

# The Illinois Record Management Survey

By THORNTON W. MITCHELL<sup>1</sup>

*National Records Management Council*

A YEAR ago the State of Illinois moved to the forefront in governmental administration by authorizing and planning the installation of a complete, modern record management program. Already a leader in the field of archival management, Illinois took steps designed to put the State in a comparable position in regard to the management of all its records. Many States, it is true, have record management programs, but the program in Illinois is so broadly conceived that it may well serve as a model for other surveys and other programs that follow it. The Illinois survey, of which this is the first public report, is concerned with the entire life-cycle of records and covers all paperwork areas. It is concerned with the "hard core" of documentation that will serve current administrative needs and will be the archival evidence of our present and future.

The Illinois survey is unique in many respects. It is one of the largest and most extensive record management surveys ever made. It represents one of the few instances in which detailed specifications outlining the scope and objectives of such a survey have been successfully written. As far as coverage is concerned, the survey will be the most comprehensive study made of any government on a government-wide basis. Of greater significance, however, are the facts that emphasis in the survey has been placed on record making and that the survey is concerned with the adequate documentation of all functions and activities of the State.

The legislative history of the act authorizing the Illinois survey may be briefly summarized. It was sponsored by members of both political parties and received bipartisan support in both houses of the General Assembly. The bill was passed with substantial majorities and was approved by Gov. William G. Stratton on July 6, 1955.

<sup>1</sup> Paper read as a "progress report" at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Washington, D. C., October 11, 1956. The writer was director of the Illinois survey undertaken by the National Records Management Council and its consultant service, NaremcCo.

The proposal for the survey received support from elected and appointed officers of the State and from many civic organizations. This support was variously motivated. Some gave support because of problems that had developed in allocating space in a new State office building that was under construction in Springfield. This building was erected to make possible the removal of many State departments and offices from rented space. As plans for the transfer of these offices progressed, however, it became evident that a considerable amount of space in the building would be used to store records seldom consulted and that some additional space might have to be rented for the same purpose. Some officials gave support because they were concerned about the inadequacy of the documentation of functions assigned to them by law or regulation. And there was great interest in reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of government. Although the State Archivist had advocated such a survey for many years, the final impetus that led to its authorization came from other State officials and from other groups. This fact has been of primary importance in the success of the survey.

After approval of the legislation authorizing the survey, bids were requested from certain companies in August 1955. These bids were all rejected because they were too varied in content to provide a basis for the selection of the company to make the survey. On September 21, 1955, Secretary of State Charles F. Carpentier invited all qualified companies to bid on the survey on the basis of "Suggestions for Bidders" that had been prepared principally by the State Records Commission.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the bids received from this second invitation the contract to conduct the survey was awarded to the National Records Management Council, and the survey began on November 7, 1955.

In general, the "Suggestions for Bidders" limited the survey to the executive branch of the State Government. Certain specific areas were outlined. The survey of existing records was limited to the preparation, discontinuation, or modification of record retention schedules. The contractor was to make recommendations to the heads of State agencies concerning the disposition of noncurrent records for which no disposal authorization existed. Another specific area to be covered by the survey was the recordmaking field. In order to improve the quality and reduce the quantity of paperwork, the record needs of each agency were to be analyzed. Control programs were to be established wherever necessary and office pro-

<sup>2</sup> Margaret C. Norton, "The Illinois Records Management Survey," in *American Archivist*, 19: 53-57 (Jan. 1956), contains the "Suggestions for Bidders."

cedures relating to recordmaking were to be reviewed. At the same time, the contractor was to reduce the amount of paperwork required by the State on the part of individuals, small businesses, and other commercial and industrial firms. This is an important objective of the survey. The contractor was also required to review the microfilming program in the State as well as the use of mechanical devices in the creation and maintenance of State records.

The specifications contained in the "Suggestions for Bidders" have proved to be flexible enough for adjustment to changed conditions as the survey has progressed. An Advisory Committee, established to advise and assist the contractor in making the survey, requested the National Records Management Council to make a special effort to reduce the amount of storage space, both rented and State-owned, occupied by inactive and obsolete records. It also authorized the Council to participate actively in designing and installing a State Records Center, whereas the "Suggestions for Bidders" originally contemplated only recommendations concerning its establishment.

In some respects the "Suggestions for Bidders" implied that officials of the State of Illinois generally were more familiar with the techniques and purposes of record management than they actually were. As previously noted, the "Suggestions" were prepared principally by the State Records Commission, under the direction of the State Archivist. The Commission was acquainted with the field and with the principles of record management that we, as record managers, acknowledge and accept; but few persons in the departments and agencies with whom the contractor would work were aware of what record management involved and the scope and purposes of the survey as it related to them. As the survey continued, however, the results of the educational and training program conducted by the Council as a part of its contract began to show results, and the departments and agencies became more aware of what they could expect.

Emphasis in the Illinois survey has been on "installation" as distinguished from mere "recommendations." With the concurrence of officials concerned, the program is actually being put into effect. For example, schedules are obtained, forms and form letters prepared for use, and procedures and systems revised. All work is done with the concurrence of the department or agency head, and, on the approval of the proposed changes, the Council staff supervises the installation of the new and revised systems.

As a matter of convenience, the survey in Illinois has been con-

ducted in two phases, one dealing with recordkeeping and the other with recordmaking. Emphasis in the area of recordkeeping or record disposition has been on records that exist now and that will continue to accumulate in the future. The Advisory Committee also asked that an effort be made to clear storage areas of obsolete types of records. Virtually every department and agency in the State had such records stored somewhere — in vaults in the Archives Building, in basement vaults in the State House and the Centennial Building, in storerooms, in rented warehouses, and even in valuable office space. Records, both active and inactive, continuing and obsolete, have been identified and basic information about them has been obtained. In the case of current records that document functions assigned by law or regulation, this information has included, for planning purposes, the rate of accumulation.

The review in the recordkeeping area, though limited chiefly to larger series, consists of identifying and evaluating the records in order to establish retention control over them. Data have been obtained on the amount of filing equipment occupied and the amount that may be released by a planned and orderly program of disposition. For obsolete records, detailed inventories have been made, and wherever practicable the inventoried records have been related to continuing record series.

When stored records have not been involved or when the records in storage have consisted of a few large, readily identified series, a modification of the inventory technique has been used. In these cases, existing records have been analyzed in terms of function, and the records have been scheduled in accordance with the need of each agency to maintain documentation of its functions. This approach has involved a determination of the principal functions of each agency and of the records made or required to document them properly. It should be emphasized that this approach has not been used on obsolete stored records because necessary information about them has not been readily available.

After the data about existing records have been gathered, each record series has been carefully appraised with respect to historical value, legal requirements, and the requirements of other government agencies — both State and Federal. Each series has also been reviewed carefully with department and agency officials to determine administrative and operational needs. Disposal schedules have then been drafted and, upon approval by the department or agency head, they have been submitted to the State Records Commission for final approval.

The work in the area of recordkeeping or disposition has been facilitated in Illinois by the existence of a procedure for obtaining authority to destroy records. First established in 1943, the State Records Commission originally had the authority only to make recommendations to the General Assembly. In 1951 the Commission was empowered to take final action on applications to destroy records; and in 1953 it was empowered to approve schedules that would grant a continuing or recurring disposal authority. The membership of the Commission since 1951 has consisted of the State Archivist as chairman, the State Historian as secretary, and representatives of the Attorney General, the State Librarian, and the Director of Finance. Before the survey began, some departments and agencies had obtained authority from the Commission to dispose of records. In several of the largest, for example, virtually all obsolete and disposable records had already been eliminated with its approval. In some respects, therefore, important progress already had been made in getting records under disposal control.

Before the Commission had the power to grant recurring authority to destroy records, many State departments and agencies had obtained from the General Assembly legislation that in effect established schedules. Although this special legislation permitted the planned and orderly destruction of records, the survey found that much of it was unduly restrictive. In one instance, for example, careful analysis and appraisal indicated that a specific record series needed to be retained for a period of only 18 months, although State law requires that it be kept for 5 years. In another instance, an agency is required by law to microfilm all of the papers in a case file whether or not they are duplicates or are necessary to document the function and activity concerned. The National Records Management Council, with the cooperation of State officials, is working to have such legislation modified or, preferably, repealed.

The State Records Commission was handicapped by the fact that it could play only a passive role in establishing and implementing record disposal and retirement programs. It had no authority, nor was there such authority anywhere in the State, to assist departments and agencies in developing programs or in obtaining necessary disposal authorization. Some departments and agencies, though well aware that they had done nothing to bring their records under disposal control, were blocked by sheer inertia from taking definitive action. The Council, however, has found the departments and agencies receptive to the scheduling of their records and willing to obtain and, more important, to use the authorizations granted by the State Records Commission.

As an example of the adaptability of the "Suggestions for Bidders," the National Records Management Council participated actively with representatives of Secretary of State Charles F. Carpentier in designing and installing a State Records Center. The center, which began to operate on July 31, 1956, less than 9 months after the survey started, was a byproduct of the more important record scheduling project. In the course of discussions with representatives of the departments and agencies whose records were being scheduled, it was learned that a considerable volume of records needed to be retained for legal or administrative purposes for long periods of time, but not necessarily in valuable office space. The National Records Management Council accordingly recommended, early in January 1956, that the State establish a State Records Center to provide such facilities.

There were no special statutory provisions for such a center. It was therefore established as a part of the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library, which is a part of the Office of the Secretary of State. Space was made available in a warehouse adjacent to the State Capitol in Springfield, and personnel and equipment were obtained from the State Library.

As an important part of the record scheduling project, records with archival and historical importance have been identified and arrangements have been made for their preservation in the State Archives. Transfers to the Archives of the permanent records have been scheduled on a planned and orderly basis. These are the records that the representatives of State agencies and the Council staff believe will be needed in the future to document the functions and the activities of the State. In addition, several large and important collections, whose archival and historical value was obvious, have been found and arrangements for their immediate transfer to the State Archives have been made. These include a complete collection of railroad and other utility annual reports from 1873, annual reports of county superintendents of schools from 1861, and records of dormant corporations from 1849.

The collection of manuscript materials known as the Logan papers was also found and identified, and the Council participated in their removal to responsible custody. This collection, presented to the State of Illinois by the family of Maj. Gen. John A. Logan, consists principally of the general's personal papers, to which have been added other documentary materials and photographs relating to the Civil War. The collection had been stored for over 30 years in a basement vault, and only a few people were aware of its ex-



istence. Because of its nature the collection was transferred to the State Historical Library; there it has been cataloged, arranged, and made available for scholarly use.

Not only has the identification of archival and historical records been an important aspect of the survey, but the studies that are being made of record creation are also concerned with the full and permanent documentation of the functions and activities of the State government. The emphasis has been on analysis of the records needed for documentation through a management-methods approach. This involves a study of the organization, functions, and operations to determine what paperwork is being created and used and what paperwork needs to be created and used. The survey has concentrated on operations rather than on pieces of paper. Paperwork systems have been redesigned and control programs have been utilized to strengthen or to simplify the system.

Although the State of Illinois had extensive paperwork problems, there were no large concentrations of paperwork to which control techniques by themselves could be applied economically. In only one instance was there a problem sufficiently large to permit the economical application of a conventional control program. In this case, with 20 well designed form letters, it was possible to handle 85 percent of some 70,000 letters a year that had previously been individually prepared.

Although control techniques are being used on a selective basis, early in the survey the National Records Management Council concluded that refined techniques could be applied more advantageously and would also provide a more realistic approach to the problem of controlling the creation of records. In one of the first departments surveyed, for example, the Council discovered that 100,000 letters a year were being handled and that there was a substantial backlog of unanswered letters. We decided, therefore, to review correspondence practices and to develop and install form letters and other streamlining techniques. The department was requested to make extra copies of all letters, as the raw data for the correspondence analysis. After two days, however, this sampling procedure was discontinued because the letters showed that the problem lay not in correspondence practices but in a situation that gave rise to the correspondence — excessive delay in returning an important document to the citizens who had applied for it. The solution was not to speed replies to the letters but to shorten procedures so that there would be no need for 100,000 citizens to inquire about the delay. The Council staff analyzed the processing operation and discovered that un-

wieldy paperwork procedures were used to receive and account for fees, to verify applications, and to post the departmental action to a permanent record card. The Council suggested the use of modern machinery and, in cooperation with department personnel, developed and installed simplified procedures that put the operation on a current basis. The unnecessary correspondence was not controlled; it was stopped completely.

As a result of this and other experience the Council, in its Illinois record management survey, has adapted the management-methods approach to the creation of records. We are taking an overall view of organization, functions, and detailed operations before deciding what is the best procedure for the agency to use in carrying out its duties. This overall examination may result in new, streamlined procedures stripped of unnecessary paperwork; or it may result in the application of conventional control techniques to paperwork in a particular phase of the agency's work. The net results are fewer records to do the job better.

The first step in this management-methods approach is to identify the areas or procedures that involve a heavy volume of paperwork. After their identification, which has been made in various ways, the functions relating to the paperwork operation are studied. The operation itself is then reviewed, step by step, following the movement of the paperwork concerned. Each step is analyzed from the point of view of function, necessity, and the amount of paperwork either handled or created. The analysis is then reviewed to determine whether steps can be reduced or whether the records created during the operation can be simplified or eliminated entirely.

When a need for them is discovered, forms, reports, and correspondence control techniques are used as tools to control the operations that result in the creation of paperwork. In one department, for example, a procedure relating to the issuance of a special type of license involved what seemed to be an excessive amount of personnel time and paperwork. Analysis of the operation revealed that the basic document involved was an application, from which were prepared two lists — each arranged differently — and a renewal application. Since the renewal applications were mailed almost a year after the basic application was received, about 30 percent of them were never delivered; this meant more correspondence and delays. After the problem was isolated, a single four-part carbon interleaved form was developed to replace the 26 separate forms that had been used. The original and the first copy are returned to the applicant, the former as the license and the copy as the renewal



application. The second and third copies are filed, to replace the two typed lists formerly prepared. And the filing of individual documents in alphabetical order instead of lists in geographical order has so simplified the reference problem that one file clerk has been released for other purposes.

A great deal of work in Illinois has been done in determining what should go into the various files. The common practice of filing everything, regardless of its significance, was encountered early in the survey. In some cases followup copies of a letter were filed together with the file copy and the reply; in other cases notes and work papers were filed with the final written product. The belief that any document might some day be needed and that all documents must therefore be preserved was particularly reflected in case files, especially those involving legal rights. In many instances, nevertheless, the Council was able to standardize the contents of case files both to ensure more complete documentation and to eliminate unnecessary papers. For the first time the agencies now have checklists enumerating the papers required in the case files and papers that should be kept out of them. In general files, the Council was able to eliminate the filing of routine inquiries and requests for information, transmittal letters, extra copies, hotel reservations, and similar material. Much of the material in the State agencies' files is arranged alphabetically by name of person, numerically, or in case files. But, where necessary, filing systems have been reorganized and simplified. In working over the filing systems we have borne especially in mind the importance of keeping unnecessary papers out of the files and of arranging files so as to permit the easy segregation of material for disposal.

Several of our paperwork surveys have cut across agency lines. In the first of these, relating to personnel records, a standardized case file for all employees, with a standardized service record card, was recommended. This recommendation has not been adopted by the government as a whole, but several departments have put it into effect. Common requisitioning, invoicing, and vouchering operations also have been reviewed and suggestions have been made for their improvement throughout the departments and agencies subject to the governor.

The Council has found that the microfilming of records is a widespread practice of the State government. It is often employed for the purpose of saving space because a serious space shortage exists throughout the government. In other instances, it has been used because the agency concerned has not been aware that it could dispose

of records without microfilming them or because the agency wanted security copies of records of primary importance to the State. A great deal of the filming is handled commercially, and much of the equipment now on hand is not being utilized efficiently and economically. Several microfilming projects have been discontinued as the result of a more realistic evaluation of the records being filmed, and some others have been stopped because the agency concerned has found it advantageous to store the original records in the State Records Center rather than put them on film. In one case, however, the Council has suggested the use of microphotography to reduce the volume of an inactive file not suitable for storage in the center. In another case microfilming has been suggested as a technique to speed a procedure that had bogged down in a recording and posting operation. Because of the uneconomical use of existing State-owned equipment, the Council will suggest to the State the establishment of a centralized microfilming service, the facilities of which will be available to all departments and agencies on a reimbursable basis. Electrical computing and tabulating machines are being used extensively and in most cases efficiently. In general, the Council has evaluated the use of machines on the basis of individual circumstances and the need arising in a particular situation.

The legislation that authorized the survey requires the contractor to report recommended changes in existing laws to the General Assembly. An important phase of the survey, therefore, is concerned with the laws that relate specifically or by implication to the making and keeping of records. As previously noted, some departments and agencies have retention schedules written into State law. In many cases, these schedules are unduly restrictive and actually prevent the installation of a carefully considered record keeping program. But legislative schedules can be changed only by action of the General Assembly; and, since other means are available to obtain legal authorization to destroy records, the Council is working for the repeal of legislative schedules except where they may be necessary to authorize the State Records Commission to take action concerning the records of a specific department or agency.

Most of the laws relating to recordmaking are old and continue in effect systems that were popular before the turn of the century. Two departments, for example, are required to keep certain records "in a book." In other cases, the department or agency head is required "to keep" specified records. This may be interpreted to mean that he shall create, make, or establish the records concerned; actually the State Records Commission has interpreted the phrase

to mean that he shall retain the records in his personal custody in perpetuity. This provision of law prevents not only the disposal of valueless records but also the transfer of valuable materials to the State Archives. In still another instance, a law provides that a document "shall be filed in the office" of a specific division; this has been interpreted to prevent either disposal, transfer to the Records Center, transfer to the State Archives, or even transfer out of the physical location of the divisional office. In all instances, the departments or agencies concerned have agreed to the changing of this restrictive legislation; and amendatory legislation will be proposed to the General Assembly. Several other suggestions for legislation will be made as a result of the survey. Amendatory legislation will be proposed to change the valid terms of licenses in certain crafts and professions from 1 year to 2 years.

The National Records Management Council will also recommend legislation to authorize and establish a broadly conceived record management program in the State of Illinois. At present no such legislation exists, and it seems desirable that the scope and objectives of the program should be established by the General Assembly. The legal basis of the archival and record disposal programs in Illinois is found in various laws, which might well be consolidated into a single law as the legal basis for all record activities. The feasibility of transforming the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library into a Division of Archives and Record Management in the Office of the Secretary of State is being explored. Certainly the machinery for granting authority to destroy records should be continued, and this machinery should operate speedily and efficiently. Some provisions of various model public record acts, including the model legislation developed by the National Records Management Council as a result of an extensive research program, will be incorporated in the proposed archival and record management legislation, although its exact provisions cannot now be anticipated. Because of the interest of State officials and of outside groups concerned with the efficiency of government, it seems probable that most of the legislation contemplated by the National Records Management Council will be enacted.

An important responsibility of the contractor in making the survey has been the training of agency representatives in the principles of record management. As previously noted, only a few State officials were fully cognizant of the scope and objectives of the survey. The training that was undertaken, therefore, was as much concerned with the general aims of record management as with its

techniques. Literature relating to record management was made available to agency representatives, and the council cooperated with the Illinois State Library in preparing a selected reading list on the subject. Each State department and each of the major boards and commissions designated a liaison representative, who has participated in a series of training seminars conducted by the Council. These seminars have not only served to train their members but have also enabled agency representatives to participate more actively in the survey as it relates to them.

In the expectation that the record management program established by the survey will be a continuing program, the Secretary of State has designated a liaison representative to work full time with the Council in making the survey. This representative has had an opportunity to participate in the work of the survey and its accompanying negotiations and agreements, and he has learned the point of view of the Council and the way in which the various problems have been handled.

Our present schedule calls for all actual survey and installation work to be completed by January 1, 1957. Thereafter, two special reports will be prepared for submission to the State of Illinois. One of these will be the report to the General Assembly on proposed legislative changes; the other will be a final report summarizing the survey and the results of the installation. The following results will have been accomplished:

1. Records of all State executive agencies will be under disposal control through retention schedules approved by the State Records Commission.
2. Most accumulations of inactive records, especially those in storage, will be eliminated through destruction, scheduling for eventual destruction after storage in the Records Center, or transfer to the State Archives.
3. Records necessary for permanent documentation of the functions and activities of the State will be identified, and arrangements will be made for their preservation.
4. Permanent records will adequately reflect the functions and activities to which they relate.
5. Paperwork procedures as they affect or are affected by recordmaking will be streamlined and simplified.
6. Substantial economies — in expenditures, in time, and in speeding service to the citizens of the State — will result.