

The Records of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad

By DOROTHY K. TAYLOR

*Supervisor of Records
Denver, Colorado*

Records Procedure

THE Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad took a unique step when it created a Records Office, under the Trustees. A Supervisor of Records was appointed, who is responsible for organizing and administering systems for the retention, maintenance, and destruction of all correspondence files, reports, and other Company records. The Supervisor of Records consults the heads of departments before revising their files, but since she is a part of the Executive Department, her real responsibility is to the Trustees, rather than to department heads.

The first and probably most important step in the maintenance and preservation of records is the revision of current file systems. A staff of employees is stationed at the General Offices in Denver, and at the division headquarters. These employees have been trained by the Supervisor of Records in revising files, and they are filing experts.

One of these filing experts travels from station to station. Local freight and passenger agencies and traffic offices are required to keep on file certain current official tariffs. Complete public files of required tariffs are located in traffic offices in Denver, Colorado and Salt Lake City, Utah. Similarly indexed files store agency tariffs at each office in the exact order required. This procedure aids agents being transferred from one agency to another, as well as any person making inspection of tariffs. This traveling expert also revises and sets up all other files in the office in a standard system used throughout the railroad offices.

A group of employees, usually two or three, is assigned to a specific department. One employee is selected to report directly to the Supervisor of Records on the activities of the crew. A complete survey is made of the present system of filing, and equipment in use. Recommendations are drawn of the requirements, suggested new system, and additional equipment necessary. The Supervisor of Records then submits the recommendations to the department head for discussion. When all

are in accord as to the best system to be used, and the procedure to be followed, the crew is moved into a convenient location, and they begin their work on the files. They are supplied with Records Office desks, posture chairs, sufficient table space for sorting, typewriters, punches, staplers, file backs, folders, guides in all positions, cards, and card guides.

Then the work begins—one by one the files are removed from the cases. The decision is made as to the proper title of the file under the new system, classifying and systematizing titles in groups relating to similar subject matter. This classification by subject greatly simplifies locating a file when the exact title is not known. Uneven edges are trimmed, and the papers placed in a new file-back with complete identification of file by name, number, and date. Every file-back also includes the name of the railroad, department, and location. The file is then placed in a folder which has a typed label pasted on the tab, giving complete identification of the file. This folder never leaves the drawer, but remains to house papers which might arrive during absence of the file, and to hold the "Out" card, which gives the name of the person holding the file, and the date it was removed from the files.

A master card is then typed for the cross index, and as many cross reference cards as are necessary to assure finding the file. These cards are filed in one A to Z card index. A record is kept in a book of the number and name of each file as it is set up, with a listing of the old file numbers, which is kept just until the new system is fully established, and working.

After the system is complete, a Manual is made, which lists every file in order, gives full instructions for the use of the new system, instructions governing the destruction of records, etc. These manuals are distributed to all persons actively using the files, those dictating letters, and all file clerks. The Manual gives a complete picture in book form of all the files, for the use of every interested employee. The manuals are kept up-to-date at all times by the Records Office.

All letters must carry file numbers when dictated. Practically all concerns now repeat the file number when answering letters, which aids the file clerk in matching correspondence.

From department to department the work progresses. The file numbers are kept as uniform as possible in all departments, so that the same subject will carry the same number throughout the railroad system.

The Supervisor of Records makes periodical visits to all offices, making spot checks, and seeing that the file clerks keep the systems up-to-date, and equipment in order. All supplies, such as file folders, guides, cards, indexes, etc. are supplied by the Records Office. Identical

supplies are used in all offices on the entire system. The ability of the Records Office to furnish needs upon request eliminates having a stock of equipment on hand in each office, which in the past has tied up capital unnecessarily, and taken storage space.

After the current file system is set up, a survey is made of the stored records. Records which should be microfilmed are set aside. The policy is to microfilm chiefly documents which must be kept permanently, and documents of considerable bulk, since the great reduction in size achieved by microfilming makes these records much easier to work with, and saves storage space and storage cases. The stored records are filed vertically by the same system as the current files. All storage file drawers are labeled with the department name, title and dates of material, file number, Interstate Commerce Commission item number, and the date when contents are to be microfilmed, or may be destroyed. A check is kept by the Records Office to see that all records are currently filmed, or destroyed.

By January, 1947, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad had microfilmed 26½ million documents. These films are on file in humidified metal cases, housed in a fireproof vault in the General Offices. These records are completely indexed by departments, and also by form numbers, for easy and quick accessibility. There are five viewers available for use in the vault, where there is a crew always on duty to locate the film. There is also a viewer in the Accounting Department, and one in each division superintendent's office, which projects both 35 mm. and 16 mm. film. Positive films of division records are sent to the superintendents, while the negative is kept in the General Offices.

Three commercial, 16 mm. Recordak machines are in operation eight hours per day for all documents the smaller dimension of which does not exceed fourteen inches. One Model D, 35 mm. machine is in constant use for filming larger documents, such as dispatchers' train sheets, bound books, etc.

The Microfilm Supervisor is directly responsible to the Supervisor of Records. She submits a cost report each week, and a monthly report, by departments and titles, of documents filmed and to be destroyed. This report is duplicated, and copies sent to all departments affected by the current month's work. The Microfilm Supervisor also keeps a check on the in-flow of material from departments, distributes the work, keeps all film completely indexed, and sees that all people desiring to refer to records have immediate attention.

The destruction of all railroad records is governed by the Interstate Commerce Commission *Regulations to Govern the Destruction*

of Records of Steam Railroads. This book of regulations prescribes the length of time that each specific type of record must be retained, according to law.

Carriers are permitted to destroy a record after preserving it for the period of time specified for that particular record. If a carrier desires to destroy any records other than those named, it may petition the Commission to that effect. Carriers may be granted authority to preserve photographic copies of certain records in lieu of original records, or copies thereof. This practice is becoming widely adopted.

An officer is appointed by the board of directors or court having jurisdiction over the property in receivership or trusteeship, to have supervision of the destruction of accounts, records, and memoranda. When any records are to be destroyed, this officer issues a written authority naming the person or persons by whom the records are to be destroyed. This written authority is filed in the office of the issuing officer.

The precise method of destruction is not prescribed. The Commission is not concerned with the method, so long as the destruction is authorized, and a certificate of destruction is filed as required by the regulations. However, if the carrier sells or disposes of the records other than by destroying, the certificate shall so state. The Interstate Commerce Act provides that a carrier shall not divulge information concerning a shipper or consignee, so responsibility in disposing rests with the carrier.

If any records are accidentally destroyed, by fire, flood, or other casualty, a statement certifying such destruction shall be filed with the officer having supervision of the destruction of records, and a copy of the statement shall be filed with the Commission.

The records of the carriers are listed in the Interstate Commerce Commission regulations, but unfortunately the task of assigning an Interstate Commerce Commission item number to the individual company's documents is left to the carrier. Since there is often more than one number under which a record could very well be classified, this makes it possible to misconstrue, and assign a number which calls for a different period of retention. The carrier is held completely responsible for each classification, and if the Interstate Commerce Commission auditors find any discrepancies in checking the classification, the carrier is at fault. This hardly seems fair when in many cases the carrier seems to have a choice of numbers which would appear equally correct for some specific record. This flaw greatly depreciates the value of the Interstate Commerce Commission book of regulations, as it allows for such looseness of classification. The ideal situation would be for all carriers to agree to call their records by the same names and form numbers, and to submit a uniform list, which classifications could be

checked by the Interstate Commerce Commission, and thus give records of the same kind of all carriers the same item number.

The Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad has a *Manual of Procedures*, a section of which (Section 15) is entitled "Preservation of Records." In this section are listed all the records, and the following information on each: form number, name of form, whether the document is an original or copy, the filing point, Interstate Commerce Commission item number, Interstate Commerce Commission period which records must be retained, D&RGW requirements for the period of retention after which they may be destroyed or microfilmed, and fireproof protection requirements. In some cases the railroad desires to keep records longer than is required by the Interstate Commerce Commission, but, of course, in no case do the railroad regulations infringe on the Interstate Commerce Commission requirements.

The Denver and Rio Grande Western has distributed Section 15 of the Manual to all records custodians, and is no longer widely distributing the Interstate Commerce Commission books. They have thus attained uniformity in the classification of their records, the officers now being responsible for the classification rather than the individual employee handling the records. The Supervisor of Records co-ordinates this program, and makes annual checks to see that all record custodians submit requests for authority to microfilm and destroy records. All requests for authority are checked by the Supervisor of Records before being forwarded to the officer having supervision of destruction. While the original work of matching records to Interstate Commerce Commission regulations is a difficult and long task, any carrier would be amply repaid by the results of its co-ordinated program, as a substitution for the old haphazard methods of classification, which could very readily result in a severe penalty.

After the above program is completed in all current and storage record rooms, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad Company will have all current records filed in first grade steel file cases with the latest type vertical file equipment of guides, folders, etc. uniform over the entire road. All systems will be uniform. All records practical to film will be kept currently on film, filed in fireproof vaults, and completely indexed. All records not practical to film will be housed for the required period in steel storage cases, completely labeled as to contents and date of destruction. Every record will be housed in fireproof file cases or vaults as specified by the committee making a special study of every record. All records will be disposed of as soon as both Interstate Commerce Commission and D&RGW requirements have been met.

The Denver and Rio Grande Western's experience with this revised and unified system has proved its value in convenience and efficiency,

and the prevention of losing valuable documents. The adoption of such a uniform system by all railroads would simplify and expedite exchange of information, and facilitate the auditing of railroad records by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Microfilm Procedure

An experiment that developed into a full-time program has eliminated the necessity for eight miles of shelving for Rio Grande records, and reduced eighty tons of these vital records to several pounds of film capable of being housed in a space of approximately 212 cubic feet.

All railroads, being public utilities under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission, must, by law, keep an unusually large volume of records for periods ranging from several years to permanently.

Too, their free interchange of traffic and equipment with the several hundred railroads in the United States, results in a complicated and voluminous set of interline accounts, etc., which have always created a serious storage space problem, and the permanent value of many of these records has also created a preservation problem.

Consequently, it was with considerable expectancy that the Rio Grande launched an experimental microfilm project in 1942 with one commercial machine.

The results immediately were so pleasing to the Rio Grande management that a full-time microfilm supervisor was employed, responsible to the Supervisor of Records; a commercial machine, and a Model D for filming large documents and books were added, and for a long period the commercial machines were running on three shifts, twenty-four hours a day, to catch up with the tremendous backlog of records that had accumulated through the years.

Now that the bulk of records are on film, the schedule has been reduced to one eight-hour shift, and the program has been systematized on a permanent basis, dove-tailed into the Rio Grande's over-all program of revising current filing systems, and otherwise overhauling their methods for the retention, and destruction of records.

To date, the Rio Grande has 26,600,000 documents on film. Two large operating rooms, and a fireproof vault to house film have been constructed, and an office built for the microfilm supervisor adjoining. The cost to date has been \$.0035 per document.

Since many records are needed frequently by the Division Superintendents, scattered over the 2,400-mile system, these Superintendents have been provided with viewers.

Virtually every department has now had a large bulk of its records filmed. The largest part of this volume comes from the Accounting

Department, including thousands of local and interline waybills, interline settlements, and claims, passes, milk and cream abstracts, bills for vouchers, bills collectible, paychecks, conductors' wheel reports, and car service accounts.

The Engineering Department has had all Authorities for Expenditures prior to the eleven year period of Trusteeship reduced to film. The Personnel Department has sent in for filming all records for retired, and deceased employes, and personal records of employes out of service five years or more. The Transportation Department sends bulky records, such as those covering movement of military trains, fruit blocks, ODT orders, bulky daily reports, etc., which heretofore have always been responsible for a serious problem of providing floor space, and filing cases.

To take a few examples to illustrate the tremendous volume of records being filmed under the program:

The Interstate Commerce Commission requires that the form covering Authority for Expenditures be kept as a permanent record. To date, the Rio Grande has filmed 367,500 pages of this form, plus maps which often accompany them. Interline settlements, and claims together make up the biggest single item, and more than 3,400,000 of these have been filmed, and destroyed which normally would have to be kept for four years after settlement. Interline waybills received accumulate at the rate of approximately 475,000 per year, and must be retained for six years. Local waybills received pile up at approximately the same rate. To date, nearly two and one-half million of these have been filmed, and destroyed.

Bills for vouchers, which must be kept for ten years, were another big problem under the old method of filing the entire 8½" x 11" document, but now 5,000,000 of these have been reduced to film, and the originals destroyed.

Dispatchers' train sheets, one of the largest Rio Grande documents, and one of the worst problems from the storage standpoint because of their size, are being reduced to 35 mm. film. These range in size from 17" x 42" to 21" x 7'6", and are photographed both front and back on negative and positive film, the positive being sent to the Division Superintendent, and the negative stored in the fireproof vault at the General Offices. The library reader with which the Superintendents are supplied projects both 16 mm. and 35 mm. film.

These Superintendents also send in their out-of-service personal records, formal investigations, and A.F.E.'s. They are provided with film file cases, and the film is returned to them for storage, although the largest part of the film covering most records is retained in the central vault at the General Offices in Denver.

The Supervisor of Records co-ordinates the program. All requests for filming are made through the Records Office. Material sent for filming must be accompanied by a letter of transmittal, signed by the Department Head, giving the following information:

1. Department
2. Form number and name
3. Dates (beginning and ending)
4. Order in which material should be filmed, by date, location, alphabetically, etc.
5. Destruction information. If material may be destroyed after filming, enclose form 406, properly filled out, and approved.
6. Whether material is to be returned to department after filming, or held a certain length of time before destroying.
7. Indexing information.
8. Name and telephone extension of person to call in case of question.

All material is to be sorted in the order it is to be filmed before being sent to the microfilm room.

Form 405 serves as an application, and authority for the destruction of accounts, records, and memoranda. Also this form notifies the Supervisor of Records which accounts, records, and memoranda are to be destroyed, and which are to be microfilmed.

Form 406 provides the General Auditor with a record of accounts, records, and memoranda destroyed, and is signed by the person supervising the destruction.

A complete card index is kept up-to-date as material is finished, showing the film number, drawer number, and section number where every item filmed is filed. One index is made by departments, and a second index shows all records by form number, and title.

When facsimiles are required, a written request, containing the following information, is sent to the Supervisor of Records:

1. Department requesting
2. Complete description of document, if already filmed
3. Original document, if not filmed
4. Whether front, and/or back are needed
5. Number of copies required
6. Date and time required

Upon receipt by the Records Office, the facsimile is delivered directly to the department requesting.

A Cost Analysis is made each week, showing the number of documents run on each machine, film footage used, cost per 100 documents, and film footage per 100 documents. Absences, and other irregularities

affecting the cost are also shown. A copy of this report is sent to the Trustees.

At the end of each month, a Summary of Documents Microfilmed and Destroyed is made. This is a running summary of all documents filmed from the beginning of the program to, and including the current month. This report is distributed to officials, and department heads affected by the current month's work.

There is a section in the Manual of Procedures which lists all the railroad records by form number, and those records which have no form number immediately following. This section specifies the required period of retention, according to Interstate Commerce Commission regulations, and also the Denver and Rio Grande Western requirements, including the microfilm requirements. This section is constantly revised as the program progresses and more and more documents are put on film. All records are checked with this section by the Supervisor of Records to see that the filming is kept up-to-date, and a steady flow is forwarded to the microfilm rooms. Section 15 also includes a picture of the library reader located in each superintendent's office, with instructions for its use, and a general outline of Microfilming.

Numerous requests for detailed information on its microfilm program have been received by the Denver and Rio Grande Western from other railroads, and commercial concerns. Also, many representatives of these organizations visit the railroad's offices to obtain first-hand information on microfilming records. It is hoped that those unable to visit the offices will obtain usable information from this summary of the D&RGW microfilm program. If any further information is desired, the Supervisor of Records will gladly furnish it upon request.