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# Archives and Records Programs in North Carolina

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Editor's note: This article is an abstract of a Report on the Assessment and Status of Archives and Records Programs for State and Local Governments and on the Needs of Historical Records Repositories, Submitted to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, NHPRC Grant 81-125, Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Records Advisory Committee, 1983. The report was abstracted by Maurice C. York. The final report, which includes a directory of historical records repositories, can be obtained at no charge from David Olson, State Archives and Records Administrator, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina 27611.

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) in February 1981 reserved funds for studies to assess the needs of individual states with regard to identifying and preserving their valuable records and documentary sources. On June 1, 1981, the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, on behalf of the Historical Records Advisory Committee, applied for an assessment and reporting grant of \$17,500. The thirteen-member committee was chaired by Dr. William S. Price, Jr., director of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History. State Archives and Records administrator David J. Olson served as secretary, and Thornton W. Mitchell, Olson's predecessor, was designated principal investigator.

The committee chose to examine areas of concern stipulated by the NHPRC's published guidelines, as well as problems not addressed by them. The committee studied the state government archives and records program, local government archives and records programs, the status of historical records repositories throughout the state, and "functions and services" that would strengthen archival work in North Carolina. Also of concern were five topics not addressed by the NHPRC's guidelines: loss of computerized information; problems with photographs; "laundering," destruction, and removal of records; security; and state achievements in the field of archives.

Procedures were developed and information was gathered in a variety of ways. Because the grant application was prepared before the mem-

bers of the advisory committee were appointed, initial plans for the project were formulated principally by the Archives and Records Section staff. They and the principal investigator reviewed the status of state agency and local government archives and records programs and developed questionnaires that were sent to records officers in state agencies and to appropriate officials at the county level. Data concerning historical records repositories were gathered through use of questionnaires and verified by information already available to the staff of the Archives and Records Section. The advisory committee gathered five times between February 1982 and February 1983 for organizational and work meetings. Public hearings were held at Charlotte on October 15, 1982, and at Raleigh on November 10, 1982.

The committee's report was prepared for publication by May 1983. It contains background information concerning archival and historical repository programs at all levels in North Carolina as well as findings and recommendations.

## State Government Archives and Records Program

### *Background*

The holdings of the North Carolina State Archives consist of approximately thirty-seven thousand cubic feet of material. Included are state agency records, records of local government agencies (especially county records), approximately seventeen hundred collections of private papers and manuscripts, about four thousand maps of North Carolina, an estimated five million photographs and photographic negatives, sound recordings and motion pictures, papers of private organizations, records of discontinued colleges, and miscellaneous materials. The authorized staff of the Archives and Records Section consists of seventy-three and one-half positions, including twenty archivists and nine records management analysts and technicians. During the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1982, the certified budget of the section was \$1,487,451.

### *Findings and Recommendations*

1. **Space Needs.** The state archival program as a whole is critically handicapped by a lack of stack space. Plans for the assignment or reassignment of space by the Department of Cultural Resources should take this urgent need into consideration. Such space should provide for the control of temperature and humidity and be constructed so that it will accommodate the heavy weight of archival materials.
2. **Equipment Deficiencies.** Obsolete and inadequate equipment throughout the Archives and Records Section seriously jeopardizes various programs. The section should prepare an equipment replacement schedule showing each item of existing equipment, and the schedule should be made available to the Office of State Budget and other organizations and individuals. Staff must keep abreast of new developments in equipment, and the equipment used by the Archives and Records Section must accommodate advancements in technology. Section personnel must also provide technical assistance and leadership in the procurement and use of equipment by other repositories in the state. Thus, travel funds must be provided so that staff can attend equipment fairs and seminars.
3. **Educating State Agencies about Archives Facilities and Services.** The lack of information among principal records officers in regard to the State Archives and the archival records of their own agencies is startling. Every effort should be made to educate users and potential users in other state agencies about the archives facilities and holdings.
4. **Unarranged and Undescribed State Agency Records.** Approximately twelve thousand cubic feet of state agency records in the State Archives have neither been arranged nor described according to modern archival principles. A high priority should be assigned to the completion of the task of making these records available to state agencies and for general use. The streamlining of records processing operations should continue.
5. **Guide to State Agency Records in the Archives.** A guide to state agency records in the archives is badly needed, because none has been published since 1963. Such a guide would acquaint state agencies with the sources that are available to them. The archives should also prepare a listing of special subject guides that will be of interest to state and local government agencies.
6. **Study of Document Preservation.** A major study of lamination and other methods of preservation is required. Although the Barrow method of lamination has been used successfully in the

State Archives for more than thirty years, other methods should be explored. As part of the overall training function of the Archives and Records Section, conservation workshops concerning documentary materials and photographs should be held in parts of the state where repositories are located.

7. **Fees for Services Provided to Genealogists.** The out-of-state search and handling fee currently charged by the State Archives should be increased from two dollars to five dollars. The Archives and Records Section should consider the proposal that an annual fee be charged for inclusion of researchers' names on the list of professional genealogists distributed by the State Archives and the Genealogical Services Branch of the State Library.

8. **Establishment of a State Data Base for Manuscripts and Records.** The Archives and Records Section should continue its efforts to obtain data concerning automatic data processed records throughout state agencies and move eventually to an automated data base that would expand the availability of information about records and manuscripts.

### **Local Government Archives and Records Programs**

#### *Background*

For nearly seventy years, the North Carolina State Archives has participated in the maintenance and preservation of the permanently valuable records of local government. County records were brought into the archives as early as 1914, and a comprehensive local records program was established in 1959. In 1961 the Archives and Records Section became responsible for records management in local government. The state has provided many services to local government: preservation and maintenance of valuable records in the State Archives; inventorying and scheduling of county and municipal records; security filming of essential operating records of counties; conservation and rebinding of important records in poor condition; and provision of limited technical and professional advice.

#### *Findings and Recommendations*

1. **Increased Services to Counties and Municipalities.** To expand the programs of the Archives and Records Section in regard to records management for local government, the relationship with the Institute of Government and with the League of Municipalities and the Association of County Commissioners should be renewed and strengthened. To the degree possible, records management services should be provided.

2. Storage of Local Inactive Noncurrent Records. Because local government agencies have indicated that one of their urgent needs is for the storage of inactive, noncurrent records, a special study should be undertaken to determine the feasibility of using existing commercial facilities in Charlotte, High Point, Greensboro, and Raleigh for storage purposes and of establishing commercial multi-county or regional records-storage facilities that could be funded by payment of an annual fee based on the volume of records stored.

3. Expansion of Local Government Program to Municipalities. As they have grown and become more important, municipalities have increasingly needed records management services, including the creation of systems for handling automated data processing records. The Archives and Records Section should reexamine in depth all its local government archives and records programs in terms of overall priorities and formulate a long-range program that will address the problems of municipalities.

## Historical Records Repositories

### *Background*

A total of 484 survey forms were mailed to all known local historical societies, public libraries, public and private colleges and universities (including two-year institutions), religious archives, and miscellaneous repositories. The questionnaire was based on that suggested by the NHPRC guidelines, but several questions were added, the most significant of which requested information about collection policies. Unfortunately, no instructions for measuring growth accompanied the questionnaire, and information received concerning growth during the past three years included measurement in items, drawers, boxes, bundles, linear feet, and cubic feet. The variations severely limited the usefulness of the questionnaire. A total of 107 large and small historical records repositories were identified.

Perhaps the most reliable basis for comparison of the repositories is the size of staff. Of the 107 repositories reporting, sixty-seven (62.6 percent) have less than one full-time employee, and several are staffed only by volunteers. Twenty-nine (27.1 percent) employ one or two full-time employees; five, three to five employees; two, six to ten; three, eleven to twenty-five (not all of whom are working directly with historical records); and only one has more than twenty-five full-time employees (Division of Archives and History). Only eleven repositories (10.1 percent) employ three or more full-time staff members.

Approximately 75 percent of the repositories collect materials pertaining to specific subject areas. A relatively large number of repositories contain resources relating to local history and genealogy. The holdings of the religious and denominational repositories are particularly extensive and are of unusual value. The smaller collections found in local historical societies, public libraries, and museums are usually limited to local materials and genealogical documents.

A number of repositories have made notable contributions to the collection and servicing of historical records. The North Carolina Historical Commission (now the Division of Archives and History), the Manuscript Department at Duke University's Perkins Library, and the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina's Wilson Library are the oldest repositories and preserve the most extensive groups of historical records. These institutions employ comparatively large numbers of professional staff who make available to researchers significant holdings, particularly in the fields of North Carolina and southern history. Three long-established repositories of denominational and church archives—the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat; the Archives of the Moravian Church, Southern Province, Winston-Salem; and the Friends Historical Society Collection, Guilford College—have preserved valuable records of their churches. Additional repositories include the Baptist Historical Collection at Wake Forest University; the East Carolina Manuscript Collection at East Carolina University; the special collections departments at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Western Carolina University, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and the North Carolina State University Archives. All of the foregoing repositories report their holdings to the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* and appropriate journals, and several of them have issued guides or other publications to publicize their holdings.

The largest category responding to the survey consists of colleges and universities; forty-seven questionnaires (44 percent of the total) were received from such institutions. Eighteen contain both institutional archives and manuscript material, but usually more emphasis is placed on manuscript collections than on college or university records. Seventeen repositories maintain institutional archives only, but twelve completely neglect their own records in favor of manuscripts.

Often the librarians, museologists, and lay persons who administer small repositories lack



archival training and fail adequately to preserve, process, and promote the use of their holdings. The 107 questionnaires show that thirty-four repositories make no effort to prepare finding aids; seventy do not report their holdings to any guide; and approximately half of them lack fire detection systems.

#### *Findings and Recommendations*

1. **Space and Personnel Needs.** Parent institutions need a better understanding of the problems faced by university archives and manuscript repositories and should begin immediately to seek means to resolve the problems created by insufficient personnel and inadequate space. Foundation support should be sought to supplement repositories' financial resources.
2. **Professional Archival Training.** Professional archival training is critically lacking among staff in many repositories, particularly the smaller ones. The advisory committee recommends a statewide archival organization, for which the Division of Archives and History would provide initial coordination and support. The organization should move toward the establishment of a training institute in archival management and short-term workshops in specialized subjects.
3. **The Problems of Small Repositories.** Every effort should be made by the proposed statewide archival organization to provide training opportunities for staff of small repositories and to establish minimal standards for archival and manuscript repositories.
4. **Nonpublic Collections in the State Archives.** Because the State Archives no longer is the only repository in North Carolina that collects private and personal papers of individuals and records of nonpublic civic organizations, the Archives and Records Section should formulate and publish a policy concerning the nature of the private collections it will accept. Further, the State Archives should minimize its role in accepting, processing, and referencing private collections.
5. **Institutional Records of Colleges and Universities.** A low priority is being given to the preservation and management of institutional records by many public and private schools. All constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina System should establish comprehensive archival and records management programs with sufficient staff, facilities, and authority. Private colleges and universities should be encouraged to establish similar programs.

#### **Functions and Services**

##### *Background*

This broad topical category was specified in

the NHPRC guidelines. It embraces all archival and manuscript endeavors. Based on the study that has been made by the advisory committee and the Archives and Records Section, short- and long-term programs should be initiated or strengthened for the following functions and services.

#### *Findings and Recommendations*

1. **Archival Training.** The need for training in archival principles and procedures is urgent and should be provided by institutes and short-term workshops and seminars.
2. **State Archival Organization.** This organization, which would facilitate the exchange of ideas in all pertinent fields and serve as a clearinghouse for information about training opportunities, could operate initially under the sponsorship of the Division of Archives and History or an appropriate nongovernmental institution. Further, a long-range goal should be the creation of a regional association somewhat more structured than the South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference.
3. **Services for Local Government Agencies and Repositories.** The present availability of such services as document conservation, micrographic services, records management assistance, and commercial records storage and microfilm services should be brought to the attention of agencies who need them.
4. **Establishment of a Statewide Data Base for Historical Records and Repositories.** An urgent need exists for centralized information about historical records and historical records repositories. A statewide data base to facilitate dissemination of information of this nature is a desirable long-range goal. As descriptive information about archival records becomes standardized, access to the data can be automated and tied in with other statewide, regional, and national computerized systems. The sharing of holdings by means of microfilm or other media should be a continuing objective.
5. **Computers: Problems and Advantages.** The likelihood is strong that what has heretofore been our documentary heritage will vanish as magnetic tape or floppy disks are erased from the entry of new data. Since the computer can also be a useful servant of the archivist, the advisory committee hopes that the Archives and Records Section will continue its discussions with the computer manager of the Department of Cultural Resources concerning the automation of finding aids. This could be an essential first step in the proposed statewide data base.
6. **Technical and Professional Advice.** A mechanism—perhaps the proposed statewide archival organization—for providing technical and profes-

sional advice to governmental agencies and repositories is required.

7. **Creation of a Union Catalog of Records and Manuscript Holdings in the State.** To facilitate the availability and use of historical records, a union catalog should be compiled. Standards for the identification and description of materials will need to be established so that the catalog can be automated and access to it can be made through the statewide network now being set up by the State Library or through SOLINET. A grant from either the National Endowment for the Humanities or from the NHPRC should be sought to fund the planning of the catalog.

8. **Document Conservation and Microfilming.** To insure uniform quality in filming, the proposed statewide archival organization should consider the adoption and wide dissemination of advisory standards for the microcopying of records.

9. **College-Level Training in Archival Theory and Practice.** College-level courses in archival theory available at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina State University, and East Carolina University should be publicized, as should such institutes as are offered by Emory University and the Georgia Department of Archives and History. Training in archival theory and procedures should be encouraged in the library schools in the state.



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