

# Areas of Cooperation Between the National Archives and State Archives<sup>1</sup>

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*National Archives*

OUR subject is "Areas of Cooperation between the National Archives and State Archives." A confirmed States' Rights man, of course, would have nothing to say on this subject, although he might mutter to himself. Similarly, the proponent of a powerful central government would scarcely bother to discuss the matter. He would press ahead with his programs, pushing the States aside or ignoring any interests they might have in his activities. Obviously, we stand somewhere between these extremes if we are agreed that we ought to explore those "areas of cooperation" that may exist.

To begin with, there appear to be a number of worthwhile areas of cooperation that have nothing to do with theories of Federal-State relations. They are areas that are concerned rather with our common interests as members of the archival profession. The National Archives and the State archival agencies merely happen to be our employers. We hope, however, loyalty to our employers and our loyalty to our profession are not often in conflict. By serving our employers well we build up the reputation of our profession. In turn, by raising the content and standards of our profession, we have more to offer our employers. In matters dealing with the status of our profession as such, we can surely cooperate without reservation. There has already been much such cooperation in the past, some of it direct but perhaps mostly through the channels offered by our Society of American Archivists. Through it we also invite all other archivists, whoever their employers happen to be, to cooperate with us.

In what areas then do we most need to cooperate for the sake of our profession? Out of a number that come to mind I would select two for special emphasis: (1) cooperation in making our profes-

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sion and its services more widely and favorably known, and (2) cooperation in raising its standards.

In the first field the Archivist of Mississippi has long been our leader. One can read with as much profit today as when it was written his article on the "Public Relations of Archival Depositories" prepared for our Society's meeting at Annapolis in 1939. Call it education, if you prefer that term to public relations. Certainly we need to do more to educate our public men, our legislators and Congressmen from whom financial support must come, and our agency officials, whose records we desire and whose understanding we must have. We must also educate our citizens, especially those groups with influence upon our public men — the newspaper men, the business men, the taxpayers' organizations, the very active patriotic organizations, the universities and educators, to name some of the foremost. One of the best ways of doing this, perhaps, is to talk to them about their own records. The rising interest in institutional and business archives has not been without influence in extending understanding of the role of the archivist in government.

We are given no money for public relations as such, and perhaps rightly so. Instead, good public relations should be manifest in all of our regular activities. In addition, they require our time and energies beyond regular office hours. The field is so vast that we must all contribute, and what one does helps the other, whether he be State archivist or Federal archivist. Much more could be done through the Society. Perhaps some day it can have, like stronger professional organizations, a paid secretary who could devote more time to promotional work in behalf of archives. Until that time perhaps the Society should consider the establishment of a Committee on Publicity that could seek out and enlist additional talents and direct our scattered efforts toward concerted objectives.

But one has to have a profession that he is proud to promote. He must also believe that it has a vital contribution to make. This leads us to the question of content and standards. It is not enough that the archivist knows them. They must be visible to others, and valid for all.

But do our archivists yet know them? Sometimes it seems that the profession has grown too rapidly in the past 15 years, and like a fast-growing tree tends to be hollow at the center. Is there a solid core of doctrine in which our practitioners are trained? We have yet to produce in this country an ordinary manual of practice for the American archivist. Such a manual should be valid for the States as well as for the Federal Government, and it seems to me there

should be cooperation in producing it. It should be valid for any member of the profession, regardless of who his employer might be. But do we agree on the vital questions that are the core of our profession — our standards controlling selection and discard, our standards of rehabilitation and preservation, our principles of arrangement and description, the extent and quality of our reference service, our responsibility for and the character of a publication program? Are we trying to reach agreement or are we drifting further apart? And what about our standards for personnel and their training? What is our relation to other disciplines and other professions? What about the recognition and development of specialties within our own? Disintegration of the profession may be the penalty for failure to take these questions seriously and, as a result, employers may cease to take archivists seriously. A government's archives may again be left to chiefs of mail and files, although they may call themselves records officers or archivists if these terms have no clear definitions or standards attached to them. Or the records may be turned over to a man with a microfilm camera, who will call himself a records engineer. State archivists and Federal archivists, because they are still the core of our profession, will have to submerge any supposed differences and cooperate fully to give that profession status and standards. In B. Franklin's timeworn phrase, "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

There has been considerable cooperation in the past in the consideration of buildings and physical equipment, much more than in the consideration of mental equipment. There may be, however, additional areas in the physical equipment field that deserve joint exploration. One of them, mechanical finding aids, will be considered at this session. We have given a good deal of attention cooperatively to legislation. Perhaps we should leave it to the States at this point to suggest further areas of cooperation for the sake of the profession. I am not sure that it is these areas that we are supposed to discuss in this session. The title reads "between the National Archives and State Archives." This means between institutions. Let us put on the caps of our employers, therefore, so that we may survey the scene from our official stations. What further areas of cooperation are there that should be considered from the standpoint of the interests of the Governments we serve?

It might be profitable, as a background for our discussion, to review briefly the peculiar relation that has existed between the Federal Government and the States, a relation that the archivist must

understand in terms of records. The United States is not what is called by political scientists a "unitary state," with all subordinate political communities existing as its creatures and agents, as, for example, is France, where the departments and communes are really the field offices of one integrated central government. In forming our federation the States yielded only certain powers to the Federal Government, reserving the others to themselves. Then, since the States and their subordinate communities were not to serve as the administrative agents and channels of the Federal Government, the latter was forced to build up its own elaborate and separate system of field offices on successive levels, reaching down to the people. We in the National Archives are responsible for determining what to do about the records of this parallel system of administrative units that in a unitary State the State archivists would handle, although in a unitary government the State archivists would also, of course, be under a central archival administration. European archival agencies do not furnish us with precedents for dealing with this peculiarly American situation. It is one for which we shall have to work out our own solution cooperatively.

State archivists, though they may have no legal authority over the records of Federal field offices in the States, do, I believe, have a rightful concern with them. A moment's reflection will tell us why. Because of the division of powers, the State archivists in preserving the States' records are preserving only part of the record of the relations of the people of a State with their Government. The rest of the story is in the records of the Federal Government's field offices. Only together do the two form one whole and complete government. If we are not to have serious gaps in the future, it would seem that the same standards should prevail in preserving the records of both lines of authority at the State level and below. What are these standards? We at Washington ought to know if the job for the Federal field office records is to be left to us. I feel increasingly that it is a job that cannot be left solely to us if your interests are to have full consideration; it is one that should be tackled cooperatively.

The problem has at least three major aspects: (1) selection and discard; (2) proper location and protection of the records selected for preservation; and (3) adequate machinery for servicing the records to be preserved.

From the beginning the National Archives in its appraisal of field office records has as a matter of policy considered the needs of regional, State, and local history. Although we are supposed to

have on our staff persons who have an appreciation of these interests, it seems to me a truism that they cannot have a full knowledge of these interests in all the regions and the 48 States. We are obliged to fall back on general patterns of retention and disposal that take too little account, perhaps, of special situations and events. We are also perforce giving more attention to sampling techniques. A good example of the application of that technique is given in an article by Dr. Carl Kulsrud, "Sampling Rural Rehabilitation Records," in the *American Archivist* for 1947. This rural rehabilitation program was first operated through State Emergency Relief Corporations. But that mighty potentate, the Comptroller General, ruled in 1935 that the legislation would not permit grants to the State Corporations, that instead they must be made directly to the relief clients. This ruling required the setting up of an office in every county. The paid-in-full folders that had accumulated in the counties by 1943 amounted to upwards of 20,000 cubic feet. They are rich in human interest material, in documentation for the study of farm economic conditions in the depression period. These conditions, however, varied for the different types of farming areas. The folders could not all be kept, but we have kept all of them for typical counties for 134 distinct farming areas as classified by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The retained folders amount to 600 cubic feet, still an immense quantity of records. The State archivists escaped the responsibility of handling these records by the close margin of the Comptroller General's opinion. Would they have handled them any differently? Would the fact that each would have had about 400 cubic feet to handle instead of 20,000 cubic feet have affected their decisions in the case? The National Archives has made decisions on many cases like this, and it faces the making of decisions on many more. I would like to see one or two of them selected for a discussion session sometime at a meeting of the Society of American Archivists.

Often in the past we would not have had time to consult the States had we wanted to. Your views and desires should be known to us ahead of time. They could be if we acted together on enough such programs to build up precedents and standards. Another deterring factor in seeking your advice has been that it would be almost impossible to consult 48 different States, with archival agencies, where they exist at all, in varying stages of development. Should the Archivist of the United States appoint a panel of consultants, or should the State archivists get together and appoint an

advisory committee? The machinery for making your views known does not exist, but it is needed.

How would the views of the States on disposal and retention be affected if Federal records at the State level or below that were to be kept, were to be turned over to the States for preservation? This brings us to a consideration of the second question, that of the proper location for field records that are judged worthy of preservation. Here, too, we need your cooperation in reaching the best solution. Your interests are at stake. In a session at our Richmond meeting in 1942, entitled "Planning a Program for Federal Records in the States," Mr. McCain and I, together with Jesse Douglas and Richard Morris, explored this problem rather carefully. These papers are still worth re-reading (as I find others in the *American Archivist* often are). We discussed three possible solutions: (1) full centralization in Washington; (2) a system of regional archives; and (3) a system of Federal-State cooperation for maintaining depositories for both Federal and State records in each of the 48 States. I remember that I argued so hotly with myself pro and con on each of these propositions that I reached a complete stalemate. Mr. McCain, however, did better. He found it possible first to dismiss the idea of regional depositories as a permanent solution. He next stated that he was "constitutionally, fundamentally, and otherwise opposed to the general proposition of centralization." A system of Federal-State depositories, he concluded, "probably would be impractical, but I like the idea."

Since then the world has moved — whether forward or backward, we need not decide — and there are some new developments that should be brought into the picture. All of them, I think, tend to support Mr. McCain's intuitive rejection of centralization. The most powerful of these is the atomic bomb. It would give us pause under any circumstances, but in the light of the present unstable world situation, there is no rebuttal. Field records for the present, and perhaps for the future, must be kept out of Washington. It may be necessary, too, to slow down our disposal of field records. We are no longer quite so sure that substantial duplication in Washington of important records is sufficient reason for disposal. The field office files may take on the nature of ready-made security copies.

Another new factor in the picture is the increased decentralization in Government agencies, which may have been hastened by the bomb, but which was also a basic principle of modern administrative reform. Too many matters were coming to Washington for



decision. Strengthen the regional authorities for efficiency in government. Agency after agency in the past 10 years has decentralized in accordance with this principle, sometimes dividing up its records and sending carloads of them to the field. This means that the Washington office usually becomes merely a planning and policy-making center. Actions are taken and decisions are made in accordance with these plans and policies in the field. This places more records in the field and it makes them much more important. It perhaps strengthens the argument for regional depositories.

A third new element in the picture is the increased authority for action that is provided in the "Federal Records Act of 1950." Formerly we had only the National Archives in Washington. Now in Section 505 of this act authority is given "to establish, maintain, and operate records centers for the storage, processing, and servicing of records for Federal agencies pending their deposit with the National Archives of the United States or their disposition in any other manner authorized by law." These are not to be regional archives, but intermediate records centers. At Richmond in 1942, after arguing ourselves into a stalemate, Mr. McCain and I had agreed on the desirability of some such temporary expedient. If I may quote from my own article, I asked, "Could we not free ourselves from the pressure for immediate decisions by establishing at a number of appropriate points in the country not permanent depositories but temporary concentration stations, which would also be processing points? They should be located in large warehouse-type buildings, as well protected and fire-resistant as possible, and yet far less expensive than the traditional archives building." This legislation gives the authority to do just that. The plans are for establishing these centers on a regional basis, tying in with the General Services Administration's administrative regions. This may seem also to be moving toward the regional archives idea, but it must be emphasized that the final decision is only postponed. It will be determined in large part, presumably, by the nature of the records that find their way into these intermediate records centers and our experiences in servicing them.

The new law also gave us authority in another direction, in Section 507 the authority "to direct and effect . . . the transfer of records deposited (or approved for deposit) with the National Archives of the United States to public or educational institutions or associations: *Provided*, That the title to such records shall remain vested in the United States unless otherwise authorized by law." This would permit us to place records with the State archival agen-

cies, provided we felt such action to be in the public interest and the States were willing to accept them under the stated proviso. Formerly we had such authority only for records that we could conscientiously certify to Congress as being without further value to the Federal Government. Thus the Federal Records Act of 1950 grants us more freedom to act in either of two directions, or in both simultaneously. This only calls the more for your serious cooperation with us in deciding in which directions we ought to move.

Whatever the final decisions as to location may be, more cooperation will be necessary in making the records available. In discussing cooperation in servicing, I should like to depart from my outline enough to include for consideration not only the records of Federal field offices of all Federal-State cooperative programs of the present and past. It is necessary to go back to the very beginnings when the Federal Government took over certain functions and obligations from the States — the State debts, the western lands, the military responsibilities. Usually part of the story is in the State records and part in the Federal records. The Virginia bounty land grants to its Revolutionary soldiers is, for example, a very complicated story, and scarcely a week goes by that we do not receive inquiries that involve some grant or grantee. The Federal Government took over the responsibility of satisfying many of these grants out of the public domain. In almost every case part of the story is in Mr. Van Schreeven's custody and part of it in ours, and we need to know more clearly what portion of the records each has. At a later date there are the records of such functions as internal improvements, where the Federal Government and the States had difficulty making up their minds as to the respective roles each should play. Another subject causing us much difficulty at present are the records of private land grants emanating from foreign sovereignties, as for example those from Spain or Great Britain in Mississippi. This problem is made more complicated by the fact that in the past the Federal Government in nearly every case turned over to the States the records of its Surveyor General's offices, when these were closed, and these records, in most instances, have not even yet been turned over to the State archival authorities.

Such instances of overlapping subject-matter records could be multiplied. We would like to see the State archival agencies round up these old records, so that we would need to do business with only one central agency in each State. Then we would like to see adequate guides and inventories prepared, and we will try to reciprocate. This should save us both much time in hunting vainly for



the answers that the other agency has and could provide quickly.

Next to be mentioned is the whole category of records of Federal-State cooperative programs, most of which are of more recent times. It is strange even in a Federal Government that the State and central governments were kept so separate so long, but our Constitution provided no machinery for their cooperation, and there were other reasons that we need not go into that prolonged the separation. Each watched the other jealously and each stood on its own prerogatives. We as archivists in our preoccupation with the older records may have inherited something of this old separatist tradition. If so we are now behind the times. Many factors in our modern civilization have combined to break down the barriers. In one area of governmental concern after another it proved necessary or desirable to work cooperatively, and these cooperative programs have increased so rapidly in recent years that one is almost forced to conclude that the nature of our Government is being transformed. One can take time barely to mention the more than forty-odd Federal aid programs, some of which have now been operating with conspicuous success for almost a generation. They dominate the picture in fields of agricultural research and extension work, in vocational education and rehabilitation, in the construction of our major highways, in wildlife restoration, in unemployment relief, and in public assistance programs such as the care of the aged, the blind, and dependent children. All of these programs represent the Federal Government working through State established machinery instead of setting up its own field offices. These programs involve the creation of records that must be preserved and used cooperatively to make the complete story available.

There are an even greater number of cooperative programs that have developed more informally, such as those of the Geological Survey in geologic and water resources investigations and topographic mapping, those of the National Park Service in the development and maintenance of historic and scenic sites, those of the Forest Service to stimulate the development and proper management of State forests. The Bureau of Labor Standards operates almost as a common service agency for State labor departments and officials, promoting and investigating proper labor standards, and coordinating the enforcement by the States of wage, hour, home work, child labor, and safety and health laws. The Bureau of Standards has long cooperated with State agencies in regulating weights and measures in commerce and industry. Other agencies help to enforce interstate agreements and compacts through their

authority over interstate commerce. There is increasingly close cooperation between the law enforcing agencies, and between the tax collecting agencies of Federal and State Governments.

The records of many of these cooperative programs for the earlier years of their operation are now in the custody of the National Archives, and they will soon be, if they are not now, coming into the custody of the State archival agencies. As the governments cooperated in executing the programs so will we have to work together in preserving and producing the records and the information they contain.

All this means that we shall have to set up and operate our own Federal-State cooperative program in the archives field. But before that can be done we shall have to have more adequate archival legislation, archival agencies, and archival personnel in our States. We come back then in a full circle to the points with which we started, cooperation in advancing the status and standards of the archival profession. These, it becomes clear, are basic; and we cannot expect much help except from each other.