

October 22, 1954

Internal Memorandum

Interview with Dr. Henrietta Larson of the Business Histories Group in the  
Harvard Business School

(See earlier memorandum of conversation with Miss Larson)

Miss Larson was glad to talk at considerable length about the problems which arise in any process of trying to define what is the material most valuable for the writer of histories in the business field. She quoted Mr. Glover, author of a book entitled, "Attacks on Big Business," to indicate that much of the material which was kept, in the way of accounts, records of business, etc., was not as useful as much of the material which is thrown away. What is needed is material which proves activity in the field of policy in the behavior of officers and in their thinking. Correspondence frequently does this, although nowadays, when so much business is done over the telephone, this kind of thing is apt to be lacking. Also, there are auxiliary minutes to the directors' minutes in the way of memoranda sent up to directors which govern their own thinking. There is also likely to be valuable material in the minutes of executive committee meetings.

The difficulty both with the minutes of directors' meetings and those of executive committees is that they will be kept in a most perfunctory fashion and nothing but action recorded. It is the thinking which goes to make the decision that is wanted, and it is this which is most difficult to get at.

Miss Larson suggested that we consult people in charge of the Ford Archives for work they may have done in defining records that are historically important.

As distinguished from records of current importance but with less historic value, Miss Larson listed the following groups:

- 1) top correspondence, that is, the correspondence of the top officials of any organism;
- 2) committee records;
- 3) individual memoranda, leading perhaps to decisions or advising officers in decisions;
- 4) important statistical information, (I told Miss Larson that in so far as the bank was concerned, its statistical information is mostly published because it is a public institution);
- 5) the central account books of the organization;
- 6) the internal reports of officers to each other, (with those might very well be put internal memoranda such as exist in quantities in this bank);
- 7) departmental reports that go to make up the material which is so highly compressed in annual reports.

Miss Larson said that in this list she had in mind the fact that she was talking mostly from experience with business organizations. It applies only in part to work in this bank and to the material we need, but it is distinctly suggestive for lines of future thought that may be developed. This was reported to Miss Burnett who is making these studies for us at the present moment.