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Annette Bochenek

Ilana Stonebraker

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Business Archives as a Tool for Academic Business Researchers

Annette Bochenek, Purdue University

Ilana Stonebraker, Indiana University

Author Note

Annette Bochenek <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5199-9884>

Ilana Stonebraker <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7348-5489>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Annette Bochenek, Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies, West Lafayette, IN, 47907.

Email: ahbochen@purdue.edu

Competing Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Abstract

This paper examines the structure and collections in business archives in order to create a list of suggestions to better prepare researchers seeking historical business data prior to 1970. Four business archivists were chosen for interviews from a variety of industries. The article shares seven tips gained from the interviews, including getting to know what is housed or not housed in the business archive, looking for archives with museum arms, and considering the importance of legal permission as part of the business archives process. The authors also explore how business librarians can better support the work of business archivists into the future.

Keywords: archives, business, business archives, business research, libraries

Introduction

Academic business librarians work with patrons across a variety of research needs. They often work with patrons who are researching individual companies, conducting market and industry research, or exploring the possibility of entrepreneurial endeavors. The prospect of accessing and examining business history is a research need that both academic business librarians and corporate archivists face to assist researchers. Examining business history, specifically business history prior to 1970, offers a rich opportunity to explore various facets of historical business data. While academic business librarians can examine historical business data in this context to an extent, the possibility of utilizing business archives is also a notable resource and potential wealth of information for researchers to consult.

Though business archives offer information pertaining to the history of a company and its employees, the processes of accessing business archives may be unfamiliar to academic business librarians as well as individual researchers. Business archives house an array of resources for internal and external individuals in relation to a company; however, for that very reason, the resources to which external researchers have access can be quite limited. Some archives are completely closed to external researchers. Likewise, business archives may operate as separate departments or as part of an existing department with key individuals that external researchers may contact. In other cases, requests undergo a vetting process in addition to adhering to other rules for accessing archival materials. Nonetheless, business archives can still be utilized by researchers in varied, though more controlled, ways in terms of access, and offer sources that possess merit both on an internal and external scale.

This paper reviews business archives and items housed therein, the organization and preservation of these collections, and guidance for patrons looking to gain access to them. The paper explores the following research questions:

- How can business librarians better assist researchers looking for historical, pre-1970 business data? What information exists in business archives and how can it be accessed, if at all?
- What tips, if any, would archivists have for business researchers to be better equipped to utilize business archives?

Pre-1970 was chosen as a focus of this paper because those items are more than fifty years old at the time of writing. It is also before large-scale business automation and the world wide web, which often complicates questions of paper material archiving versus digital archiving. This paper is authored by two academic business librarians aiming to encourage the use of business archives by researchers in business schools as well as academic business librarians. The authors also aim to foster collaboration between academic business librarians working with researchers and business archivists.

Literature Review

Business archives house a wide variety of materials that serve to document the history of a business. The items housed in a business archive range from the physical, digitized, and born-digital. Just as individual businesses house a diverse array of materials, the structure and management of business archives also vary. This section discusses basic information about business archives, their contents, their management, and the value of maintaining them. This section also addresses the importance of business archives to academic business librarians.

What are Business Archives?

Archives are repositories in which a wide range of resources are stored and function as the “documentary by-product of human activity” retained for its long-term value (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 104). In general, archives are “an essential part of finding sources, especially historical sources” (Setiawan et al., 2023, p. 2855). The archival resources, also known as archival records, “are usually characterized as having certain relationships to evidence in its temporal aspects” (Anderson, 2012, p. 349). Archives themselves are “not defined by any specific physical form” and all archival material is “the product of some activity” and (Miller 1997, p. 56). The records housed in archives are “records saved because archivists have determined that they have some future research, legal, or administrative utility” (Miller, 1997, p. 56).

Business archives, also known as corporate archives, include “records created or received by a commercial enterprise in the course of operations and preserved for their enduring value” (Society of American Archivists, n.d.). This value is extended not only to the business itself but also to stakeholders and future generations. The records therein “were contemporary to business (in a broad sense) at the time of their creation to the individuals and organizations that created them, therefore providing a route to interpret past events” (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 104).

Corporate archives can be viewed as “an important part of the cultural heritage of the society,” utilized by corporations for “litigation support, trademark protection, customer and media relations and brand marketing, enhancing corporate reputation and building a corporate culture” (Niu, 2023, p. 2). Additionally, they are useful to external researchers, “such as corporate consumers, historians and individuals whose livelihoods are affected by the social and economic impacts of the corporations” (Niu, 2023, p. 2). While much of the material held in business archives is ephemeral, some of the records “will remain a unique corporate asset that

documents a company's origins, growth, products, services and decisions" (Business Archives Council of Scotland, n.d.). Overall, business archives are largely private with little to no public access granted directly to the materials housed within, complicating the potential for access to outside researchers. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) Business Archives section keeps the Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada, which includes more than 406 archives and is openly available on their website (Society of American Archivists, 2018).

Business archives can be organized as for-profit or non-profit, being held either in-house or offsite. For-profit, in-house archives are typically part of the marketing or communications departments or divisions of a company. Non-profit business archives are often situated with museums, representing a vast array of industries including but not limited to athletic organizations, foundations, religious institutions, and consumer products. Each organization determines its own record access to the public. Business collections are sometimes held in-house, or within the same physical facility in which the business or a branch of a business operates. Alternatively, they can also be held offsite, in a location that is separate from where a company ordinarily handles its day-to-day operations. Though held offsite, these items are still maintained and made accessible by the business and business archivist(s) in some capacity.

Contents of Business Archives

The contents of business archives vary from institution to institution, though they generally include marketing materials that exhibit the history of a business in addition to items such as executive headshots or internal newsletters. Items housed within business archives may also include human resource records, such as organizational charts, company directories, or documentation of internal awards. Some amount of financial information may be held, such as tax returns, company financial statements, or shareholder reports. Administrative documents

such as meeting minutes, agendas, product line lists, or correspondence may also be included. In a study of business archives, it was found that almost 80% collect quarterly or yearly reports; 87% collect newsletters, whether internal or external; 85% collect video and photographs, published internally or externally; and more than 90% collected press releases (Donaldson, 2022). In addition, some business archives may include research and development files, which are typically closed to external researchers.

Moreover, some of these records are created “in the process of transacting business or fulfilling legal obligation,” which can include the development of the aforementioned records as well as contracts, planning documents, legal documents, architectural drawings, publicity material, staff magazines, stock market data, and more (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 104.) While this list is not exhaustive, it is important to note that “not all of these types of documents survive in a single archival collection about an organization” (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 104). Since most documents developed for the sake of “immediate use and consumption” are often discarded, the records which do survive “will condition the forms of historical research that can be undertaken” (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 104).

Management of Business Archives

In some cases, there may be one business archivist working solo or multiple business archivists working together. In other cases, a business archivist might be part of a marketing or communications department. One archivist interviewed for this study mentioned that their archive is housed in the records management department, but had a separate workflow than the records management department. A records management department oversees the “planning, controlling, directing, organizing, training, promoting, and other managerial activities involved in records creation, maintenance and use” (National Archives and Records Administration, 2017,

para. 1). Other archivists interviewed for this study did not have records management departments in their organizations.

If the business archive is located in-house, the main focus of the archivist is its internal clients. In this scenario, the business archivist may work within the marketing and communication department of a business. Archivists also often act as the “corporate historian” or “business support unit,” communicating important milestones or constructing information packages for their company about a particular subject or moment within the historical timeline of a company (Markusic, 2020, p. 29; Gray, 2002, p.1; Sandecki, n.d., as cited in Force, 2022, p. 60).

The Value of Business Archives

Business archives are not always considered strategic by their parent organizations, making the need to advocate for the use of business archives all the more crucial (Lasewicz, 2015, p. 59). Overall, “an understanding of the past is important to any understanding of the present” and business archives exist to preserve information pertaining to the history of a business (Lasewicz, 2015, p. 64). Business archives preserve aspects of business history and heritage, with business history referring to “the collective body of immutable, objective facts that reside in the documentation that archivists collect” and business heritage referring to the “applied use of history” (Lasewicz, 2015, p. 68).

Generally, an archive holds particularly strong value to “firms that are of an age where their history or brand provides some competitive advantage over rivals” (Hull & Scott, 2020, p. 2). Corporate culture and heritage are also seen as a “unique corporate asset, having the potential to make a long-term contribution to society through developing and exploiting a unique company resource” (Hull & Scott, 2020, p. 2).

The Importance of Business Archives to Academic Business Librarians

Business archives are scattered, internally focused, and often not resourced well to provide academic support. Why, then, should academic business librarians be interested in business archives and what they have to offer?

Overall, “[c]ollaborations between academics and business archivists have become increasingly popular in recent years” (Hull & Scott, 2020, p. 1). First, historical questions are a challenge in the often contemporary-focused resources held in academic business collections or in other resources that tend to be highly accessible and readily available. Government resources such as the Federal Reserve offer many types of information but often are limited in what they can provide about individual companies and their strategic decisions. Second, understanding which materials companies usually deem worthy of preservation can be a useful teaching tool for a librarian in educating a patron. Knowing, for example, that companies themselves do not always include financial information or that companies often do not have records about subsidiaries, brings to light the challenges of conducting organizational research.

Third, business archives can often provide a missing piece of the puzzle. Librarians often rely on newspapers for things like press releases, but they may lack correspondence information, product line details, or executive leadership biographies. A company newsletter, for example, can function as a cultural snapshot in time; it holds information on who has joined the organization, what major events are happening in the company, as well as corporate cultural bellwethers like holiday parties. Comparing them across time, especially in relation to outside metrics like stock quotes or scandals, might reveal how an organization might have responded to a situation on an internal and external scale.

Finally, and likely most importantly, business archives are shrinking in number. These documents are important to a shared interest in business history, and it is important that academic business librarians understand the use and value of business archives so that they can become a stronger part of academia's data sources. In a column for the *American Archivist*, Paul C. Lasewicz, a corporate archivist for McKinsey, called on business academics to save business archives. His argument, paraphrased, was that business academics write frequently during their "search for universal truths, which can be made relevant beyond the specific case study or statistics they are analyzing" (2015, p. 63). Additionally, academic business librarians "are writing in the language of business for a nonarchival audience" (Lasewicz, 2015, p. 63).

Beyond corporate biographies, business archives could offer a font of new theories to examine in relation to what might lead a business to fail or succeed. The support of academic business librarians and the potential uses of business archives could further assist business archivists in advocating for the value of business archives to the businesses in which they work, in addition to researchers internal or external to the business through raising awareness for and promoting the use of business archives to researchers. In turn, the business archivist can relate the use of the business archive back to corporate, noting which items or topics researchers are utilizing most.

Academic Business Librarians and Corporate Business Archivists

There is no literature from librarianship-related publications that examines how business librarians can learn more about business archives, their resources, and operations, in order to better serve business researchers. Over the years, business archives have been discussed in librarianship generally but not from the lens of business librarianship. There is literature discussing how corporate records have become acquired by university collections and organized

for university use but there have been no studies about how business librarians can turn to business archives as potential resources of importance for themselves and for business researchers (Lyle, 2004; Visser et al., 2022). While articles that discuss the acquisition, organization, and management of former corporate records offer a perspective on connecting librarianship to business archives, there is a need to examine how business librarians, specifically, can turn to resources that have not been acquired as an additional research tool.

Methods

In order to better understand how business archives can be a source for business reference, the authors sought to better understand the world of business archives and how they operate. The authors focused on business history pre-1970s in scope in order to avoid larger questions of digital archiving and preservation. The authors reached out via a listserv email to the SAA Business Archives section, asking interested business archivists to contact the authors directly. From those responses, the authors selected archivists representing different types of business archives. This included interviewing archivists for a bank, hotel chain, professional service organization, and consumer product company. The authors also consulted the book *Managing Business Archives*, published in 2022, to get a bigger idea of the field. The authors conducted four interviews with business archivists via Zoom, with each interview lasting about one hour. The archivists were all mid-career professionals, with a range of 6.5 years to 18 years at their current institution. Their geographic locations ranged but were primarily on the east coast. This study was approved by (REDACTED)'s Institutional Review Board as IRB-2023-1536. The interview questions asked of the selection of business archivists were as follows:

- What are your roles and responsibilities in the archive?
- What type of collection do you work with?
- What tips do you have for patrons outside the company asking for help?
- How do you serve corporate clients?

- What can patrons do ahead of time to prepare for their visit to the archive?

These questions were developed by the authors according to gaps in the literature and their questions about how both researchers and corporate clients are served by business archivists. In order to better understand the work of business archivists, the authors crafted questions that focused upon the individual roles of business archivists and the types of collections with which they worked. The literature lacked strong information about how patrons outside of a company were served by business archivists, so the authors also posed questions about the differences between serving internal clients versus external researchers. Specifically, these questions asked what tips business archivists have for researchers external to the company and how business archivists serve corporate clients. As this study aims to help business librarians better prepare researchers to use business archives, the authors also developed a question that invited the business archivists' perspectives on how patrons could better prepare for a potential research visit to a business archive.

Due to the possibility of corporate concerns about company privacy, the interviews were not recorded, but rather notes were taken by one researcher while the other led the questions. From these conversations, the authors learned more about the scope of business archives collections, the daily work required to maintain them, and how business archivists serve their corporate clients. After each interview, the researchers reviewed their notes, and continued to refine key themes for application as they emerged and were identified by comparing interview notes. As a result, the authors compiled a list of tips for researchers interested in using business archives, further supported by professional literature to better understand what information might be helpful for academic business librarians and researchers to know pertaining to utilizing business archives when researching historical, pre-1970 business data. The business archivists

interviewed in this study are anonymized in this paper but their responses and quotes informed the authors of underlying themes to assist researchers considering the use of business archives.

Results: Suggestions for Researchers

Upon interviewing business archivists, the authors noticed common themes that arose in business archivist responses, despite the fact that the business archivists served different types of business archives. While this paper does not address basic archival literacy, a skill implied and imperative to basic archives usage, this section highlights emerging themes for the utilization of business archives by researchers. This section compiles those themes into suggestions that the authors believe beneficial to academic business librarians and researchers interested in examining historical, pre-1970 business data.

Tip 1: Learn What is Housed in Business Archives

Learning what exactly is housed in a business archive is a beneficial first step for any researcher, which can be explored by contacting the business archives for basic information about the publicly available collection and its contents. The archivists stressed limitations of what was kept in the archives and which types of formats were preserved. Financial information was often not included. Internal documents such as manuals were not consistently kept. Some of the archives did not serve as the multimedia archive and therefore did not have the photos or videos from the company, which were kept in a separate archive. Many kept public documents like press releases and company reports. Some kept internal correspondence. Other artifacts are unique to the business itself, such as hotel archives housing hotel keys or keycards.

Business archivists were plagued by the same backlog of problems as other archivists. Many of the items in their collections have not been cataloged or lack finding aids altogether.

Therefore, common requests such as “Give me all your documents on this merger” or “I would like a spreadsheet of all the store closings between 1999 and 2023” can be challenging. It is important to understand what is in the scope of these collections. “Archives can be a powerful source of data” but one must approach archives with a clear idea of what you might hope to find” (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 104).

On the other hand, business archivists noted that researchers external to the organization turn to them as a resource for a variety of reasons. Per the authors’ interviews with business archivists, in some cases, researchers or members of the media may wish to utilize a photograph or an early company logo that exists in the archive. One business archivist interviewed noted the following:

It seems the most common request for many corporate archives is for visual materials, especially in this age of social media. Of course, photos are not necessarily related to in-depth research, but showing old photos makes people aware of the existence of an archives and hopefully highlights the importance of collecting and preserving business history.

In other cases, research requests are of genealogical interest, with family members requesting a photograph or item that documents a relative who once worked for the company. These requests will vary depending upon the business archive but generally “[c]ompany archivists usually have a primary responsibility to their parent organization” (Green & Lee, 2020, p. 37). According to one of the business archivists interviewed, while a researcher may wish to come in to the archive, oftentimes the archivist is able to handle the inquiry in a way that does not necessitate a visit on the researchers’ behalf.

Tip 2: Have A Clear Research Question

It is important to connect with the business archivist in advance, stating a clear research question. Communicating with a business archivist is not always easy since their contact information is often not readily available. If this is the case, a researcher would need to seek contact information for the business archive or contact a marketing or communications department. In some cases, research requests are vetted or deemed acceptable to be honored due to the nature of the request before an archivist can receive the request and potentially respond to it. Providing a clear research question in advance will assist the business archivist in preparing the materials beforehand or, in other cases, sending a response or reproduction of a resource that answers the researchers' question—eliminating the need to visit the business archive, should public visits even be a possibility for a particular business archive.

In addition, connecting with a business librarian can also help with the formulation of a research question, particularly if a business librarian has a connection with a business archivist. “Business archivists oversee heterogenous collections with many potential routes for business-relevant research” and it is often challenging for a business archivist to form a direct link to a particular academic field of study (Green & Lee, 2020, p. 38). Since “focusing on themes that reflect the priorities of a parent organization” might help to focus potential areas of research, a researcher's collaboration with a business librarian can offer the possibility of creating a connection between a possible research topic and researcher. Often, higher education “operates in many ways as a closed system” and, in business archives, “[c]oncerns about restrictions an academic freedom to access and use documents can contribute to a s[k]epticism” about the use of business archives (Green & Lee, 2020, pp. 37; 42). Leveraging an existing relationship between researcher, business librarian, and business archivist can aid in the development of a research question and exploring sources that would be available to an external researcher.

Tip 3: Make the Scholarly Impact of Intended Research Clear and Share the Final Product

Business archivists rely on stories as well as data to demonstrate value. These stories often include how they have helped the bottom line of a business by archiving important prior knowledge, preserving heritage, and helping the business grow its brand. Therefore, it may be helpful for business archivists if researchers made clear the impact of their research question on the field of business. The more that they know about the importance of a request, the more likely they are going to be able to describe that impact to their organizations. It may expedite the business researcher's request, but at a larger level, it can demonstrate the importance of the business archive to business leadership as a whole and may be a good talking point in defense of the business archive in the future. Of course, not all questions may reflect positively on the company, but larger questions about strategy, change management, and even the history of business in the United States, may highlight the importance of the business archive not just for the institution but for the broader business world. Moreover, it is important to communicate with the business archivist at the end of the research project, as well. In addition to thanking the business archivist in the published research, one should share a copy of the final product with the business archivist, as it is a significant way for the archivist to track impact.

Tip 4: Expect Legal to be Involved

Business and organizational archives hold records at the direction and in the trust of their parent entity, as well as current and future users. Archival materials may incorporate layers of rights, including "(1) the creator of a work, (2) the employer of one who creates a work within the scope of employment as 'work made for hire,' (3) one who specifically commissions a work by contracting with a freelancer for a 'work made for hire,' or (4) anyone to whom a copyright owner legally transfers ownership of rights, such as a surviving spouse or heir, successor

business, or another person or entity” (Behrnd-Klodt, 2022, p. 115). A work may have other works embedded within it, such as images, graphic design, or music, potentially complicating legal clearance for using or reproducing these sources. A business archivist interviewed for this study offers the following example:

Since much of society is litigious, some people might want to make money from a company they think has deep pockets. They may sue for improper use of photos that are published without consent from the people in the photos. Often, this is difficult because there may be group shots of employees and the archivist does not know who the people are. This usually results in the legal department not allowing the use of the photo of unidentified employees. The law department is trying to protect the company, but sometimes it is too bad that a great picture cannot be used.

Business archivists and the business for which they work must assess risk as part of the access process. This may involve legal counsel, risk managers, and ethics experts within the company. As a result, almost all requested information that a researcher might be searching through can potentially trigger a Memorandum of Understanding, requiring waivers and other documents to be signed. This process may take time. For those accustomed to university archives and public museums, these processes may feel irregular, but they often are needed in order for the business to assess and document potential risks.

Tip 5: Explore Business Archives and Museums

During interviews with business archivists, the authors found that business archives that were part of museum collections were often more likely to share documents publicly. Partly, it seems that business archives attached to or affiliated with museums often have more processes for outreach with external researchers. There may be records that have been already cleared to be

utilized in exhibits or consulted by external researchers, which may allow the business researcher to engage in a more efficient research experience. In some cases, records may even already be on public display and can be consulted without the necessity of an appointment. For example, the Kodak company donated its collection to a university library but later also created a corporate archive “to provide historical materials for its exhibits” (Niu, 2023, p. 3). Additionally, the Ford Motor Company “donates its records of general public interest to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village but maintains some records internally because of proprietary and confidential information” stored in those records (Niu, 2023, p. 3).

Tip 6: Look for Individuals’ Papers Beyond Business Archives

Business archives are archives of corporate entities, not of people. Individuals often donate their personal papers to universities or other collections, resulting in collection bifurcations or dissemination of business history beyond the business archive. These collections are often separate from the business archives but might answer some of the same types of research questions posted internally or externally. For example, Tiffany & Company maintains a corporate archive in New Jersey, but the papers of its founder, Charles Lewis Tiffany, are held in the Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives Repository in New Haven, Connecticut. Examining the papers of its founder would likely help to supplement study or shed further light upon the history of the company.

Tip 7: Expect That Every Business Archive is Different

Just as business archives are diverse in terms of their collections, expect each business archive to operate differently. Some have more staff than others, while others assign business archivist duties to specific departments. According to one business archivist interviewed, “Some archives have one person running it, and other repositories have several people on staff. Business

archivists, like most archivists, try to be helpful, but the main group they need to assist are co-workers and requests from outside the company come second.” The use of business archives by external researchers can be “secondary and at the discretion of the archivist, who is usually an employee of the firm” (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 110). Certain business archives may have more visibility in terms of contact information for their business archivists, while others do not publicize this information. In some cases, one might find an inquiry form to complete, as is the case for Atlanta Housing’s business archive; in other instances, one might have to broadly contact the business and be routed to the appropriate department in order to reach the business archivist (Atlanta Housing, 2023). Another example includes “repositories accessible to outside researchers, some with publicly viewable catalogues” (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 110). In more difficult instances, researchers could be met with a broken link to an archive, leading to questions about the status of the archive and how to best go about contacting the archive. In such situations, the authors recommend utilizing the SAA directory or contacting the respective business for further guidance with a research inquiry. Connecting with the appropriate party can take some time and may call for an appointment, so it is best to explore possibilities for potential connection and communication with business archivists early-on in the research process (Tennent & Gillett, 2023, p. 110). Additionally, some business archives might associate fees with fulfilling certain research requests, while others may not.

Additional Resources

In addition to acknowledging the aforementioned suggestions, the authors would like to point out additional resources they believe would be of use to business librarians and researchers. They are as follows:

- Hagley Museum and Library. (2019, September 3). *Center for the history of business, technology, and society*. About the center. <https://www.hagley.org/research/center>
- Library of Congress. (n.d.). *Business history: A resource guide*. Business History: A Resource Guide. <https://guides.loc.gov/business-history-research/introduction>
- Society of American Archivists. (2018). *Directory of corporate archives in the United States and Canada*. Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada - Introduction | Society of American Archivists. <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/business-archives-section/directory-of-corporate-archives-in-the-united-states-and-canada-introduction>

Each of these resources can help researchers note which business archives exist, a general overview of their holdings, and explore information on how to contact the respective business archives and archivists for further research. These are also strong sources for locating historical business information in the United States and Canada.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

This paper has largely focused on general tips or resources that can assist business researchers with finding mostly manuscript-based collection materials in business archives; however, there are many more ways in which business archives and academic business librarians can further collaborate. One of the areas with the most potential for improvement is in outreach, with potential for connections across various library and archive professional organizations. The SAA meets annually, as do the American Libraries Association and Special Librarians Association. Very rarely do information professionals attend both or invite one to the other. For example, there are separate professional communities for business librarians and separate communities for business archivists for networking and professional purposes, but allowing

opportunities for collaboration or spaces for conversation between these two groups could be beneficial to business librarians and business archivists. Academic librarians may be a valuable resource in connecting students to internships in business archives. Corporate archives may have collection information that will help a librarian better understand this often-underused source of information. Partnerships on grants may also help both business researchers as well as business archivists.

Outside of the profession, it may not be known that archivists and librarians are overlapping but disparate professions, both in literature and language. Both groups have very little time and resources to invest in projects. Business archives have real restrictions on what type of content or expertise they can offer. However, these professionals may also see the value in collaboration and finding better ways to conduct their respective work and reach the largest audience of users.

This paper is limited in scope. The authors interviewed four business archivists to gain an understanding of the work, as well as consulting industry books like *Managing Business Archives*. Additionally, the four business archivists interviewed for this study were from the United States; therefore, this study did not reflect international business archives. Moreover, four archivists may not reflect the totality of experiences inside business archivists, nor would seven tips represent any full corpus of things to be considered while consulting with a business archivist. This paper also focused upon the perspectives of archivists working in for-profit archives and not nonprofit archives, which may differ in terms of access to materials. Business archives have long professional histories. This paper is intended to assist academic business librarians regarding the scope and breadth of business archives and to facilitate more collaboration between business librarians and business archivists in the future.

An additional area not explored in detail is how business archives are shrinking and consolidating. The authors heard about archives which had been closed or experienced cuts in staffing on numerous occasions. This issue requires more study than can be addressed in this paper. During the course of the interviews, all the archivists at one point alluded to archives that had closed. Some business archives had closed during the pandemic, while others had closed much earlier. Sometimes when companies merge with other companies, the business archives are not merged, leaving one business archive closed or inaccessible due to a lack of resources. “Mergers and acquisitions between companies lead to a loss of records” (Niu, 2023, p. 2). Additionally, many companies use third-party services and facilities to address their business archives needs, and it is unclear as to how their contracted services will affect the livelihood of the business's historical records. This is a larger question than could be answered in this paper, but it remains an important one for business librarians to further ponder across a broader scope of perspectives.

How, then, can these fragile, endangered resources be better supported? One avenue in supporting these resources lies with the role of business librarians. Business librarians should maintain an awareness of the business archives which are most relevant to their researchers; in doing so, business librarians will be well-informed in the event that there are any potentially major changes or closures that could benefit from their advocacy. Business librarians need to inform business school faculty about it and see how they can use their contacts to better highlight the problem that affects business history. Though business librarians may not have full access to the business archives, they—as well as other researchers—still benefit from records being kept. Business librarians also need to celebrate when business archives reopen and are staffed anew. In business, business librarians often monitor the environmental and societal effects of

corporations; therefore, examining its effect on historical memory is also pertinent. This is an area ripe with future research opportunities, not only for librarians, but for business academics as well.

Conclusion

Business archives hold special value for business research. Their records shed light on how companies have existed through business history, overcoming challenges and adapting over time. This article highlights findings from interviews with business archivists about their work in archives and how that works fits into the historical record. The authors of this article have highlighted several tips based on these conversations and a review of the business archives literature. The authors suggest that researchers have focused questions, know the limits of the collections, and highlight the impact of their research. Researchers should expect company legal offices to be involved in their requests. For those archives that have a museum arm, the authors suggest reaching out to the museum locations as the individuals there are likely more able to share documents. In addition, the authors emphasize that the structure of business archives and communication with business archivists will vary. Business archives are mainly closed to the general public, but the archivists interviewed were willing, even delighted, to help researchers find what they need. Their passion is a testament to their profession and the authors thank them for taking the time to share their perspectives. The authors see many future opportunities for further collaboration among business librarians and business archivists.

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