

Recent Archival Developments in Georgia¹

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MY general topic covers roughly three points: (1) The condition of the archives of Georgia when I began my work, (2) setting up a program to meet my immediate needs, and (3) the long-range program as I envision it.

May I introduce the first point with a brief history of the steps leading to the formal organization on September 10, 1918, of Georgia's Department of Archives and History and of what has been done since it began operation on January 1, 1919.

The struggles to rescue from oblivion the records of the labors and achievements of our colony and State is partially recorded in early schedules, inventories, checklists, and the like, on file in Georgia's archives today. The earliest such recording, I find, is a list of records in the executive office in 1791, a schedule of books of records belonging to the secretary of state's office, taken May 2, 1792. Other lists appeared in 1812, 1816, 1823, 1841, 1845, 1896, and 1903, and a checklist in 1917 notes Georgia archives on file in the offices of the adjutant general, the comptroller-general, the executive department, the secretary of state, and the Western and Atlantic Railroad, a State-owned railroad. This checklist was prepared by the State librarian and published in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Session of the Georgia Historical Association, Atlanta, Apr. 10, 1917*, pp. 49-63, along with an article on "The Condition of Georgia's Archives" in the same issue, pp. 32-35.

On December 9, 1823, Gov. George M. Troup reported to the legislature the following revealing facts:

. . . that the books and papers in the executive office are in such disorder and confusion as to require immediate attention . . . the old books and papers connected with events which form our early history, are thrown into trunks and put aside as food for worms — so far as the history of our country is of any value to us, I submit for your consideration, whether these may be overhauled, and be made to pass through a classification and arrangement.

¹ Paper read at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Annapolis, Maryland, Oct. 16, 1951. The writer has since revised the paper to bring it up to the date of July 1, 1952.

As a result of this plea and the alarming Indian situation, in 1824 the legislature appointed Joseph Vallence Bevan of Savannah as historiographer "to search the archives of the State with a view to unfold its history," and appropriated \$400 for the work. This was Georgia's first effort to have an official history compiled and edited from official records. Although Bevan died before he was able to complete the work he had undertaken, he forwarded to Governor Troup in 1825 "a table of the Documents relating to the History of our State; having taken care to select only such as I believed to possess real & intrinsic interest." The Bevan papers, his letter of transmittal to Governor Troup, and the table of the Georgia documents are today in the possession of the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, a private historical society organized on June 4, 1839, 80 years before the Department of Archives and History began operation. On several occasions this society was authorized by the State to keep some of its valuable relics and records. Mr. Tefft of Savannah furnished the Library of Congress with a table of Bevan's collection of papers some years ago. The Library of Congress also acquired material concerning the Georgia archives in the Peter Force papers. The Georgia Historical Society in 1845 appointed William H. Pritchard an "agent to proceed to Milledgeville [then the State capital] for the purpose of procuring a full and correct schedule of all documents pertaining to the History of Georgia from the landing of General Oglethorpe to the close of the War of the Revolution." A lengthy and complete schedule made by Pritchard as a result of his mission is on file in the Georgia Historical Society.

In the long-range program I plan to publish a new checklist of Georgia archives; then the director of the Georgia Historical Society, Mrs. L. M. Hawes, and I plan to collaborate and follow up the new checklist with the inventories mentioned above and to publish them in chronological order in future numbers of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, or, still better, to have the checklist and inventories appear in a single issue. The articles on "The Public Archives of Georgia," by Ulrich B. Phillips in the American Historical Association's *Annual Report*, 1903, volume 1, and the checklist by Mrs. Maud Barker Cobb, State librarian, of 1917, in the publication already mentioned, are today inadequate. Some items they reported missing have turned up in the assembling of the archives, while others reported on file are today missing. Checking these lists of eighteenth and nineteenth century archives against our present holdings for the period will be an interesting compara-

tive study. Work is under way on this project, with the idea of publishing the results.

The colonial records of Georgia in London were copied at the expense of the State, in accordance with an act of 1837, the cost being approximately \$7,000. The Rev. Charles Wallace Howard "repaired to London" and remained 3 years, returning with transcripts of 22 volumes. Subsequently all of these costly volumes but 4, which are now in the department of archives, were destroyed by fire in 1891, in the home of a professor who had borrowed them — a practice permitted in those days.

Nothing was done to replace the colonial records until 1902, when former Gov. Allen D. Candler was appointed to compile for publication "the Colonial, Revolutionary and Confederate records" of Georgia. He did not "repair to London" but arranged to have Messrs. B. F. Stevens & Brown of London do the transcribing. Legislative funds provided for the transcribing of 39 volumes and the publication of 25. My predecessor, with the aid of the WPA, typed, indexed, and prepared the remaining *Candler Manuscripts* for publication — 14 volumes in all. These are scheduled for publication in the near future.

Between 1903 and 1918 the State's three compilers of records — Allen D. Candler, William J. Northen, and Dr. Lucian Lamar Knight — wrote in their annual reports of the great difficulties they encountered in finding the official records and documents pertaining to the three historical periods the documents for which they were authorized to compile and publish. In Candler's report to the Governor in 1903 he stated:

Georgia has been too slow in preserving her history . . . our neighbors, carved out of Georgia territory, Alabama and Mississippi, already have established by law a "Department of Archives and History," and the Department put under the charge of an officer designated the "Director."

The nucleus for such a department for Georgia already existed in the compiler's office. The Georgia Historical Association, organized in 1917, had as its chief aim to establish for Georgia a department of archives and history. Dr. Lucian Lamar Knight, a well-known Georgia historian, had been appointed compiler of records in 1913 and became the president of the newly formed Georgia Historical Association. He emphasized that Georgia's most pressing need was a department of archives, that Georgia was without adequate history, for the period 1785-1860, which he called "Georgia's Silent Years — An Alarming Hiatus." Dr.

Knight was the driving force behind the movement to establish the department; with the able backing of the Georgia Historical Association and of patriotic societies, especially the Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the department was established. With slight modifications, it was based on the Alabama model. Dr. Knight was known as its founder and became the first State historian and director of Georgia's Department of Archives and History.

Under the reorganization act of 1931 the State Historical Commission, formerly in control of the department, was abolished; and the powers, duties, and functions of the commission were transferred to the secretary of state. In 1929 a 20-room residence was tendered to the State by the heirs of A. G. Rhodes for the home of the Department of Archives and History. The department was moved from its small quarters in the capitol building to its new headquarters, Rhodes Memorial Hall, in 1930. Today its collection consists of more than 70 thousand official manuscript books and pamphlets, and 4 million paper records, which have been assembled, classified, arranged, and cataloged over a period of 30 years.

SETTING UP THE PROGRAM TO MEET IMMEDIATE NEEDS AND THE LONG-RANGE PROGRAM AS NOW ENVISIONED

When I was appointed by the secretary of state as acting director of the Department of Archives and History, in September 1950, I was asked to work with him in a program of expansion for the restoration shop and selection of material from our files for lamination. A Barrow Laminator had been purchased in 1942, but because of lack of funds and staff very few documents were restored until 1950. During the fiscal year 1950-51, however, 19,091 pages were laminated.² After lamination our book records are being rebound in buckram by a commercial firm. In preparation for the removal of the land office records and other records from the office of the secretary of state and the State treasurer, a complete rearrangement of the stack areas and the shifting of books and files was necessary.³ The work was completed late in the summer of

² During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1952, 24,000 pages were laminated.

³ The removal of the land office records was completed and the books and records were inventoried. They consist of approximately 1,000 volumes of head-right, bounty, and lottery grants, and surveys relating to these, with master indexes to cover grants and surveys, by number and by name, included in the various volumes. In addition there are approximately 330 volumes of field notes of the district surveyors, and 400 district and county maps.

1951. This move afforded me the opportunity to eliminate deplorable segregations in record groups.

We are at this time setting up the microfilming program. The sum of \$20,000 was appropriated to the secretary of state for the housing and safekeeping of permanently valuable State records. In the summer of 1951, 80,000 notary public commissions were microfilmed, and approximately 3,000 commissions of county officers are in the process of being filmed at this time.⁴ Scheduled for filming in order to release greatly needed space in our building are the property tax digests of Georgia counties, 1880-1949, deposited with us by the Property Tax Division of the Revenue Department. This group of records consists of approximately 6,500 large volumes, occupying five rooms. House and Senate bills and resolutions, 1859-1940, from the Office of the Secretary of State, occupy one large room in which they are packed to the ceiling and are practically inaccessible. With the advice of the secretary of state I am selecting bodies of records of historical importance and high research value, for filming. They are irreplaceable unpublished historical source materials on file in his office and our department, consisting of original State constitutions and journals of State conventions, records of the general assembly (acts, and house and senate journals), Georgia's treaties with the Indians, passports issued by the governors, 1785-1820, Creek and Cherokee Indian letters, material on Indian depredations, governors' letter books (letters sent and letters received), the series of executive minutes, records concerning Georgia military affairs and commissions, 1775-1864, and a list of persons entitled to draws in the lottery authorized by the act of May 11, 1803 (4 vols.). Security copies will be provided and we hope to make the films of these records available to scholars, archives, libraries, and universities throughout the country, at small cost, whenever they are needed and called for. This will conserve travel time and expense for the persons interested and will further ensure a means of preserving our priceless documents.

We have still other projects in view:

1. We hope to establish a well-planned museum with new equipment, placing particular emphasis on a "hall of fame" of Georgia's public servants.

⁴ This work was completed, and in addition to the commissions, the original Georgia laws, 1764-1948, on file in the Office of the Secretary of State, were filmed during the fiscal year 1951-52. As of June 30, 1952, 400,000 documents have been microfilmed, totaling 25,000 feet of film, consisting of 66 reels of 16 mm. and 183 reels of 35 mm. It is our practice to make three copies of films, one negative copy for storage and two positive copies for use.

Handsome oil paintings in gilt frames of great beauty are stored in our attic at present.

2. In our records management program we are encouraging other State departments to microfilm their files in order to reduce the bulk of the material to be transferred to our department in the future. We are emphasizing disposal schedules for worthless records and are acquainting many departments with the law governing destruction. We find that many department heads do not know of the legislation authorizing the destruction of useless public records by the State librarian and the secretary of state, with the approval of the governor.

3. The great interest in genealogical studies has led to our cooperation with the patriotic societies, particularly with the Daughters of the American Revolution, in building a substantial genealogical collection. More than a thousand genealogical volumes are available in our research rooms and are cataloged and shelf-listed. We wish to continue to encourage the making of typescripts of county records, cemetery and Bible records, minutes of old churches, and genealogical charts — concentrating, however, only on Georgia records and lines and those records which help to supplement Georgia lines. I am at work on an inventory of records in our department that will aid the genealogist. This I am preparing for the National Genealogical Society to publish in a future issue of its *Quarterly*.⁵

4. A program of publication should be undertaken. Approximately 60 volumes of our most important materials, 1775-1864, were prepared for publication by a former director. Georgia's civil service records of men who have held public office in Georgia, 1777 to date, are listed on individual cards, are alphabetically arranged in the general catalog, and should be published in a future edition of Georgia's *Official and Statistical Register*. Many of the rosters of public servants published in earlier editions of the *Register* have not been brought up to date in more than 20 years. There is great need for a complete list of the meetings of the general assemblies.⁶ A calendar of Georgia's more than 400 colonial wills should be published. The director of the Georgia Historical Society is collaborating with me on this project. Although we plan to microfilm the list of persons entitled to draw in the lottery authorized May 11, 1803, we wish to publish it as well, as it is practically a census of Georgians at the time and as there is no complete census for Georgia prior to 1820. Publication will place the list in the hands of many genealogists who do not have access to microfilm facilities.

5. Emphasis is being placed on inventories and lists of certain record groups because they can provide more detailed information than can be included in a guide. A published inventory of State and county maps is planned. Publica-

⁵ This inventory was prepared and appeared in the June 1952 issue of the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*.

⁶ Rosters of the members of the Georgia Senate and House, and the list of the meetings of the general assemblies were brought up to date, and are being published in the latest edition of *Georgia's Official and Statistical Register, 1951-1952*, to be released in December 1952.

tion of a roster of officers commissioned in the Georgia militia during the War of 1812 and the Indian wars is contemplated. This project was begun by a former director. Data on individual commissions were entered on cards, which were put in the general catalog pending publication.

6. Valuable World War I and World War II material, now crated, which was gathered at heavy expense to the State, needs to be arranged, boxed, labeled, and shelved. This is a project for the future.

7. The department should cooperate in every way possible with the new State Historical Commission, created by the 1951 legislature to erect permanent markers at Georgia's historic sites. Closer cooperation with schools and institutions whose work is closely related must be encouraged.

8. When legislative funds are made available, it is planned to acquire more scientific and technical equipment, such as a photostating machine and a fumigating vault.

9. We hope to reproduce in facsimile some of Georgia's well-known historic documents, chiefly for use in the schools.

10. The project which is ripest in Georgia at this time is to erect a modern fireproof annex back of our present building to house the old records from the counties. In the words of the secretary of state, "I would like to have the building to serve as some sort of bank where these records could be deposited from the various counties, inventoried, laminated and microfilmed and preserved. They, of course, would be subject to withdrawal by the county officials from each county." The situation of country records is deplorable and has caused general alarm all over the State, and something must be done immediately. A bill providing for the annex will be introduced in the legislature next January.

In 1934, the year I began work as a file clerk in the department, its appropriation was \$5,453. Today the annual appropriation is \$30,000, plus an extra \$20,000 for equipment and microfilming. The program I have outlined is a 10-year plan, and will require additional funds and staff to see it through. In closing, may I give credit to whom credit is due, to my administrator, Georgia's secretary of state, the Hon. Ben W. Fortson, Jr., who is devoting his time to the building up of our Department of Archives and History.