NEW BUILDING FOR OLD. THE TRANSMIGRATION OF THE QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES

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In July, 1968, the staff of the Queensland State Archives took up occupation of the new archives building in Annerley Road, Dutton Park, a suburb of Brisbane. The site is two miles (in a direct line) from the Brisbane G.P.O., or two and a half miles as the traffic crawls.

As far as the present author knows, this building is the first one to be erected specially for archives by any State Government in Australia—the first such archives building, that is, quite separate from any other building, and to be used exclusively for the preservation of public records. The work of the Commonwealth Government in erecting buildings of a similar nature is, of course, acknowledged.

The choice of site is one of the most difficult ones for an archivist to make when he is presented with the possibility of seeing an archives building erected for his use.

In his article on "Archival Buildings — Programming and Planning", Victor Gondos, junior, states[1]:

> No consideration is more important in the selection of a site [for an archives building] than that of room for expansion. This consideration, for one reason or another, was not given sufficient weight in the case of either the National Archives of the United States or the Maryland Hall of Records. The sites of both these buildings provide no room for lateral expansion of the stacks.

The observance of this consideration will, of course, preclude certain sites which might otherwise be suitable. Priorities must be established, and Gondos does not seem to be in any doubt that this particular consideration should rank first in any order of priorities.

There is more difficulty if one has to observe a list of two or more considerations. Gondos lists five which were postulated by the late Georg Winter in *Archivum*[2]. The archives should be:

1. Near the agencies with which it is bound by daily business relations and from which it receives its records.
2. Near the cultural and research institutions that are most dependent on archives and with which it has close cooperative relations.
3. Near the center of public life, but also:
4. Away from fire-threatening establishments (gas tanks, chemical works, and the like) and from districts subject to dampness, to flood, or to harmful gas and dust in the air.
5. Away from closely built and densely populated areas — places especially dangerous in time of war or public disorder.

The difficulties in Winter's statement are only too obvious. As far as a State Archives institution is concerned, one can only conclude that the first of these criteria will be satisfied if the institution is somewhere in the State capital. Only by the establishment of regional archives repositories could one come anywhere near satisfying this requirement literally in a State the size of Queensland. The Archives of this State have had to be brought together from centres as far away as Normanton, Birdsville and Mount Isa. At the moment of writing, the Archivist is

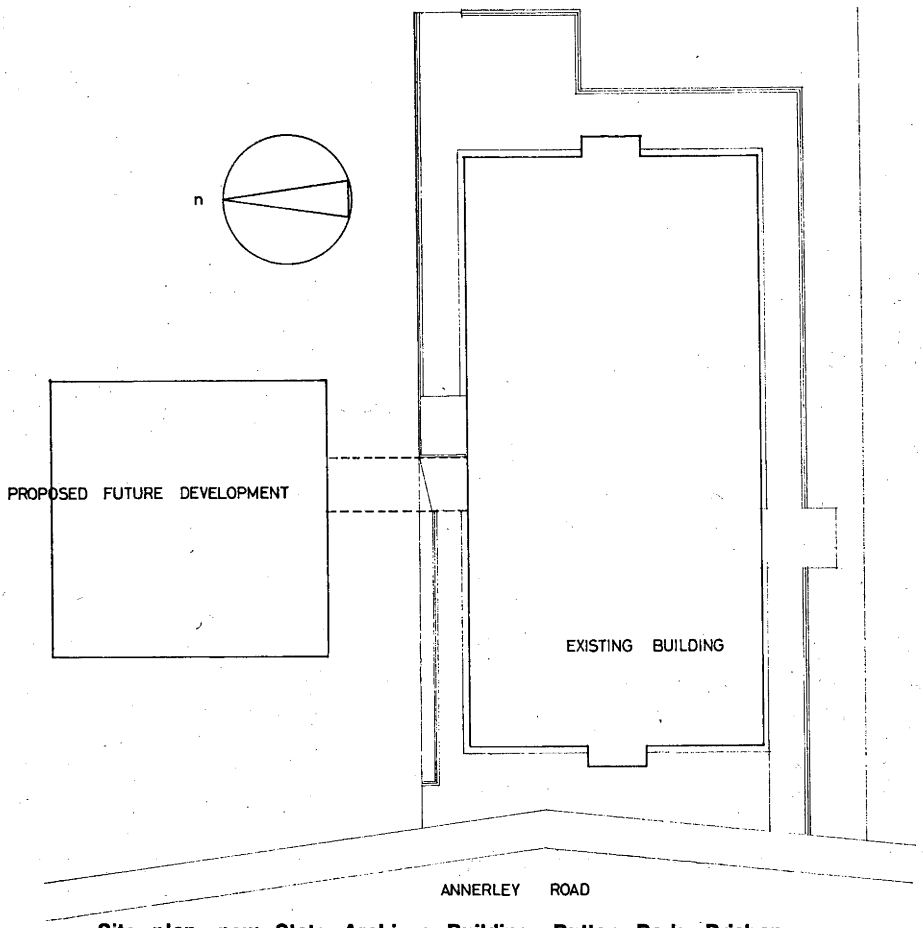
planning to take a trip which will involve over 2,000 miles of travelling, and the purpose is to bring together some of the scattered archives of the State. However, the majority of our records have come to us from Government Departmental headquarters, and these, of course, are located in Brisbane.

It is difficult to understand Winter's criteria unless one knows how near is "near" and how far away is "away". In the fourth statement, he stipulates that archives institutions should be "away" from fire-threatening establishments. In this case, I expect half a mile would be far enough away. "Near", on the other hand, could hardly be interpreted to mean "within half a mile of". In each of two of the major cities of Australia there are three universities, which must surely be the sorts of "cultural and research institutions" which he has in mind under point 2. But it would be impossible to locate the State archives institutions for the States of which those cities are capitals within half a mile, or even half a dozen miles, of the universities located in those cities.

This brings us back to a more realistic understanding of the problems of siting an archives establishment. If it is in a large city, and if there are reasonable public transport facilities to link it with the public (whether it be the "student" public, or the officers of the public authorities whose records are deposited there) one may assume that the site has met the reasonable demands of those who wish to make use of it. There is always the telephone and the mail service for those who cannot attend in person, and it is true that a great number of enquiries have to be answered by letter, whether the enquiry itself is made in person, by telephone, or by letter.

The safety of the records is all-important. At the back of the mind of any person planning an archives building there lurks the fear of fire and flood. More incipient dangers such as air pollution, civil riot, and damage from aerial or other bombardment, are less easy to gauge. These depend on industrial and sociological factors which cannot accurately be forecast, but in each case they represent an argument for locating the archives institution some distance from the business and industrial heart of the city. In a city such as Brisbane the possibility of damage from flood is also a factor influencing the choice of a site away from the city centre, or at least away from the river-bank site occupied by the old building used for archives purposes for eight years (1960-68). Suburban fires are probably as frequent as urban fires, but at least in a suburban location there is the possibility of finding a large enough piece of land to ensure insulation against fire for the comparatively small building to be erected thereon.

All of these considerations entered into the decision to locate the new Queensland State Archives building on a high piece of land, part of a Prison Reserve, next to the Brisbane Prison in Annerley Road, Dutton Park. The site measures one acre 10 perches, but there is a possibility of additional land on the northern side (a little more of that dwindling Prison Reserve) to be dedicated for archives use, should it be decided to extend the building in that direction. What is more, any building on that additional land could be a multi-storey one, and could be designed so as to harmonize in appearance with the existing building. In addition, there is an area of land at the lower (i.e. eastern) end of the



Site plan, new State Archives Building, Dutton Park, Brisbane. Scale 1" = ca 64 feet.

site, equivalent to about one third of the whole, on which a further extension could presumably be erected.

The site is reasonably well insulated from other buildings. Our nearest neighbour lives in a government-owned cottage on the northern side, the occupant being an employee of the Prison. There is only 48' between the two buildings, and the cottage would have to go if we were to expand in the direction anticipated in the second sentence of the paragraph immediately above. A few derelict outhouses adjoin us on the same (northern) side, further back from the street, and these probably constitute the greatest risk of fire spreading from nearby buildings. A request has been made for their removal. On the southern side, there are suburban residences, the closest of which would be about 100' from the Archives building.

The elevated position provides a sure guarantee against flooding, and the steep slope of the land assures run-off to such an extent that we have little to fear, even from the heaviest tropical rainstorm.

The building is basically a single-storey one, on approximately the same level as the street, but the land slopes away to such an extent (an average fall in the height above sea level of 22 feet from the line representing the front of the building to the line representing the back) that it is possible to develop a lower level floor at the rear section of the building. In fact, an area 80' by 100' has been designated "future intermediate records storage", and for little cost this could be floored and walled, and equipped with steel shelving.

The over-all dimensions of the building are 100' wide by 200' long, and this 20,000 square feet has been divided up as follows:

Archives storage	4,000 square feet
Intermediate records storage	9,850 square feet
Offices for Archivist and staff	520 square feet
Search and display room	480 square feet
Map storage	640 square feet
Fumigating room	320 square feet
Sorting room	800 square feet
Manuscript repair room	460 square feet
Staff lunch room	100 square feet
Strong room	81 square feet
Study carrels	114 square feet
Entrance foyer	760 square feet
	18,125 square feet

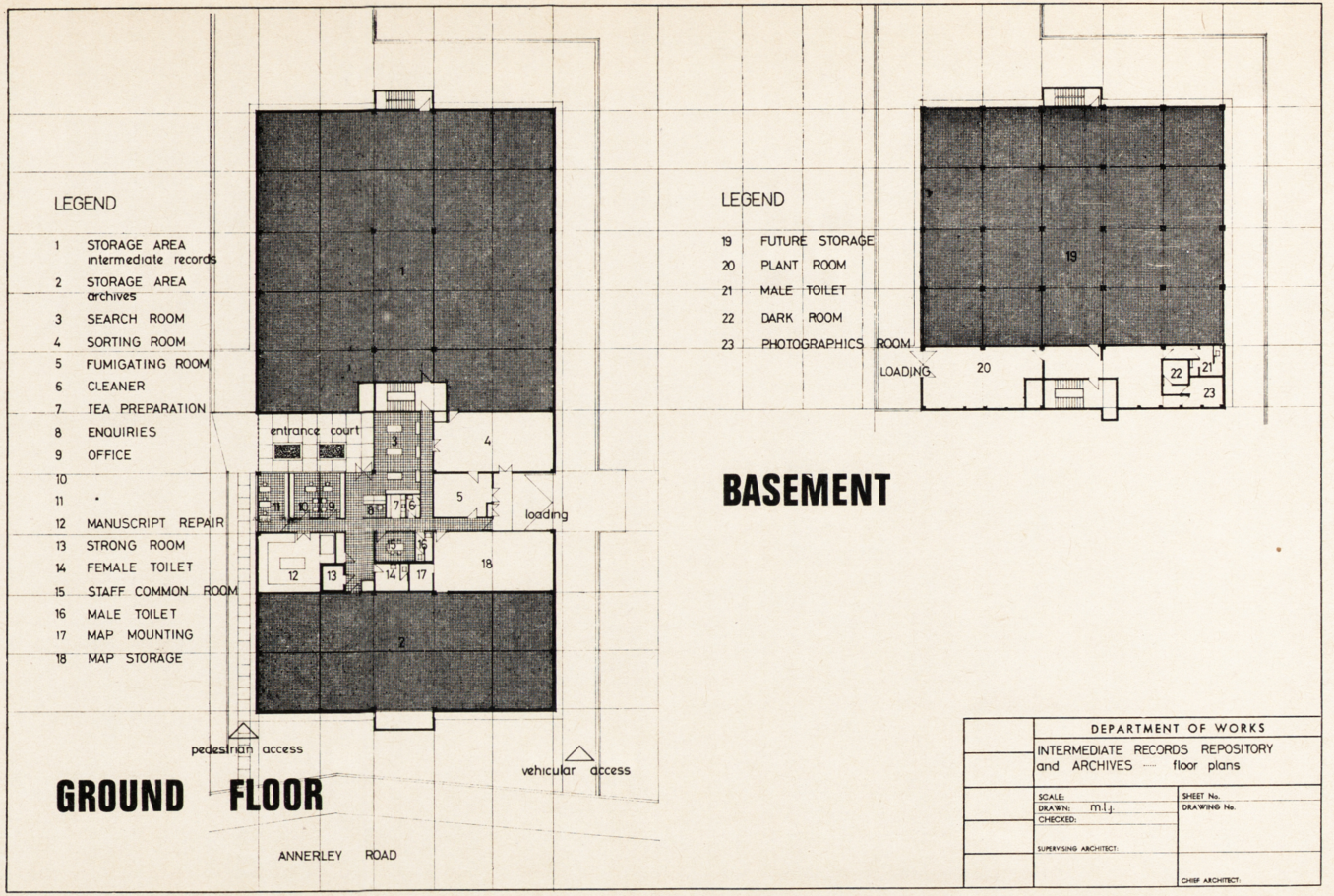
The difference between the total as calculated above and the over-all area is made up of passages, stairwell, loading bay, toilets, and other useful offices.

On the lower level, there is an airconditioning plant room, a photographic laboratory and a toilet/shower room.

The outside walls of the building are 6" thick exposed aggregate *in situ* concrete. This aspect of the building has attracted some criticism, as the finish on this concrete is rather uneven, and the over-all effect is not pleasing. However, it is a practical type of material. There is a wide over-hang, ensuring that the sun's rays do not penetrate directly into the repository. High-level windows under this over-hang ensure a minimum of direct sunlight in this storage area.

The archives storage area and map room are airconditioned. The airconditioning unit incorporates a sulphur dioxide wash to maintain a Ph factor of between 8.3 and 8.8. The temperature of the airconditioned premises is maintained at between 70° and 72° Fahrenheit, and relative humidity between 40% and 50%. The staff working areas do not share the benefit of the airconditioning.

Planning of the building was done with work-flow and security in mind. Records are delivered to a loading bay at the southern side of the building, and from there they can be moved directly into either the fumigating room or the sorting room. The sorting room is equipped with five sorting tables, each 3' 2" high, 3' 2" wide and 11' 8" long, with



Floor plans, Ground Floor and Basement, new State Archives Building, Dutton Park, Brisbane. Scale 1" = ca 64 feet.

laminated tops and shelves underneath in which records being sorted can be placed. The sorting room is the centre from which the file issue service operates. Repository assistants who are engaged on a variety of tasks either in or near the sorting room are available to extract files and volumes from the intermediate records section for issue to departments. Files issued are almost invariably taken to the department concerned by the Archives staff in an official vehicle provided for this purpose.

"Student" visitors to the Archives approach the building by a footway on the northern side, which leads to a large semi-covered foyer planted with a rubber tree, diefenbachia, monstera deliciosa, maiden-hair ferns and other plants. These plants provide a pleasant outlook from the staff working area and the search room. The visitor enters the building and enquires at a desk which constitutes the central information point in the building — for dealing with telephone and corporeal enquirers, and for overseeing the search room. The central location of search room, offices and sorting room (between the archives storage area at the front, and the intermediate records storage at the back) is one of the most commendable features of the plan.

There are study carrels for four students, located in the airconditioned area at the front (west) of the building. These can only be reached, however, by passing the enquiry desk just off the search room, or by passing through staff working areas at the southern side of the building. Needless to say, only trusted students who need to consult large quantities of archival material will be permitted to use the study carrels, though their location in the cool airconditioned area will probably constitute a temptation for perspiring archivists to find some excuse to use them in Brisbane's sweat-box summer.

The problem of the bulk of material to be consulted by persons using archives is one which has not yet been solved, and which should engage the attention of planners of future archives buildings. Whereas the average user of printed books is supplied with research material weighing a few pounds, or even ounces, the user of archives frequently requires several hundredweight of material. One volume may weigh as much as forty pounds, and even this (when it is a register of letters received) may not represent the material he wants finally to use, but merely a finding aid to enable the required documents to be located. From the point of view of the protection of the records, one central reading room is the best solution. To obviate the need to move great quantities of material from place to place within the repository, however, it would be far better to have series of little study carrels at intervals around the repository. We have only one place where such study carrels are located (there are four of them). To provide more would, of course, immeasurably increase the need to maintain supervision. More staff would be required to watch over them, and there would be more places in the building where clearances would have to be made daily, the staff being required to put back into the shelves the records that have been consulted.

Fire protection is provided by smoke and heat detectors. Earlier plans to incorporate a sprinkler system were abandoned.

In listing amongst our facilities a photographic laboratory, a manuscript repair room, and a fumigating room, I have been speaking more in terms of potential than in terms of actuality. The fumigating chambers are on

order, but we have not yet persuaded the authorities of the need to equip the photographic laboratory or the manuscript repair room with the machinery which is vital for their operation. The photographic section has a dark room with developing troughs, but there is as yet no microfilm camera. In the manuscript repair room there is equipment to enable repairs with silk organdie and map mounting with calico to be done, but bindings and other major tasks cannot be done for want of a guillotine and other essential equipment.

Map storage is provided, for the most part, in steel flat filing drawers, approximately 31" long by 42" wide; some of these drawers are the older type (6 to a cabinet, each drawer being 2⅜" deep) and some are the more recent type (10 to a cabinet, each drawer being 1⅛" deep). There is a danger in using the more modern type of flat filing map cabinet. We were told that in length and width they were the same size as the older ones, but found that they were about one inch less in length. For many of our maps, this one inch discrepancy was critical. An experiment tried some years ago of filing maps vertically in the four-prong standing cabinets has not won universal support, and we have only three cabinets of this type.

Shelving is steel throughout, except in offices and the search room where timber shelving offers a better appearance. For the most part, our shelves are compact ones of the frontally-moving type (like "Compactus" shelving). The method of moving the units is mechanical, which is reputed to be faster than the electrically operated automatic principle, and must certainly be cheaper. Shelf depths are 12", 15" and 20", with the greatest use being made of 15" deep shelving. The following table shows the linear footage of records which will be accommodated in the two storage areas:

	Archives area	*Intermediate records area*
1' 3" deep	10,332 feet	32,259' 6"
1' 8" deep	820 feet	522' 6"
1" deep	576 feet	1,152'

This will allow a total storage of 11,728 feet of archives and 33,934 feet of intermediate records.

Parking is possible in the street outside, but as Annerley Road carries a good deal of traffic, motorists normally prefer to use the parking area at the rear of the building. The fact that parking is possible has made a great deal of difference to the staff and to searchers and departmental officers visiting the building. At the old premises in William Street, the motorist had to use metered parking space, when this was available: for most of the staff members, this precluded the use of cars as a method of getting to and from work: for students, the need to interrupt their research every hour or so to "feed" a meter was a constant source of annoyance. The University of Queensland, which is just across the river (at St. Lucia) is now closer to the Archives than it was when the William Street building was in use. Those dependent upon public transport can now (at least in term time) use a ferry service which enables them to reach the Archives within twenty minutes. Those who have private transport can now park their vehicles within the Archives yard.

Apart from the ferry service, the building is well served with public transport. Trams are to be abolished in Brisbane at the end of 1968 or

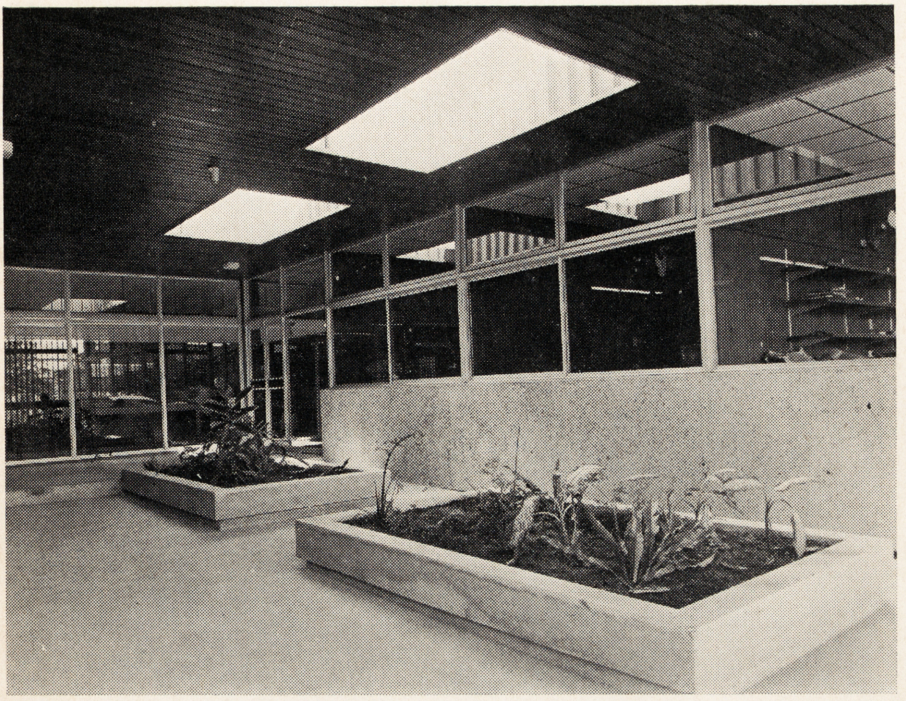
early in 1969, but buses will replace them, and the Archives is served by an existing bus service in Annerley Road and will be served by a prospective bus service in Gladstone Road.

The total cost of the building was $304,844, this being inclusive of fees paid to consulting engineers and other outside professional advisers. $234,432 was the amount of the tender for the basic construction work, and to this was added $64,888 for shelving, $2,254 for furniture, $2,000 for landscaping, $10,000 for electrical work, $4,400 for the fire alarm system, $30,000 for airconditioning and a certain sum of money (as yet unspent) for the fumigating equipment.

The work of planning a building such as this was, of course, primarily the responsibility of architects and engineers belonging to the State Works Department. The present writer wishes to place on record his immense appreciation for the painstaking care, consideration and professional skill of those whose job it was to make some sense of the archivist's varying *desiderata.* The task was no easy one, for nothing quite like this had been built in Australia before. From the beginning about seven years ago the planning had been dogged by bad luck. An earlier site was found not to provide a firm foundation rock. Plans for a more majestic-looking building were not acceptable to the government because of their high cost. When the building was finally erected it was castigated by a correspondent to the Editor of the local morning paper as "the ugliest public building inflicted on Brisbane since the War" [3]. Such judgements are, of course, easy to make and impossible to gainsay. It is admitted that the building is not a noble edifice like the Parthenon — but it is certainly more useful. Marble was not used in its construction: nor was it placed at the top of impressive steps, with classical columns seeming to reach to the heavens. Practical considerations demanded a building which was level with the street: they also precluded the use of wide entrance doors (or even doors of any sort) on the western side, facing the street. A few summers' residence in Brisbane will convince everyone of the severity of our afternoon sun on the western side of a building. If airconditioning is to be at all economical, the number of doorways leading to the outside world must be restricted. Security needs suggest the same solution — access should only be possible past those points where staff are on duty.

Any intelligent criticism of a building must bear in mind all of these essential points. Otherwise, we would all be encouraged to live in Grecian temples. Buildings can never be judged solely on the impact they make when viewed from the street. Nor is the area so select, or committed to any particular use to such an extent that the new building can be accused of intrusion. In the immediate vicinity are a small park, a large prison, and suburban residences of average standard. Further away there is a Machinery Department vehicle testing station, and further still there is the Princess Alexandra Hospital. It is understood that the Government Garage will one day be in the area. With so many Government and other public facilities in the vicinity, one can scarcely claim that the building is in odd company.

There are a number of minor features of the building which are not to be commended. The noise level in the search room can be too high, because of its proximity to the tea making area and the staff lunch



Entrance Court to the new State Archives Building, Dutton Park, Brisbane. The search room is beyond the windows at the left. Staff offices are on the right.

room. These areas are only noisy at certain times of the day, but this may be sufficient to distract some students. The vehicular access is not very good. Large trucks have difficulty in backing in to unload records, and some trucks cannot back in sufficiently far to enable use to be made of the driveway by other vehicles. Thus, when records are being unloaded, it often happens that there is a bottleneck in the vehicle service area.

Moving House.

The primary concern of this article has been to describe the building, but the mechanics involved in moving from the oldest archives building in Australia to the newest may be of some interest. Moving any public collection of materials can be a perplexing process, but it is ever so much more onerous when the responsibility for the removal of so much depends on so few. In a recent news report [4], it was stated that, with regard to the removal of the National Library collections to the new building on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra:

> A special committee of seven has been set up under the command of the deputy librarian, Mr C. A. Burmester, to deal with the logistics.
>
> Sixty members of the National Library staff have been deployed as a private army for the operation and the Department of Supply is giving support in equipment.

Such terms as "logistics" and "deployed" can only be used when a veritable army of men are called upon to tackle a task such as this. Three men, including the writer, shared the planning of the removal of the holdings of the Queensland State Archives. The other two were repository assistants to whom the present writer cannot pay too high a compliment. Their efficiency, enthusiasm and capacity for hard work knew no bounds. Other members of the Archives staff contributed their part by performing ancillary tasks, and by maintaining the normal services of the Archives against great difficulties, especially when some of these services were provided from one building, and some from the other. Apart from this, the Works Department provided labour and the services of two five-ton trucks. The rest was up to us.

Every item had to be moved in sequence. At all times we had to maintain our service to departments, and in fact at no time did we have to ask departments to wait longer than 24 hours before an item requested could be delivered to them. At any time during the move, we could locate and if necessary extract any item that was wanted. All bundles, volumes, etc. were tied into larger bundles, of an average of 10" in thickness, and were numbered. There were 26,000 such large bundles. Once it was established that 500 such large bundles could be loaded on to a 5-ton truck, a method was developed of loading items in such a way that, when the truck reached the new building, they could be unloaded and wheeled straight to their new places in the shelves.

For several months before the records were actually moved, preparations were being made. Gradually the 26,000 large bundles were tied up with white tape, and numbered. The actual transfer of the records and of most of the furniture and equipment was achieved during the month of July. The only casualty was one steel map cabinet, which fell from the truck as it was being loaded, and suffered some dents. The placing of the records in the new building was complicated by the need to leave room for live series to expand. To simplify matters, for the present no distinction was made between intermediate records and archives. All were placed in the intermediate records section. It is planned to avoid use of the archives section, if at all possible, until the fumigating equipment is installed. It seems likely that it would be difficult to carry out fumigation of the whole room as it stands, because of the existence of airconditioning ducts. Hence it will be best to fumigate the entire holdings in the intermediate records section, and then move the archives into their correct place. The fumigating plant can then be brought into use for all future accessions, and for items being returned from departments under the file issue service.

When we left space for individual series to expand, we had in mind the normal expansion rate for each series. We were not to know that a severe fire would break out in the Supreme Court building in Brisbane in the early hours of 1 September. One of the results of this fire was the destruction of most of the Ann Street wing of the Court, where there were several repositories of records. Most of the records survived, though some suffered damage from water. The Archives was called upon to accept an accession of well over 1,000 linear feet of records when a decision was suddenly made to demolish the remains of the Ann Street wing, including the strongrooms which had been used for records storage.

The influx of records in this one section of our stacks caused a temporary breakdown in our otherwise orderly system of shelving all records in record group order. We will be glad of the opportunity to move permanently valuable records into the archives storage area, for this will enable us to put the intermediate records back into correct order.

Conclusion.

It would probably be true to say that the only person who is competent to plan an archives building is one who has just completed the planning of one, and seen it erected and brought into use. Even then, climatic factors, the nature of the materials to be housed, the extent of "student" use, and the type of site available will differ so much from city to city that experience gained in planning a building in one place may not be of much assistance when a second building is being planned. The experience of professional architects, even though they have never planned a building for such a specialized purpose before, is of tremendous help. They have been trained to recognize and cope with climatic and environmental factors, and their experience in planning hospitals, schools, libraries and public offices generally helps them to find solutions to problems which the archivist can pose but not resolve.

The advantages of being in the new building as opposed to the old one are too many to list here. It is a matter of the cumulating and cumulative benefits of being in a situation where the various constant dangers to the security of the records no longer apply, or, if they still apply, are now of only minor significance. The old building was chronically subject to attack by white ants (termites). The fire danger was quite real. We were frequently reminded that during the 1893 Brisbane River flood the water level at the old site was 6' above the lowest floor (some estimates said 10'). Air pollution is greater in the city area where the old building was located, and of course it was not airconditioned. The old building was equipped, for the most part, with wooden shelving, not adjustable. With shelving reaching to the ceiling in parts of the old building (with its high ceiling levels) we had a certain proportion of our records out of reach unless ladders were used. It was an impossible building to clean and to fumigate. Cracks in floors and ceilings allowed dust to filter through and fumigant gases to escape. It was on three levels, with only a cantankerous old goods lift and inconveniently situated stairs to connect the three floors.

In comparison, at least on the above points, the new building is something like heaven. When other separate State Archives are built in Australia, the planners may well achieve a second, a third, or even a seventh heaven. If they are prepared to try to benefit from our experience, however, they will probably find a great deal to appreciate in the first step we have taken on the stairway to paradise.

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2. *Archivum,* Vol. VI (1956) pp. 93-99, as translated by Victor Gondos in *American Archivist, loc. cit.*
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4. *Australian Library Journal,* Vol. XVII (1968) p. 161.