

Archives 'Neglect' Blasted



Under Archives Building roof is breakdown in control over the Nation's records.

By Robert E. Ashley
Washington Post Staff Writer

A special committee of nationally known historians, alarmed that the influence and importance of the National Archives has been downgraded by Federal bureaucracy, has called for an independent branch under a presidentially appointed archivist of the United States.

In an exhaustive study to

be submitted today to three top historical and archivist organizations, the committee said transfers in 1949 and 1950 of document-keeping functions to the General Services Administration have undermined the Archives' potential.

The loss of authority and influence of the archivist of the United States since 1949 has resulted in grave dam-

age to the public interest, the Committee reported, urging action to maintain the Archives' integrity both as a cultural and service agency for the Nation.

The committee criticized the system, but not the administration of Archivist Robert H. Bahmer.

The committee was formed last year by the American

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Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians and the Society of American Archivists to study the role that the Archives here should be playing.

It is headed by Julian P. Boyd, professor of history at Princeton University, editor of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson and a past president of the Historical Association.

The report, said the group, is "the product of a long-felt concern on the part of historians, archivists

and informed citizens . . .

"It is grounded on the simple proposition that no nation can be said to have a prudent regard for its own interest, or a civilized nation hope to rise to greatness, if it neglects the records that are indispensable to the orderly conduct of government and serve over the centuries as the embodied memory of the aspirations and achievements of its people."

Specifically, the group attacked implementation of a plan in 1949 that created

new machinery for administering Federal records that placed the National Archives establishment in a subordinate position.

"The archival function of appraisal of records for disposal or for permanent preservation is inseparable from records management, said the report, "and can only be performed by professional archivists, not by filing clerks."

But, the group noted, the office of archivist has, "in almost complete disregard of its relation to the cultural

heritage of a great nation," been reduced to a bureau that merely has charge of supplies and space.

As a result, important documents such as the annual report of the archivist have been scrapped, replaced by "a few paragraphs or pages subordinated to extended accounts of business operations on lands, buildings, transportation and supplies" with no regard to long-range policy, the committee concluded.

The appraisal function of

'Neglect' of National Archives

the Archives is so understaffed, the committee said, that it "cannot possibly carry out its awesome responsibility" of identifying what is valuable among the approximately 5 million cubic feet of new records created each year.

The committee urged that the archivist be appointed not by the head of GSA but by the President on the basis of professional qualifications, to put the post on an independent footing comparable to that of the Librarian of Congress and the

secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

Under the group's proposal, the archivist would be assisted by a board of regents composed of all living former Presidents; the Attorney General; the administrator of GSA; the public printer; representatives of Congress and the judiciary, historians, records-management experts and public members.

Until changes in the system are made, said the group, the Archives will continue to demonstrate

"the ill effects of inadequate support of its cultural objectives" through "the breakdown in systematic controls over the great masses of records."

U.S. Envoy in Nicosia

ANKARA, (UPI)—U.S. Ambassador Parker Hart flew to Nicosia Tuesday for a vacation which may include talks with Cypriot leaders. The Anatolian News Agency said Secretary General Zeki Kunalalp of the Turkish Foreign Office will also be in Nicosia Wednesday.