop up whenever administrators felt that the records “thing” had gotten unmanageable. He or she had real standing

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in government departments and corporate entities to which assigned, and significant input into records management, the selection of and signing off on records deemed archival.

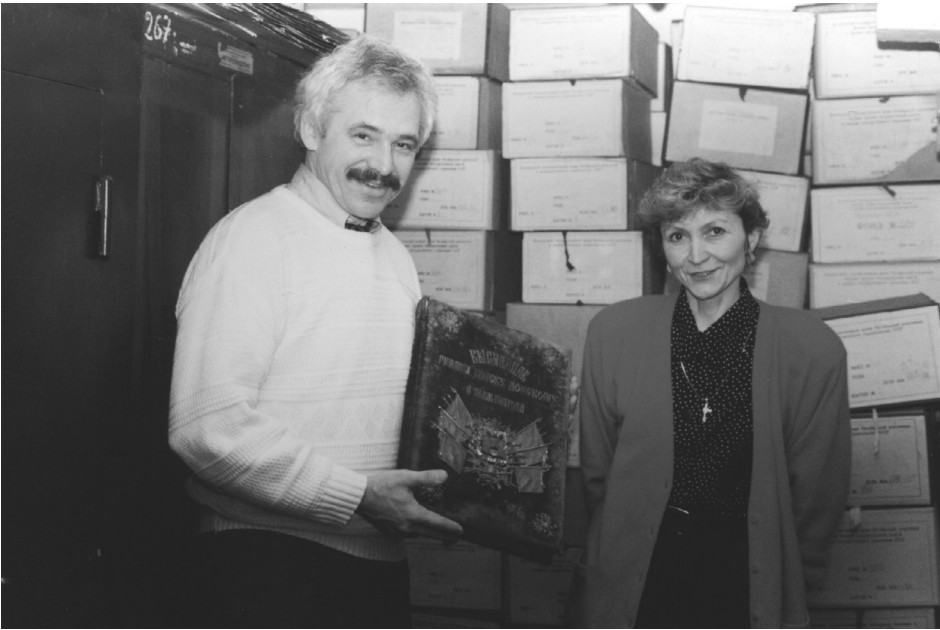
Fourth, while the professional status of archivists was not stratospheric, it was more-or-less secure. All full archivists, designated “intellectual workers” (*nauchnye sotrudniki*) in the Soviet archival system, were required to complete an undergraduate degree, undergo a multiyear archival program at Moscow State University (a very intensive, broad, and deep program), and perform a three-year internship at an archival institution before receiving full credentials. Archival science was a component of the many-faceted “learned” profession in the U.S.S.R., in the full sense of that word, in a society that seemingly valued culture and knowledge and thus accorded its learned professionals respect.

Finally, base funding was secured, though there was never enough money for physical plant and necessary modernization of equipment. Although some *oblasti* (provinces) did get new archival buildings (Volyn’ and Donetsk, for example), many archival repositories continued on in old churches and monasteries, or in centuries-old buildings requiring extensive renovation and maintenance. Nonetheless, enough funding assured the well-being of staff, necessary security services, and basic maintenance, with occasional financial largesse to allow capital ameliorations in archival repositories.

Archivists realized that an ill-defined and sweeping root reform of society could threaten all the above. However, particularly during the last decade of Soviet life, ennui and stasis overcame the Soviet polity, producing a stagnation verging on paralysis. Some archivists sensed that society had in truth come up to the edge of a dark abyss; to go forward meant entering the unknown. In the end, the decision was not for archivists to make—their role was simply to come along for the ride. That ride proved to be what many had feared: a brutally hard wrenching of archives off their firmament, with much attendant suffering for archivists personally, for the archival profession, and for the archival record itself. The ride is far from over.

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Gorbachev’s attempts at reform mortally undercut the legitimacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). With the center’s legitimacy to rule so affected, the residual nationalism of the constituent republics shook the Union. With state coffers bare, the economy ground to a halt. *Gosplan*’s central planning grew increasingly irrelevant as industries, without funding, shut down; as agricultural concerns, unable to fund operations, scaled back production to subsistence mode; as townspeople and city dwellers turned increasingly to the ubiquitous garden plot for basic agricultural produce. The ruble, floated on international markets, fell to pitiable lows. Finally, forced into fiscal responsibility (with little income or few state-budgeted resources available), state and



**FIGURE 2.** The author and L. I. Petrusheva, chief of the White Guards Archives at the State Archives of the Russian Federation, in 1995. The author is holding a jubilee manuscript of the Don Cossack Host.

privatized agencies released workers by the hundreds of thousands. The state-managed economy died—a free-enterprise economy was the new prescription, pressed upon Russia by the West. With no popularly shared common values to govern this new economy, with neither the rule of law nor an independent judiciary to implement it, executive caprice ran riot. Those in positions of influence and power grew ever wealthier and more powerful, while the peoples of the former republics fell into abysmal poverty and powerlessness.

In this context, it is not surprising that Russian and Ukrainian archivists came to feel that a new “Time of Troubles” had descended upon their societies and institutions, a time of full governmental, legal, structural, economic, and moral collapse.

### **Archives in the New “Time of Troubles” (1991 to Present)**

#### ***The New Structure***

The former all-Union GAU disappeared, and with it went monolithic top-down control. *Rosarkhiv* (Russian Archives, a central agency which, like GAU, reported to the Council of Ministers when required) replaced it. Though later renamed *Federal’naia Arkhivnaia Sluzhba Rossii* (Federal Archival Service of

Russia), the archival community still continues to title the central agency “Rosarkhiv.”<sup>3</sup> In 1992, it resolved in principle to turn to the West, open all Russia’s archives, establish normal and decent relations with the outside world, and modernize Russia’s archives consonant with the best prescriptions of international archival norms.

*Rosarkhiv*, unlike its predecessor, exercises immediate control only over the central archival repositories (once eighteen, now reduced to eleven) located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Many of these central institutions are larger than the National Archives of Canada in the extent of their holdings. *Rosarkhiv* exercises no direct administrative control over lesser archives (*oblast*, municipal, and various corporate archives). But it does have very significant moral and methodological suasion over lesser instances, through the provision of valuable professional-methodological assistance, as well as conferences, workshops, and occasional funding of local projects. Despite the fact that *Rosarkhiv* has no statutory authority to enforce archival practices, archival training programs produce archivists with shared values, approaches, methodologies, and so on, which assures adherence to *Rosarkhiv*’s norms. Moreover, the tradition of looking to the center for guidance is still very much a part of Russian life, archives included; hence, archives at various levels throughout Russia accept *Rosarkhiv*’s leadership, a well-merited role given *Rosarkhiv*’s dedication, despite crippling financial strictures, to preserving Russia’s archives.

The central organization is governed by several fairly simple statutes of the early-to-mid 1990s. For a while it seemed that *Rosarkhiv* itself would make the very limited schedule of seven or eight ministries that would answer directly to the Office of the President. This, many felt, would have been a boon, securing reliable funding for the central archives, as well as giving the agency profile and prominence. Others feared that too close an affiliation with the powerful executive arm of government might have rendered archives subject to executive caprice and compromised openness and access. Later there was talk of melding the agency into the Ministry of Culture; all archivists felt that this would result in a frightful reduction in both status and funding, given that cultural agencies are presently perceived in Russia and Ukraine as the most expendable. In the end, both hopes and fears proved groundless, and *Rosarkhiv* continues as before, an agency attached to the Council of Ministers.

*Rosarkhiv*’s mandate does not extend to archival management of the records of several significant ministries and agencies of the Russian government. The Ministry of External Affairs (MID) manages its own records and runs its own

<sup>3</sup> The new name, *Federal’naia Arkhivnaia Sluzhba Rossii* (Federal Archival Service of Russia) has as its acronym, FASR, which in Russian is a command used in dog-training. Archivists generally found this ironic and made many tongue-in-cheek observations regarding the appropriateness of the acronym, given that many felt that they were treated like dogs in the new Russia.



**FIGURE 3.** The author in the stacks of the State Archives of the Russian Federation in Moscow in 1995, holding the original abdication of the last Romanov emperor, Mikhail Aleksandrovich, younger brother of Nicholas II.

archives through its own archival-research group, which administers records dating back to approximately 1700 (as well as some older fonds). The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) turns over very little to the archival system (save for exceptions, such as the *Osobyi Arkhiv* [Special Archives], which held trophy records from the Second World War on German operations and looted records re seized from the Germans). The Ministry of Defense (MO) has decided it will retain all records from 1940 on, even though they had already been slated for transfer into the public system managed by *Rosarkhiv*. The Kremlin Archives, the repository of the executive branch, as well as various security agency archives, also fall outside *Rosarkhiv*'s scope. Some explanation for these exceptions lies in the nature of the records produced by these institutions, which do not wish to lose control of access to very sensitive documentation. Additionally, institutions have discovered the monetary value in these historical records by performing information searches for foreigners, providing photocopies, publishing vital documents in co-operative ventures with outside institutions, and so on. This is no mean consideration for departments that themselves are often severely underfunded by a treasury constantly in crisis. There is no gainsaying that *Rosarkhiv* has some influence in such departmental archives, assisting in the management of the record flow, providing methodological and practical advice for archival management of the records and intellectual control over them,



assisting in declassification, and so on. However, the records themselves remain outside the direct purview of *Rosarkhiv*.

*Rosarkhiv* still bears responsibility for managing the flow of expired records out of government ministries and agencies. But the old system of preliminary archival work funded by the host ministry is no longer the operational norm, and transfer into archival repositories has become far more haphazard. But more on this below.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Place of Archives and Archivists in the New Society*

The “place” of archives and archivists in post-Soviet society is, at best, “unenviable.” From 1991 onward, archivists have been in a classification limbo—are they “cultural” or “intellectual” workers, or are they “civil servants”? The matter of classification is of great moment. Under the old, controlled economy, all knowledge workers were designated under cultural and academic categories, and the required money allocated to these categories. The new economy in the making, however, has no excess funds to direct to these areas. Thus, the leadership of *Rosarkhiv* has fought for “civil servant” status from the very beginning, which, if achieved, would secure better funding from the Ministry of Finance. *Rosarkhiv* got close in 1997–1998, until the ruble meltdown in 1998 (the ruble lost three-quarters of its value) shook Russia, and the Ministry perforce again turned very stingy with respect to monetary allocations for governmental operations. Insofar as I know, as of this date archivists’ status is still undetermined, both in Russia and Ukraine. Archivists now have little prominence, perhaps more correctly “presence,” in government departments and agencies. In fact, most administrators have very little use for archivists and call only when a records glut occurs.

Despite the parlous state of funding, the profession has not stagnated. In fact, its professional cachet has only improved. The archival program at Moscow State University is still excellent, if not improved with upgraded attention to records management in an electronic age. It is also well subscribed, for while the government archival service is in a state of more-or-less ongoing crisis, new civic and economic institutions and undertakings require archivists and records managers. Archivists have a place in the new Russia and Ukraine.

Interestingly, the significance of the archival profession and the historical record have received a boost with the establishment of a new university in Moscow, the Russian State University of the Humanities, founded by Iu. Afanasiev. One of the most respected voices of the Gorbachev era of *glasnost*, he

<sup>4</sup> I cannot say much on Ukrainian central archival organization, since up to my last visit in 1997, much had been planned, relatively little done. Ukraine has retained the old name for its central administration, GAU, which is attached to the Ukrainian Council of Ministers. The archival system has been described, in various publications and by scholars, as “fairly rigid.”

contributed greatly to the delegitimization of the Soviet order. The university has a very strong archives-based program, reaching back over the Soviet era to original records of the past in an attempt to allow students to reconnect organically with pre-1917 roots, a valuable program for a society that has in large part renounced over eighty years of its immediate past and is seeking new historical moorings.

Professionalism has also increased through openness to the outside world. Participation in international forums, co-operative projects with prominent Western archival and research institutions, and connection with the digitized universe, in addition to the traditional foundation in languages, histories, paleography, diplomatics, and so on received at Moscow State University, has only increased the professionalism of Russian archivists. Despite financial strictures, most central archival institutions have managed, in one way or another (through purchase, gift, or co-operation with Western institutions), to acquire computers and to begin to automate intellectual control tools, build archival databases, and the like.

In Ukraine, following separation from the Union in 1991, a new archival institute connected with Ukraine's GAU was established, as well as an archival program at Shevchenko University in Kiev. But, broadly speaking, the Ukrainian archival scene seems less dynamic, with fewer institutional connections with the outside world. In part, this may be because Ukraine's archival record is far less attractive to the outside world than that of Russia.

While the level of professionalism has not suffered, the status of the archivist has distinctly declined (a fate shared with all cultural and intellectual professions). The mass of society, burdened with the issue of simple survival in a time of root-and-branch economic dislocation, has little interest in things archival. And, for a fisc perennially short of money to underwrite the most basic critical services for society (medical and dental care, education, housing, social services, etc.), archives and archivists have become a matter of secondary, perhaps even tertiary, concern. Thus, salaries have plummeted, and funding for archives has fallen below critical minimums.

### ***Finances and Funding***

A summation of discussions with several directors of highly significant archival repositories in St. Petersburg and Lviv in 1993 might be instructive in conveying a sense of the crisis, engendered by underfunding, faced by archives in Russia and Ukraine from the early 1990s onward.

When I visited the St. Petersburg archives in the spring of 1993, the director thought long and hard before summing up the situation in his institution in one word—"catastrophic." The director needed immediately three to four million rubles (\$600 to \$800) to activate his fire protection service, as well as

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additional money for security, cleaning, and maintenance. His phones had been disconnected for over a week because of nonpayment of his account. A UNESCO team had recently visited his institution and concluded that the archives housed splendid and extraordinarily valuable records (critical to Eastern and Central European, as well as to Russian, history), but that storage conditions approximated a primitive root cellar. These priceless records were housed in a raw and humid environment, on wooden shelving collapsing from the weight of the records they held, with unprotected electrical outlets and exposed electrical cabling strung throughout the storage vault. Hygiene was only a distant dream—the whole building stank of dust and mildew, and one walked on “historical” grime and grit sealed into floors over the past several decades.

The preceding director had been dismissed for impropriety in renting out space for a bar in one corner of the archives (which is situated in a prime tourist locale); he had “commercialized” a government building. All attempts to improve things continued to run into Tammany Hall–style politics. To acquire a special corporate and charitable registration, which would exempt the archives from crushing customs duties and taxes on purchased supplies, the director was required to pay into the mayor’s office 300,000 rubles (\$60). He did not have such money; as a result, a Xerox machine, a gift from people in England, was tied up for months in customs. This paralysis denied the director one of the few ways his impoverished institution could have earned some desperately needed funds through the sale of copies of documents.

The situation in the Lviv archives, located in a seventeenth-century Benedictine monastery, was even more desperate. I visited this archives in November 1993; its walls were raw with moisture, and ventilation grates in the vault opened directly to the outside, as did cracks through which one could see daylight. With no money available for heating, it was almost as cold inside as out. Fire control implements were a past memory. We walked about the archives in a murky suggestion of light; as few lights were on as possible, because the director could afford neither electricity nor light bulbs. Roof and walls leaked; the director had earlier repaired a particularly bad roof leak with money out of his own pocket, throwing in several bottles of vodka to attract moonlighting workers. The restoration and photo labs were primitive, 1950s vintage, with a solitary overhead camera and jury-rigged lighting consisting of sun lamps; and even this apparatus was never used because, if bulbs burned out, no more were available. (The distant Kherson *oblast* archives had begged this director to spare it a couple of lightbulbs, which were needed desperately. He was prepared to do so, but to send them through the mail guaranteed their demise.) In this desultory archives are stored, *inter alia*, three great bound collections of cadastral records on parchment and vellum priceless to the histories of Imperial Galicia, the Lithuanian Kingdom, the Polish Commonwealth, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Jews of Eastern Europe—the Acts of the Lithuanian Kingdom,

and the Josephine and Franciscan *perliustrations* (cadastral registers), dating from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. They sit on wooden shelving groaning under the weight of the load they carry.

The above was much the norm in Russian and Ukrainian archives during my visits, and an archetypal lament from directors, varying only in details. Everything foundered on the critical nonfinancing of archival operations, staff, and buildings. In Russia, the Ministry of Finance has never released more than 33 to 40 percent of the minimal budgets approved for archival operations, more correctly, for the salary budgets alone. There has been no allocation for building maintenance and repairs, for security (the tommy-gun wielding guard at the entrance), for heating and lighting and water supply, for telephone service, or for fire protection—for these expenses directors were left to their own devices. Given this, one need not even begin to speak of resources for things such as security microform copies of archival records.

Although central funding for archives is largely for staff salaries alone (and is only partial funding at that), it often comes only after delays of up to six months. In 1996, one of the most prominent archives in Moscow had no money for franking, and thus could not respond to reader inquiries by return mail for approximately two months. In that same year, in St. Petersburg, the Hermitage, Mariinskii (Kirov) Theatre, and RGIA (Russian State Historical Archives) were on the verge of shutdown because there was no money for heating, lighting, and staff salaries.

It is no exaggeration to say that this crisis engendered by state poverty embodies a manifest threat to the survival of the record. Most archives are housed in buildings constructed for other purposes, most of them quite old (some dating back several centuries). Few have been adapted to modern archival needs, in accord with even basic requirements such as temperature, humidity, and light controls. Both archivists and the records in their keeping suffer when heating breakdowns occur, or heating is cut off for nonpayment of bills, as seems to have happened with some regularity over the last decade.

The shutdown of power to the “archival village,” a complex of three central archival repositories in Moscow, in the winter of 1999 was particularly disturbing. One of the archives there, RGADA (the Archives of Ancient Acts), houses some of Russia’s greatest historical treasures, records dating back to the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> All power was cut for three or four days. Archival administrators

<sup>5</sup> Power was shut down by Mos-energia, the power utility of Moscow. Interestingly, at that time customers contracted with the utility for the delivery of a set norm of power—if they utilized above the norm, they were fined; if they utilized below the norm, they were fined! Ironically, the utility company itself later suffered a fire—regarded by some archivists as divine retribution—and no one shed any tears, archivist or not. Interesting to note, archives are not alone in lacking money for basic protection and services; in 1999 a ministry in central Moscow suffered a catastrophic fire because it had had no allocation to secure fire prevention services.

and archivists organized to go public with their situation, calling in television and press teams. Bundled in winter coats while at work, they spoke of the danger to the priceless records in their care. The press and television coverage elicited the hoped-for public outcry, and power was restored, but not before serious damage to RGADA. Water pipes had frozen solid; once heat came back, they burst, and records were damaged. In response to this emergency, archival officials summoned the fire service; there were subsequent plumbing repairs and substantial costs, ultimately covered by Mos-energia (Moscow's power utility), since it was deemed culpable for this misfortune.

While power and heat came back on for the archival village, the buildings never warmed up to any comfortable level, due to the nature of Russian construction. During the power shutdown, the thick, stone exterior walls sucked in the winter cold, which resided there until the advent of summer and its heat. (Generally, all archival buildings suffer from seasonal spiking in interior temperatures: in summer, heat builds up until intolerable; in winter, cold seeps in, barely kept at bay, and at times frost settles out on interior walls of some archives—with any break in heating, frightful cold settles in for a long time.)

#### *An Archivist's Income*

The economic restructuring of the past decade in Russia and Ukraine, with endless funding shortfalls, has ravaged archival incomes. First, consider some cost comparisons to better understand the purchasing power of an archivist's income. An archivist-specialist earned, in 1993, as much as a rector of an institute! It sounds good, but the reality was bitterly grim, given that famed institutes in nuclear physics and cancer research had almost closed down through lack of state funding. In Ukraine, meanwhile, a university lecturer in the Crimea earned 600,000 Ukrainian "coupons" per month, which bought but two kilograms of barely edible sausage, while one month's pay in Armenia could purchase two eggs!

A Russian archivist earned a tad more than this. In 1994, a midlevel archivist earned 35,000 rubles monthly (4,270 rubles equals \$1), at a time when 5,000 rubles bought one kilogram of oranges or bananas, 40 rubles paid for one subway ride, and 2,500 rubles could purchase one pack of Hall's cough candies. By 1995, salaries improved somewhat to 150,000 rubles per month; but the increase was more or less eaten up by inflation. In 1996, the cheapest lunch at an archival cafeteria cost 6,000 rubles, while a monthly transit pass was 180,000 rubles; thus, one month's work might cover transportation and lunches alone, depending on whether an archivist was in the top bracket of his or her category. At the same time, an unskilled teenager working in some undertaking or business concern could earn 1,500,000 rubles (eight times more) monthly. One archival section

chief finally left her archives to manage a bank's records, trading a 300,000-ruble monthly salary for \$900 per month.<sup>6</sup>

By 1996, an archivist earning 300,000 rubles monthly paid the following prices for various commodities: 2,750 rubles for a loaf of bread, 32,500 rubles for a kilogram of butter or cheese, and 9,000 rubles for a kilogram of sugar. Salaries in no way kept pace with increases in prices of goods and inflation. Between 1991 and 1994, a 5,000-fold increase in prices of goods occurred in Russia.

Though barely conceivable, the situation was even more difficult for archivists in Ukraine. In 1996, when prices of goods equalled those in Moscow, Ukrainian archivists earned approximately one-half the salary paid to Russian archivists.

The miserliness of archival salaries is painful. (Other professionals, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, academics, scientists, etc., suffer equally.) Just as bad, if not worse, are other factors that exacerbate the pain of this pittance paid archival professionals: the unpredictability of a payment coming on time, since salaries are often from three to six months in arrears, as well as the uncertainty of whether or not it is going to be the full sum.

The question naturally arises—how can archivists survive on their salaries? As most other professionals in Russia and Ukraine, they have recourse to various other means. They rely on extended family and on various support structures (organizations, friendships, etc.); they work at two or three jobs; they moonlight (coming into the archives nominally for several hours and then leaving for another job, often in private enterprise where they may earn 500,000 to 600,000 rubles monthly); they vend and peddle wares in their free time; they work the ubiquitous garden (*dacha*, i.e., cottage) plot accorded to anyone desiring one on the outskirts of the city; they undertake “business on the side”—in sum, they ride a ceaseless and frenetic carousel from one place of work to another, with no rest on weekends. Luckily, apartment rents and utilities do not yet reflect real costs, something the state simply cannot allow given the general impoverishment of its people—but many indications imply that these allowances are not for long. Older archivists, those without support groups, or those with some debility who have no additional source of income, are in truly lamentable straits. One such archivist lived on potato soup alone, while another rationed himself to one-half a potato per day.

<sup>6</sup> The salary was far, far larger, but the chief's heart remained with the archival record. Many archivists stay on because they simply love their work and feel that it is redemptive, that it contributes to society's awareness of self. They are, of course, usually older archivists, who value learning and knowledge in their own right, as a facet of the overall culture of a society, who value culture in the German sense of *Bildung*. This mindset is disappearing throughout Russia and Ukraine, a casualty of the capitalist imperative to make money.

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The above perhaps explains why there are so few overweight archivists and support staff in Russian and Ukrainian archives, in fact why these societies in general have, after a decade of deprivation, grown very lean indeed.

*Archival Demographics*

The pitiable wages, along with their arrears and unpredictability, have occasioned significant changes in the demographics of auxiliary archival workers, support, and technical staff. Men are becoming rarer and rarer within the confines of archival institutions. Many pensioners turn to archives to supplement their inadequate pension incomes, performing clerical, retrieval, and other such tasks. Pensioners are predominantly women. Many young women come to the archives to take on a second family job, with their husbands working at what is considered the primary income job of the couple.

Often enough, directors have no recourse but to hire on as staff those with absolutely nowhere else to go; not surprisingly, they are too often neither the most reliable nor dedicated employees. Additionally, archival workers are aging, as the young go to jobs with greater remuneration and, perhaps, a brighter future.

Increasingly, then, it is more and more the case that women and retired seniors now work as technical and support staff, and their load is heavy. As an example, in one prominent archival institution in Moscow in 1996, one old pensioner was responsible for the retrieval and return of the records of four vaults scattered throughout various locations of the nine-story building (the norm is one vault per worker), at a time when elevators did not work for weeks on end. Developments such as these have an impact upon service for researchers (with far longer waiting times for requested records), not to mention the health of the workers.

*Archival Survival—"Biznes" in the Archives and Criminality*

The endless and enervating shortage of funding has forced directors to become "businessmen" or "businesswomen," to commercialize the only commodities in their purview, that is, archival records, fonds, and buildings. This is repugnant to all archival managers, who consider themselves to be learned and cultural workers first. "Commodification" of archival information and services was the farthest thing from their minds when they took up their posts. Obviously, commodification has its limits; *Rosarkhiv's* regulatory control and various International Council on Archives (ICA) regulations define strictly what tariffs and charges are allowable for what archival services. Such strictures make sense in a more-or-less rational world; but where things are chaotically topsy-turvy, strictures necessarily bend. While this has allowed for some impropriety and chicanery in archival practices, remarkably, given the extent of the

ongoing crisis in funding in Russian and Ukrainian archives, such mischief has been relatively limited.

In some instances, directors, in contravention of international norms, charged a registration fee for access to archives. *Rosarkhiv*, on hearing of this, put a stop to the practice. Copying charges vary dramatically from institution to institution in any given year, from \$.30 to \$5.00 per page. *Rosarkhiv* considers this situation not only inappropriate, but illegal; that it is "high time to end this bazaar"; and that directors of archives allow themselves too much leeway with copying prices, especially when they set differing tariffs for Russians and foreigners.<sup>7</sup> According to ICA and *Rosarkhiv* norms, archives can charge only enough to recover costs of operator, paper, supplies, and other maintenance, never for the informational content of copied documents (unless the information is to be used for a commercial venture or publication that will earn money). One can sympathize with *Rosarkhiv's* principled posture; it is the correct thing to do. One can also understand the directors of archives who, in desperation, try to get ends at least close to meeting.

Archives directors have taken to renting out space to private ventures. The archival village in Moscow consists of three central archival institutions laid out in an enclosed quadrangle. A number of garages and storage structures, enclosed by a high board fence, take up much of the central square, which is home base to a firm that washes cars and trucks, performs various deliveries through the city, and so on. An undertaking of this sort does not accord well with archives and their needs. Excess water from washing operations flows near archival vaults, and heaps of construction materials lie all about (pipes, bricks, sand piles, etc.). Archival administrators long wanted it out, but the firm has connections, and the rent it pays more or less covers the energy costs of the complex. In a pleasing development, most of the trash heaps have been largely cleared over the last several years.

In 1994, another major Moscow archives boasting a prime location began to rent out a portion of its massive lobby to two banks and a cleaning company, which opened branches there. How else, the director asked me, was he to raise money to pay staff and maintain the building, at a time when he needed 5,000,000 rubles for elevator repairs and 500,000 rubles monthly for elevator maintenance, as well as 1,000,000 rubles monthly for fire protection? Other archives rent space to apothecaries, computer and photoduplication shops, bookstores, and the like. A number of archives have opened hostels within their institutions, catering to both Russians and foreigners.

Some of the archives that hold records of extreme interest to foreign archival or research institutions have established significant copying and joint-

<sup>7</sup> This practice of differential rates continues and has been established at many archives, as I discovered during a research trip to St. Petersburg and Moscow in September and October 2003.



publication projects with them. Most significant of such undertakings was the Hoover Project. This agreement was struck between *Rosarkhiv* and the Hoover Institution for the Study of War, Peace and Revolution in 1992. The project promised *Rosarkhiv* desperately needed money in a desperate time; Hoover paid several million dollars for permission to copy all Comintern Finding Aids, as well the complete fonds of seven or eight prominent Bolshevik leaders (such as Molotov, Kalinin, Kaganovich, and others), amounting to several million pages. Duplicating technology used during this project, as well as security microfilm copies of all records filmed, were also presented to *Rosarkhiv*.

As archives try to earn money from abroad in various joint ventures, the same government that cannot fund their basic needs taxes their earnings from such projects as foreign income; in 1993, the tax rate was 90 percent. A chaotic and capricious tax structure, the "devil in the details," as so many directors put it, decimates their foreign source earnings, as the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Finance, customs and excise officials, and others, all with an interest in "foreign earnings," take their shares. Representatives of all these agencies have legislated taxing responsibilities; unfortunately, these responsibilities are often in manifest contradiction to each other, and the Duma seems to lose sight of how many levels of taxation it layers upon the archival system (and all Russia, for that matter).

In some instances, thankfully rare, archival institutions hold researcher services for ransom. One archival institution in Moscow, holding records reflecting Soviet decision making at virtually the highest level, has a wondrously detailed Rolodex system based on keyword entry, cross-referencing records to the minutest degree. In its time, this information control system provided almost instantaneous recall of information for the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Yet researchers have no access to this system. They make do with finding aids, which, as Russians say, are "deaf," because the file descriptions provide no useful information whatsoever; they simply list sessions of the Central Committee, along with date of session and number of the sitting. However, for a fee of \$100 to \$120, archivists will perform a thematic search through the Rolodex (and if the material has been declassified, will provide photocopies at \$2 a page).

Yet another means for earning income is searching holdings for researchers. All archives will execute comprehensive thematic searches of finding aids, index cards, and whatever automated intellectual control tools they might have at their disposal. The cost usually begins at \$100; the degree of intensity requested (inventory or file level, for example) can affect the price.

Directors employ all of the above means to earn desperately needed money to keep institutions working. Most, while not desirable, are open and legal. Unfortunately, with archival workers so desperately underpaid, unethical practices also manifest themselves within the archival system at lower levels. Archivists can, for example, refuse to provide any assistance, other than

*pro forma*, unless some compensation is given them. The refusal could be overt or suggestive, for how can a researcher actually know what the responsible archivist knows or does not know about records on a given theme in his or her care and so determine whether or not the assistance provided conforms to ethical and professional norms? Archivists can “hide” records in the vaults for some researcher who has “helped out,” or until they themselves have published their own work. They can “misplace” records until some special consideration is shown them. In these and many other small ways, desperate archivists can hold back on full service. In all my travels and working visits to archives in Russia and Ukraine, I have never experienced such things, but both foreigners and Russians attest to their occurrence.

Beyond such professionally unethical conduct have been cases of outright criminal activities in Russian and Ukrainian archives. Archival originals have been sold, usually to foreigners with American dollars. In the early 1990s, the director of a sensitive archives sold records from the period of the Civil War (1918–1921), before their declassification and before any Russian researcher had ever seen them, receiving an extraordinary sum in return. He then broke news of this perfidy, which he alleged was perpetrated by another, to the press. A conservative Communist himself, he also wanted to use this development to embarrass *Rosarkhiv* before the Duma, which, in a xenophobic moment, was demanding strict control over access to archival records. This gentleman sought to kill two birds with one stone—embarrass the archival leadership and profit personally, by alienating a portion of the national memory.

In Ukraine, the Odessa *oblast* archives was closed down in the mid-1990s for several months for the purpose of taking a total inventory of records, an action necessitated by indications of massive, wholesale thefts of records from that institution.

When I was visiting an archives in St. Petersburg in 1996, its director told me about the stealing of stamps, about the cutting out of signatures from historical documents for sale as autographs, about the theft of aesthetic gems such as illuminated decrees signed by emperors, and about the disappearance of other easily marketable items. While there one Saturday morning for a personal visit with him, I walked into a maelstrom of activity, with archival officials rushing about hither and yon. The director shared his anger and sorrow with me. Just that morning, he had received a call from a German dealer in manuscripts, along with faxes of documents given to the dealer by several Russian-speaking individuals to sell on consignment. The faxes showed sixteen extremely valuable items from the eras of Peter and Catherine (the Greats); the archives’ inventories attested to their provenance, and a search of the vault verified that these items were missing. As the director pointed out to me, this time the thieves had run up against an honest merchant; what other treasures had been “removed” and had fallen into the hands of unscrupulous dealers?

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Flagrant thefts of almost-reliquary records are infrequent—at least, archival directors hope that this is the case. However, many fear that theft might be an invisible, ongoing phenomenon, given the desperate poverty of archivists and the relatively primitive security and control methods within archival storage areas and in vaults. Some, in fact, fear there has been criminal penetration of the archival system already, that some of the people hired to perform auxiliary and support services may be moles who, when the time is appropriate, will be activated by their “managers” on the outside and instructed what to steal. This fear in part informs all directors’ desires and activities to keep as many of their present staffers on as possible; most are known and trustworthy, and no one truly knows who a newly hired worker might be or the nature of his or her intent.

*Frost on the Walls of the Archives—Cold as a Morgue*

Most of my visits to Russia and Ukraine occurred in late fall or in the midst of winter. They were uncomfortable trips; but they were instructive, allowing me to experience in full measure the onerous conditions under which Russian and Ukrainian archivists work. In the mid-to-late 1990s, most of the central archives, as well as the archives of prominent ministries, had very little or no central heating—even the reading rooms, let alone the vaults, were unheated and frightfully cold. Archivists and researchers worked indoors in nearly full winter dress. My heavy clothes warded off cold for the first hour or two; after that, with each passing hour, the cold made itself well and truly known as it penetrated through to the marrow, and my teeth began to chatter. The humidity in the air so intensified the cold that on many a day I left archives with a runny nose, with tingling and burning in my ears and other extremities, with a dizzy head, and fearing that my body would never know warmth again. In truth, to walk outside into the cold was a relief, since exercise at least helped to stir up whatever residual body heat remained inside.

For me, of course, such experiences were brief interludes, only two or three weeks of discomfort. But for Russian and Ukrainian archivists, working in unheated buildings for long stretches at a time was their daily lot. At times, frost does indeed crystallize as a glistening sheen on interior walls. Luckily, electricity was usually available during heating shutdowns, and thus the ubiquitous space heater could be used, placed in strategic corners where warmth could collect and where archivists could try to do most of their work, or at least retreat to whenever time allowed. They cocooned themselves in layers of wraps when sitting at their desks, and scribe’s gloves, with fingertips cut away, were not uncommon. To work in such cold and humidity, winter after winter, takes its toll on people’s health, weakening their resistance to illness. Illnesses of various sorts were common and dragged on for months on end, especially among the

older workers. And what of workers with chronic ailments, asthma, or other lung-related illnesses? Some develop tuberculosis, and while many other factors probably occasion their infections, working for months in the sepulchral cold of an archives in winter surely plays no small part.

In Ukraine in November 1996, the First Conference of Archivists and Historians of Independent Ukraine took place at GAU's main building. The auditorium where the ceremonies and plenaries took place was a deep freeze. The thematic working sessions were held in smaller rooms, where participants sat wrapped in winter coats, people huddled up against each other, the speakers' warm breath vaporizing out of their mouths in the dimly lit room. Lightbulbs were of such low wattage (for economy's sake) that one could barely read notes for presentation. Breathing into my hands to warm them up, I completely steamed up my glasses. After a session of several hours, I exited the building shaking from the cold, with fingers fully numbed and barely responding.

A popular bit of black humor circulated at this conference. The central plenary chamber, it went, should be renamed "Morgue Central," so that as attendees expired from the cold, it would not be necessary to carry bodies any great distance, but simply "stack them up at the back"; survivors could benefit by the last of the body heat emanating from the fallen.

Lack of funding accounts for the cold in Russian archives. In Ukraine, it is not only lack of funding, but also that Ukraine depends largely on Russia for energy supplies, which have at times been interrupted because of large Ukrainian arrears in payments due Russia for supplies received. However, the buildings themselves—their age and the nature of their construction—worsen the situation. The old monasteries and churches mobilized into archival service many years ago are essentially and almost exclusively of stone construction. Newer buildings, until recently, were built much the same way; all walls are load bearing, hence the need for thick stone. Even when structures were built over a steel-girder carcass, insulation was never much a concern. This was in part a consequence of economic unaccountability, both allowed and encouraged by *Gosplan* under the old Soviet order. With no premium on efficiency, when no one had to care about the cost, heat could be run at full blast in stone buildings to keep out winter's chill. In fact, the more heat one expended the better the numbers looked for the power and heating sectors of the national economy (in terms of total production/service) when they did their annual accounting before *Gosplan*. In truth, the peasant *izba* of Russia or *khata* of Ukraine were far more heat efficient than urban buildings. Building modes are now changing dramatically (frame with insulation, interior insulation over stone walls, weather-tight doors and windows, energy-efficient heating/cooling systems, and so on). This will bear fruit only in the future; given the low priority that the state has assigned to its archives, they will continue, for decades yet to come, to reside in their dank and stone-cold fortresses.

In the face of all these hardships and indignities, many archivists soldier on! Why? Some archival workers simply have no other place to go—however bitter their lot, other jobs pay even less. Many believe that, with time, improved benefits will come to them in the job they hold, that ultimately the corner will be turned (not a vain hope, for directors in many archives have managed to find ways to increase their workers' salaries). Most, however, stay on out of dedication. They believe in their calling, and feel that they are, as in Russia, saving a great heritage, or as in Ukraine, restoring a lost past and building their nation anew. Their faith may be somewhat quixotic—but it motivates nonetheless. A palpable professional camaraderie binds them and even strengthens their resolve to see things through to a better day. They are motivated by the awareness that they live in a time of great and novel experimentation in societal remaking during which they are performing a noble task by preserving the memory of the past (both Tsarist and Communist), saving the record of a turbulent-yet-fecund present, and helping shape the future by providing instructive lessons from the historical experience of the past preserved in their institutions. Finally, they are still committed to the idea of archives as central to culture and learning, and they carry on, at times crusaderlike, suffering for their New Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

#### The Director as Pater/Mater

During the trying 1990s, the more-or-less amorphous interphase when Russia and Ukraine commenced transforming themselves, the office of “director” assumed significance beyond the general understanding of that term by most Westerners. The director not only manages an institution and its employees—the very fate of an archives is arguably dependent on the director. This is not surprising, given the severe financial dislocation of society and ever-deficient funding for archives. Additionally, an unending flood of legislation from the Duma and instructions and directives from *Rosarkhiv* come down upon archives; some of it at cross-purposes with existing regulations, while many of the directives are unrealistic, given the lack of resources at the disposition of archives. (One director of a significant St. Petersburg institution told me that he “does not make haste to fulfill the requirements of the law—it may soon change.”) Only a prescient and energetic individual, with extraordinary political and administrative abilities, could lead his or her institution under such conditions.

<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to say what the future holds for these archivists, what potential chagrin and disappointments, as Russian society becomes more like ours, where pursuit of the dollar (U.S. preferably, of course), consumerism, and escape into the virtual world of Sony's PlayStation are easily and rapidly displacing the love of culture and dedication to great literature and learning. They are motivated by, and dedicated to, an ideal of culture which, in all certainty, will also fall to the “American way”—the pursuit of efficiency, profit, and mass consumerism.

But there is more to the role of director. True to tradition, executive officers in Russia and Ukraine have a certain *potestas*, a plenitude of discretionary executive authority in their prescribed circuit accorded to them less by legislation than by practice; subordinate workers treat their directors with great respect and deference, and they feel that this is as it should be. Concurrently with a formal sense of subordination to a director comes also a recognition of the director as a sort of *pater/mater*, as a person of influence and power who can intercede wherever and whenever necessary with appropriate authorities on behalf of his or her workers, who become almost wards. Beyond the outward formality of subordination and deference is this sense of a kinship group headed a patriarch/matriarch, who will do whatever he or she can for the well-being of the group.

The notion of an executive officer as an empowered viceroy within his or her circuit also manifests itself in the director. He or she has an extraordinarily broad reach throughout the life of the institution and its staffers and more discretion to bend strict regulations wherever necessary and possible, doing what is right for those in his or her appointed circuit. This practice existed in Tsarist Russia; it survived throughout the Soviet era; and it has continued on into new Russia and Ukraine. Perhaps there is a Slavophile underpinning to this notion of director as patriarch/matriarch over his or her kin, of viceroy over his or her wards—and most of the directors take these responsibilities seriously.

Thus, the tradition of powerful executive officials (ensconced in law), the pragmatic imperative for able and interventionist officers during socio-economic and political transformation (to steer institutions through a seemingly endless crisis of severe underfunding), and the traditional mindset of archivists (which both elevates an administrator and treats him or her with appropriate deference, seeing him or her as a parent-intercessor and their hope of salvation) have all come together to shape the role and perception of today's archival director in Russia and Ukraine. The director can safely be termed a *pater/mater*, the *bat'ia* (patriarch) or *matushka* (matriarch) who is the support and anchor in the lives of his or her archivists, with whom they either swim or sink.

The dearth of central funding imposes upon all archival directors their first imperative—sources of income for their staffs and institutions. Thus, they seek to earn money in any manner conceivable, most often through linkages with outside institutions interested in copying, editing, and publishing records out of Russian archives, as well as mounting them on-line in massive electronic databases. One director, for example, has links with several outside agencies (both Hoover and other pan-European institutes). With money so earned, he was able to establish a decent cafeteria for his staff; a small benefit, perhaps, but for many it provided the only meal of the day. He was able to hire another thirty-five staff members desperately needed to modernize institutional management practices

(by, for example, developing an accounting office) at a salary of 5,000 to 6,000 rubles per month (at that time 840 rubles bought \$1).

The building housing his archives is decent, by Soviet-Russian standards, with its own air-conditioning system. But breakdowns in the system occur with unpleasant regularity, and repairs, as well as ongoing maintenance, are very expensive. He needed someone with extraordinary abilities to manage it. So, for his engineering chief, he hired a retired naval captain who formerly had run a Soviet nuclear submarine, a man who was dedicated, efficient, resourceful and, at that time, trying to survive on a pitiable pension.

Additional measures that the director implemented were the rental of lobby space to various private firms and the purchase of a full year's supply of copy paper when he stumbled upon a very good price for it. He "shopped when it was hot," grabbed up the paper supply, and, with the proceeds from copying records for researchers, brought in additional money, with which he could then make repairs to his building, pay various bills, and help secure his staff's salaries.

A director of another Moscow archives also earned critical income for his institution through developing contacts and initiating a number of ventures and undertakings. His institution now runs a hostel for visiting scholars; he has launched co-operative intellectual and publishing projects with significant institutions in Europe, Israel, and the United States; and he has begun producing "history minutes" for broadcast on a popular television station. Simply put, he has had to learn to "smell out" where money can be made and, if he has the archival resources—particularly historical records—that command interest, he works with all the creativity at his command to get that money. He has been so effective that his archival workers occasionally received bonuses in the late 1990s.

Those directors who have "marketable" archival commodities apply all their energies to their "selling"; those who care for records that do not command a premium in the intellectual or information market today look out for their staff in other ways. Many directors have had success in attracting the "nouveau riche" of Russia to underwrite certain high-profile projects; in return, the benefactors receive public recognition that tickles their egos. A director of a central archives in Moscow restructured work schedules for people, in fact allowing them a *de facto* four-day week and flexible arrival and departure times so that they could leave early for second jobs or imperative errands during the working day. "Creative bookkeeping" and reporting to the center were unavoidable to get more money into salary allocations. During the cold season (late fall, winter, and early spring), this same director allowed workers to leave several hours earlier rather than suffer in the unheated building. In 1999, the director told me that he could count on absolutely no one, that any director must rely only on him- or herself, and that a director must, in addition to being a scholar and administrator, also be a politician, lobbyist, public spokesperson, politician, and businessperson to secure the survival of staff, institution, and historical record.

### *Archival Challenges Under the New Order*

Until 1991, there was no civil society to speak of, only an all-encompassing state structure under the aegis of the Communist Party. State organs, each with a shadow Party organ, were the only legally empowered corporate agencies in the former Soviet Union. There were what, at first glance, might be termed citizens' associations, various friendship societies, for example, or sporting and leisure clubs, but they all had affiliation with, and were controlled by, societal entities (factories, institutes, etc.) that in turn were subordinated to state or Party agencies. In such a system, with all corporate entities identified, all scheduled for archival purposes, archival management was relatively predictable. With the implosion of the Soviet Union all this changed. A new legal consciousness is in process of formation, and this has a meaningful impact upon the burden facing Russian and Ukrainian archives.

The central archives have had to struggle with the explosive consequences of the upheaval itself. As ministry after ministry was cashiered in the early 1990s (some 180 ministries have been reduced to perhaps thirty or forty), nightmarish logistical challenges reared before *Rosarkhiv* and its archival directors. How were they, first off, to monitor and bring in the records of these ministries; where were they going to store them; how did they intend to process these mountains of paper? At the very same time that this challenge arose, archival budgets failed, and staff was harder to retain. In the new Russia, neither archives, nor the cashiered ministries, nor the historical memory of the nation, had any cachet for the new "businessmen" and go-getters under Russian "capitalism," or for the reforming administrators in the new governmental institutions. This led to some harrowing, Pythonesque moments.

For example, a ministry in Moscow was "privatized" (i.e., its operations handed over to a private group) and its building bought by a baking operation. The new owners cared not one whit about the "records" of their predecessors and "disposed" of them by heaving them out onto the street. Officials of the relevant archives learned of this and reacted immediately; the institution's archivists, on their own time (for which they received no pay), worked a whole weekend and more to save these records which, documenting the activity of a significant ministry (heavy metallurgy), had indisputable historical value. Such salvaging, perhaps more correctly salvation, of massive extents of records occurred time and again. Without the altruism of Russian archivists, without their admirable commitment to archives and history, what crimes would have been committed against the national memory? These records were all-Union, touching on sixteen republics along with the central government; and more significantly, they constituted the apotheosis to a great dream gone terribly wrong, born out of the Revolution of 1917 which, in itself, was one of the defining historical moments of the twentieth century. The archivists knew this—and they



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responded selflessly, as Russian archivists always have done, in the service of their state and society, and as always, with little or no remuneration for their efforts.

Physically saving the record was only the first challenge; where to store millions of files simply thrust upon archives by the closures of central ministries and agencies was as serious a concern. For example, the archives responsible for economic records had to find space for three million files in 1994 alone! The only possibility, as it turned out, was a related repository [filial] in Samara (on the Volga River), well over a thousand kilometers away, and at a cost of over \$35,000, an astronomical sum by Russian standards. I witnessed the beginning of this move some years later. Standing in the courtyard of the archival village in Moscow in 1996, I saw a tarped delivery/construction truck back up to a large heap of bundled records piled up on the ground. The truck-bed was far from clean. Workers simply started heaving the bundles into the truck; before the records lay a journey of over a thousand kilometers along broken roads in a vehicle with no suspension aside from worn leaf springs! It was painful to watch and think about all this; at the same time it was comforting to realize that, however impoverished and inappropriate the means, the records were nonetheless being saved.

Certainly not all threatened records were saved in either Russia or Ukraine. Some of the sensitive departments intentionally burned records that might have compromised their staffs in the new era dawning. In 1996, a highly placed administrator in Ukraine destroyed 50,000 files of the Ministry of Transport. In his estimation they were simply junk unnecessarily occupying needed space; he suffered absolutely no consequences.

The saving of the records of abolished ministries and agencies was one side of the coin. The other side was getting through to officials in the new institutions the importance of re-establishing records management and archival control. Many of the new political “managers” simply don’t care about archives. Perhaps they’ve taken a cue from Russia’s own politicians, who at times have shown frightful lack of concern for the national memory. For example, in 1994 the Russian Duma took over a building of a former “fraternal” agency housing records of cultural relations between the former Soviet Union and outside states. The Duma’s sole concern was getting the records out. Remove the records immediately, it threatened, or they would be trashed.

It’s no exaggeration to say that many of the new leaders in Russia and Ukraine, whether in governmental ministries and agencies or in private enterprises, manifest an “archives-be-damned” attitude. “Who needs them?” is a question too often asked of archivists intervening on behalf of the records. Early in the 1990s, the director of the Comintern archives in Moscow was stunned to learn that authorities at the former Marx-Engels Museum, after its building was re-allocated for other functions, had decided to “clear” some space. Original

writings by the greatest of Europe's socialist luminaries (French, German, and English) from the late eighteenth century onward, artwork by French realists (Cormier and Daumier), associated manuscripts, and many artifacts, all assembled at great cost after the establishment of the Soviet Union, were simply stuffed into sacks and trashed. Upon hearing of this, the director moved quickly to save this priceless body of manuscripts, artwork, and artifacts, even though it was outside his bailiwick. It is difficult to say what elicited the museum's threatened act of cultural barbarism—commercial imperatives to clear space at all costs, a vengeful glee in denigrating the former holies of the Communist order, a notion that in the rampant “de-Communization” of that time it was a proper and politick thing to do? Quick intervention saved an extraordinarily rich, in fact priceless, record. What might have been lost in the first years of the 1990s because of this “archives be damned” attitude one cannot say. Perhaps for each potential disaster there was a director to intervene. Perhaps.

The old Soviet system, with its preliminary archival work carried out in ministries (appraisal, selection, accessioning, and registry work performed *in situ*), was not perfect, but compared to today it is an archivist's lost golden age. Relations with ministries and agencies are being re-organized now, at a time when the cachet of archives has dropped off the radar screen, when there are virtually no resources, when legislation governing archival activity is still in flux, when government ministries and agencies, themselves ever short of finances, contribute little for archival services.

In addition to rebuilding the archival machinery to save the government record, *Rosarkhiv* in Russia and *Glavarkhiv* in Ukraine have before them the challenges of the new private sector. Many civic and private corporate entities now exist in all areas of life independent of the state. Each citizen now has an independent legal persona, free of the encumbrance of ascription to such-and-such a collective entity. Archival administrations are developing procedures to work with the new structures of civic life and with private citizens in the hope that existing historical records, as well as those created in the future, are not lost.

It is difficult enough, as archivists in the West know, to acquire private records. It is much more difficult to do so in societies crippled by residual, near-paranoid fear of the state, especially when representatives of that state still have so much capricious executive authority, when legal consciousness and structures to limit executive caprice are not firmly in place, when the legal persona of citizens is still fragile, and when that state probes deeply into the lives of all in an endless search for taxes. There is also the matter of reaching out to private individuals who have valuable records; many small troves of very significant historical records remain hidden away throughout Russia, particularly in Siberia (dealing with the Trans-Siberian Railroad, the Whites and the Civil War, etc.). Not only does the search for this record have to be completed; the records then usually have to be purchased, at a time when archives have no money.

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In addition to saving the record of the past and addressing the issue of acquisition in a changing society, another concern dominates the minds of some archival administrators—capturing the present moment. Society seethes with new political movements of the right, center, and left, while entities, both governmental and private, rise and fall overnight. All this transpires in a society distributed across one-sixth of the earth's surface, still ethnically the most complex polity on Earth. To capture the fullness of the era, one archives has an archivist who does nothing but go from one prominent metro station or city square to another throughout Moscow, every day, gathering up all the “ephemera” handed out on a daily basis by representatives and spokespeople of various causes and movements. Sadly, despite best efforts, the historical record of the current-day protean flux in Russia and Ukraine will never be captured as faithfully as it should be—archivists are only able to do their best with frightfully limited resources. And certain extraordinary moments born of this time of flux have demanded of certain archival institutions herculean efforts. After the destruction of the White House (the building housing the offices of the president of Russia) in 1993, for example, archivists moved in under still-dangerous conditions to save what records they could, trucking out forty-five tons of water-damaged, smoke-stained, and fire-scorched documents which required years of painstaking sorting, organizing, and restoration. The work was done.

As archives define their place in the new order, jurisdictional disputes arise, especially for prized, high-profile fonds. For example, the records of the *Malyi* and *Bolshoi* theaters in Moscow have for decades gone to a specific central archives; they are now the object of contestation, as the City of Moscow Archives has made a bid to become the new home for the future records of these institutions. Four archives hold portions of the papers of the clown-prince of Russian politics, Zhirinovskii.

More significant jurisdictional struggles occur when ministries refuse to cooperate with the archival system and continue to hold records long-scheduled for transfer to central archives. In some instances, the matter goes beyond simple jurisdiction, as ministries have come to see archival fonds as sources of income. For example, all Ministry of Defense records from 1918 to 1950 were to be transferred to *Rosarkhiv*. Then, the ministry refused. The records had immense prestige value; after all, the Civil War, Allied intervention, building the Red Army, purges of the army in the 1930s, the Second World War (initial defeats, recovery, and victory), and the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe are all extraordinary themes, and all are reflected in these records. Additionally, these fonds also give answers to marquee issues in Soviet history: the Katyn massacre of Polish officers, missing Allied POWs, the GULag, the roles of key Soviet military leaders, the origins of the Cold War, and on, and on, and on. Beyond the prestige value in retaining these records, the ministry can manage access to these records much more tightly and, perhaps, also earn money by

providing document searches and copies at elevated prices. Sadly, there seem to have been instances of near-extortion, with one Polish researcher taken out of a research room, asked to pay a substantial sum for research privileges and, upon refusal, shown the door. A similar situation exists in the Ministry of the Interior (MVD), which in all likelihood safeguards a remarkable number of treasures in manuscript materials confiscated from prominent Soviet literati and refuseniks over many decades. It is purported that unpublished diaries of Gorkii (wherein he vented savage criticism of the evolving Stalinist order), held in the MVD archives, have inexplicably gone "missing." Against such jurisdictions as the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior, *Rosarkhiv* does not have enough profile, clout, support, or legal basis to effect its theoretical control. In the case of power ministries, not much has changed over the last decade.

#### ***Declassification and Archival Guides***

One of the most significant archival achievements of Russian and Ukrainian archives over the last decade has been the declassification of immense extents of archival records. By 1991, all Party and KGB material had come under the control of *Rosarkhiv*. Two statutes of 1992 authorized it to lead the Special Committee on Declassification in opening up this (and other) material. Within several years, more than one-half of seven million plus classified files were opened, many of them dealing with the most sensitive of subjects (Katyn massacre, KGB repressions throughout the Soviet Union, repression of the churches and religion, Western MIAs, exile and repatriation of nationalities, Soviet dissidents, etc.). Generally, the thirty-year rule was (and continues to be) applied, with exceptions allowing a fifty-year closure. Material of a personal nature is opened after seventy-five years from birth (subject to third-party clearance).<sup>9</sup>

In Russia, thousands of fonds, long hidden away and whose very existence was long denied, have been made public over the last decade (fonds dealing with the White movement, Jewish communities, MVD-KGB repressions, the Russo-Finnish War, Soviet-Nazi co-operation, GULag, Communist Party and Central Committee records, etc.). A ravenous hunger among citizens for information about the "white spots" of Soviet Russian and Ukrainian history characterized the early to mid-1990s. To sate this demand, the press, both newspaper and periodical, printed revelation after revelation from archival sources about

<sup>9</sup> Both Russia and Ukraine have paid special attention to this issue. In January 1994, the Declassification Conference (under the aegis of UNESCO) was held in Moscow, which added impetus to declassification as Canadian and American archivists shared their knowledge and experiences with Russian colleagues. In November 1996, the First Conference of Archivists and Historians of Independent Ukraine was held in Kiev and also dedicated much attention to this issue.

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the past. Politicians, often very powerful, who stood to gain by the publication of the truth about the past, pressured for ever-more openness. Thus, even more once-taboo fonds concerning the Comintern, the State Committee on Defense during World War II, Party history in the regions, and human losses during WWII (resulting in the undertaking of a massive memorial project, the Book of Memory, with more than fifteen million names now), were declassified.

Then, beginning in 1995, pressures to slow down declassification manifested themselves. Laws on privacy went into effect. Moreover, Russian archives, in the first fevered flush of declassification, had opened record types usually closed for far longer periods in the West (fairly current executive records of the Central Committee and almost current Party records on Communist parties in other countries whose revelations had harmed persons still living). Declassification slowed down; in fact, where warranted, opened fonds were again closed (Comintern records, for example, heavy with personal information). Other records and fonds that perhaps had been too precipitously declassified were temporarily closed and re-evaluated by declassification commissions. These proved more fastidious in their application of stricter guidelines. Composed of retired employees of relevant ministries, they operated with less commitment to archival research interests, were not broadly educated, had a sectoral interest to defend, and wanted to make themselves important. (For example, one commission consisted of twelve retired generals—obviously, their proclivities regarding opening materials would differ from an archivist's.)

Declassification is slowing, but astounding extents of records have already been opened. Concurrently, these records, as well as the traditional holdings of the central archives, have been described and publicized as never before. Publication of detailed archival guides and full inventories of the holdings of the central archives has exploded. This is a critical turnabout from former practice; into the 1980s, archival inventories and guides were published in very small press runs and almost always restricted, stamped “for internal service use only.” The need to earn money drives, in part, this phenomenon; publication of archival guides, almost always with a Western partner, generates some revenue and promises to bring paying researchers to an institution. But the real impetus is to open, to publicize, and to make known the historical moment when Russia changed. All archives have been infected with this publication mania—many have published multivolume works on their holdings so that researchers can access descriptive information by various methods (listing by fonds number, alphabetic, thematic, etc.). Descriptions of fonds are copious. The production of such guides demands extraordinary labor, often under very tight deadlines; yet many archivists put in many, many hours of their own time in the preparation of such guides (at work, on the subway, and at home) to get the job done, motivated by their sense of commitment to a great thing in the making.

Unfortunately, dependent as they are on foreign sources or institutions to cover publishing costs, Russian archives often lose copyright and ongoing intellectual control over such publications, as well as potential earnings from sales. More hurtful to archivists is the misappropriation of academic and authorial credit that happens far too frequently with such joint works. While the true compilers or creators might get mention in passing in a foreword or in a list of contributors, others' names (of their own directors and of foreign editors and compilers) embellish the spine. To people who still value culture in its broad sense, and who are members of the intellectual class, such misappropriation of credit is even more painful to bear than the everyday trials of their stressful and Spartan existence. Many feel the loss of their intellectual or spiritual bread more painfully than they experience the loss of their daily bread, despoiled, as many of them put it to me, by "odious personalities" profiting by their misfortunes.

Ukraine has been much slower to publish such guides, less because of reticence to do so on the part of its archivists, more because Ukrainian archival directors have found it more difficult to find wealthy publishing partners prepared to participate in such projects.

### Conclusion?

There is no "conclusion" to this presentation. Dramatic root changes in Russian and Ukrainian archives (mirroring root-and-branch transformations in most areas of life of both societies) have only just begun. I can only offer some general comments on the past decade of archival evolution in Russia and Ukraine and some general observations on what lies ahead.

While an avalanche of changes has descended upon Russia and Ukraine, not all of the old ways have been swept from the archival domain; the new interweaves with the old. In truth, it would be abnormal to think that it could be otherwise, that all could change instantaneously. In difficult times people recoil into old and familiar ways, and in Russia and Ukraine this has happened, as archives and archivists look to proven old methods and ways to help them transit into an unknown new.

The director as *padrone*, the personalism in director-archivist relations, the internal archival support systems devised out of stark necessity, the Potemkin/*Gosplan* type of work plans (very detailed and impossible to fulfill), inflated statements of achievements, the various tricks employed (drawing salary money for a full complement of staff when only one-half the positions were filled), occasional absurdity in rule by fiat (higher authorities decreeing tasks without taking into account lack of capacities, funding, and personnel), old "Red Directors" still in place hindering the transition to new ways—all this still pokes out of the ground in the fields of Russian and Ukrainian archives.

Bureaucratization is making a comeback; it never really went away, only into suspension in the early years of *perestroika* until some firmament began to show itself. In the first years of the past decade came massive cuts to the numbers in government service. By 1995, however, the trend had been reversed; now there are eighteen million government employees, more for Russia alone (with under 150 million people and declining) than there had been for whole of the former Soviet Union (approximately 300 million). And increasing bureaucratization affects archives as well, with the return of increased reporting and control requirements. The seemingly endless sweep of criminality and illegality throughout Russia and Ukraine also harkens back to old times and old ways. While Russia in 1996 was receiving one billion dollars in credits monthly from the IMF and the World Bank to survive, her *nouveaux russe* bandits were illegally sending two billion dollars monthly out of the country. Criminality, as indicated above, has also manifested itself in the archival system. Some directors have “benefited” beyond the normal—one individual had a “special research account” set aside for him at a U.S. bank, several trips a year, and other bonuses worked into an agreement with a foreign institution.

Against this rather depressing background of the continuation of old ways, some developments in Russian archives augur, according to some observers, even more ill for the future. Declassification is slowing, gummed up by new legislation (on privacy, and on protection of state secrets, economic secrets, and third-party interests) and by the requirement that all ministries have their say in proposed declassification of any record affecting them. There seem to be increasing restrictions on the number of files brought up in a day for each researcher to view, as well as more severe limitations on the total number of photocopies allowed researchers for research purposes and the total percentage of a file that can be copied. Hours of operation are shrinking. Soviet-style lunch hours and break periods either continue to exist or are creeping back into some archival institutions; for example, four archival workers at an archives I visited insisted on having lunch at the very same time, drawing curtains across service windows and posting a sign strictly warning researchers, “Do Not Disturb from 1:00 to 2:00 P.M.”

Against these developments, it is legitimate to ask, “Are old ways truly creeping back into archives, reversing the changes wrought by the early 1990s? Are we seeing the start of a retreat toward something akin to the pre-1990s?” I think not at all. Too much has changed and, despite the sweeping dislocation, poverty, abuse, and impropriety that exists in Russian and Ukrainian society, the cat is too far out the bag, the genie too long gone from the lamp.

The once-secret fonds, whose existence was long denied, are all known, and many have been declassified. Declassification, despite slowing down, has not stopped; in fact, the slowing down has probably been no more than a logical and necessary correction. Access has become a right of all citizens, not simply select

researchers; even more, in keeping with ICA requirements, equal access is guaranteed to any outside researcher coming from abroad. In truth, many of the limitations (shortened hours, fewer files allowed per day, fewer copies permitted, heavier copying costs, and the like) are much more the consequences of poverty than policy. Even the occasional surly archivist who simply goes through the motions with seemingly little dedication to serving the public would disappear if his or her job allowed for a decent life free of daily want and denial.

Traces of the old ways still manifest themselves here and there and will occasionally re-assert themselves in various areas of archival endeavor. But what Russian and Ukrainian archives have achieved over the last decade—the manner in which they have changed, the extent to which they have changed, what they have become—has been revolutionary. The reader should also bear in mind that what I have presented here leaves the story *in media res*—the work of reform is not yet over, though the main features of the new archives have been sketched in. The picture looks very promising, very good.

All that remains is for archivists in Russia and Ukraine to survive (in the most direct sense of that word) this new “Time of Troubles,” and for the directors to keep on as creative wonder-workers in guiding their pitifully funded institutions through to a brighter morning. Those would be no small feats! How easy to express these sentiments; how taxing it has been for them all over the last decade! They have truly performed heroic work.

In large degree, the future of archivists and archival institutions will parallel, and reflect, overall developments in Russian and Ukrainian societies. As I was completing this paper, I came upon the following timely observation in an issue of *The Economist*:

“Russia is always stronger, and weaker, than it looks.” That adage has often been cited by analysts of the country’s military prowess. Time and again the outside world has been astonished by Russia’s ability to recover from utterly hopeless situations—and to squander positions of unassailable strength.<sup>10</sup>

The squandering has been done, with the waste of the Soviet experiment. One hopes that the near future does not fall prey to the ruin of another ideology, capitalism, taken to excess, and that at the very least there will be some recovery “from an utterly hopeless situation.”

<sup>10</sup> “The Russian Economy: Getting the Measure of the Bear,” *Economist* 362 (23 February 2002): 88.