

TO: Miss Adams

April 5, 1955

FROM: Miss Burnett

SUBJECT: Visit to Archives of Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., March 17, 1955

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. has a special Archives Section which is located at one end of the large room occupied by the Company's library. Although under the supervision of the latter the Archives Section is a distinct entity, to which a trained librarian usually devotes full time. The post is temporarily vacant but the work is being performed by a member of the staff who had previous archives experience.

The Archives collection was initiated in 1934 when the then <sup>vice-</sup>president Leroy Lincoln sent out a circular letter to all branch offices and agencies soliciting all papers and objects of historical significance and interest. A copy of this letter was made for me. As material poured in, not only from the agencies but from clients, it was sent to the library for storage, arrangement and indexing. After years of work the collection is now systematically arranged and indexed, and has had ample space and attractive exhibit equipment assigned to it.

The exhibits, consisting of documents, pictures and various objects connected with the Company's history, are housed in glass-covered showcases, of both horizontal and upright types. There are also very modern display boards, with chrome framed glass removable panels, for showing pictures and photographs. I had expected a routine museum-type display of miscellaneous objects that had some sentimental but perhaps rather remote connection with actual Metropolitan Life history. But I was surprised to find that the exhibit was both striking and impressive, evoking interest even in an outsider like myself. For example, a small leather box-like satchel, some 12" x 6" x 6" in dimensions, at one time actually was used to hold all the assets of the Company. In view of the millions in present-day assets this was a remarkable visual demonstration of growth.

It occurred to me that the Federal Reserve Banks could probably produce a respectable nucleus of historical mementoes that would form a significant & worthwhile visual archives exhibit. Some objects of this nature are already on display in the President's reception room and the North West conference room of this bank. However, I don't know whether you will want to include this sort of thing in your particular project.

### Files

The files and indexes were of special interest to me as their solution to difficult problems of storage and making the information readily available. Large bulky volumes, like early ledgers, are stored elsewhere, under the supervision of the Purchasing Department. But most of the material is in a row of 4-drawer vertical files numbering at least a dozen. One jumbo sized file is used for large portrait size photographs of important officials.

The files are divided into several sections.

#### 1. Personal file

For miscellaneous items about executives or others in the Company who have appeared in print - newspapers or magazines. The clippings are mounted if too small for separate filing. Pictures are included only as they appear in connection with the article.

#### 2. Photograph file

Arranged alphabetically by name of person, in jumbo sized file.

Other divisions are devoted to Buildings, and to Group pictures, e.g. conventions, special groups of employees at various functions.

The Photo Bureau of the Company, which takes a lot of pictures for the Company's use, has its own file but sends some pictures to the archives collection if it considers them sufficiently interesting. But the best source is the officer (Asst. Secretary) to whom the library reports, as he usually sends along to the archives the pictures that come to his desk.

Another source is the employee himself who volunteers pictures.

## Files (Cont.)

### 3. Publications

Several series of publications have been or are now being issued by the Company and complete files of each are maintained. At least two copies of each issue are kept and frequently 7 or 8, so that copies can be given out if desired.

Titles of some of the series were: Policyholders' series; Health & Welfare; Home Magazine. One series included all the special reports prepared at the request of firms holding group policies.

### 4. Papers by Officers

These include addresses, speeches, and papers by officers of the Company, arranged alphabetically by name of person concerned.

### 5. Vertical File

This is a nondescript title for material arranged under specific subject, alphabetically. It includes miscellaneous items concerned with phases of the Company's activities. It fills about 4 filing cases.

## Indexes

Four separate indexes to the archives collection are maintained, on 3 x 5 inch cards.

### 1. Biographical Index

This index was started with the names of people who had been with the Metropolitan for 20 years or more, taken from the listings in the Home Office Magazine. References are made to articles in this or other company magazines but no additional information is looked up and added.

In selecting these names it was thought that many would naturally, as a result of their long experience, be promoted into responsible positions as supervisors or officers. Names of those who just come and go are therefore omitted.

The librarian said that actually not much use had been made of this index, and therefore there was some doubt as to its value, though it might be useful in the future.

## Indexes (Cont.)

### 2. Donor Index

A code numbering system is used for identifying each item of the archives collection that was based on one in use at the Museum of the City of New York. A number is assigned to each piece or object received, as follows: year of receipt, number of donor for that year, number of items given, e.g. 34 - 62 - 82 means it was given in 1934, by the 62d. donor for that year, and it was the 82d. object donated by that individual.

Cards are filed alphabetically by name of donor.

### 3. Accession Index

These cards record each gift by its number and the arrangement is chronological. These are the master cards and contain tracings for all the cards made for a particular item.

### 4. Subject Index

This index includes subject cards for each donation and also author cards in the case of papers. The location in the files is indicated.

## Organization of the Archives Section

The basic arrangement of the archives collection was set up by professionals, some of whom were obtained from the Museum at Newark which has long been noted for its new and advanced methods. Advice was also received from the Museum of the City of New York.

Miss Adams:

This is a copy of the circular letter originally sent out by Metropolitan Life to start the collection of their archives. I thought it might be interesting to study its wording.

MB

3/28

(SAMPLE Appeal for archives material went out by Metropolitan  
Life Insurance Co. about 1935) or 1934.

RECEIVED

MAR 28 1955

In re: Material for the Company's Archives  
TO ALL HOME OFFICE AND HEAD OFFICE EMPLOYEES

COMMITTEE ON THE HISTORY  
OF THE  
FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

In some remarks which I made at the recent dinner of the Field Veterans Association, I stated that we are undertaking to establish here, at the Home Office, a repository for archives which are of interest in considering the Company's development. We are trying to bring together articles which had a personal relation to great men of the Company's earlier history or which were of striking interest in the history of the Company itself. We have in mind not only personal articles, but pamphlets and other publications, programs, medals, mementoes of various types, sales literature, narratives of interesting experience having to do with the Company's history. Already, a substantial amount of material has been brought together, and more has been offered.

We propose to preserve this material in an Archive Room, probably located in the Company's New Unit. Incidentally, the room will be made available as a place of meeting for the Officers and Committees of the two Veteran Associations.

We are encouraged in our efforts by the Reception which was recently given, when this project was announced. I should like to have the members of our Home and Head Office organizations, and any others who may have or may know of material, communicate with us, describing anything of the sort which seems to them to be appropriate in this connection and which they are willing to let us have for this purpose. Each article which is suitable for display will have attached to it a card containing the name of the donor and brief descriptive information.

Will you be good enough to give some thought to this subject, at your convenience, and send us suggestions as to any material which might be suitable for the purpose? A letter addressed to me will bring your suggestion to proper attention and will be thoroughly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Vice-President