

# North Carolina's Local Records Program

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THE history of local records in North Carolina—as in most States on the eastern seaboard—is largely a story of destruction, loss, and neglect. Although every story has two sides, in fully half of North Carolina's hundred counties numbers of records have been lost, and in at least a third the losses have been serious. These losses have resulted from fire, steam, water, vermin, theft, improper temperatures and humidity, inferior paper and ink, illegal custody, enemy forces, and natural deterioration.<sup>1</sup>

For example, the colonial House of Commons noted in 1733 that the register of the writings for Beaufort and Hyde Precincts [later counties] being dead, one Benjamin Peyton hath possessed himself of the writings and book belonging to that Office pretending a Commission from the Governour for the same and hath carryed them from Bath Town contrary to order of that Court . . . and that it is much to be feared by the Magistrates and Inhabitants of those Precincts that the same may be imbezled by the said Peyton he being a Person of very ill fame & character.<sup>2</sup>

It was recorded in 1753 that

by a violent storm of Whirlwind, in September last past, the House of Mr. Thomas Black, late Clerk of the Court for the County of Onslow together with the Court House, and most of the Records belonging to the County Court, were blown away and destroyed, whereby the Estates of many Orphans and other Persons may be very much perplexed and prejudiced.

Again in 1770 it was observed by the Assembly that "the House of Mr. Marturin Colville, Clerk of the Court, and Register for the County of Bladen, and the Records of said County, were lately burnt and Consumed." In 1770 also the Assembly remonstrated that

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<sup>1</sup> H. G. Jones and A. M. Patterson, eds., *The County Records Manual*, p. 7 (Raleigh, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> William L. Saunders, *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 3: 557 (Raleigh, 1886-90. 10 vols.).

through the Neglect and Mismanagement of Persons, who have heretofore been Registers in this Province, many of the Books wherein the Conveyances of Lands within Several of the Counties are Registered, are so abused and defaced, as to be almost unintelligible, and in Danger of being entirely lost, and are some of them removed to, and dispersed in other Counties.<sup>3</sup>

In the colonial period, registers were appointed by the Governor and clerks of court by the Secretary of the Province. Both registers and clerks operated under a fee system, and many of them apparently were more interested in collecting fees than in creating and preserving proper records.<sup>4</sup> Such officials' excessive fees and mismanagement were among the complaints of the upcountry people that led, in 1771, to the abortive War of the Regulation.<sup>5</sup> This uprising was an important event in early North Carolina history, but perhaps even more significant was its contributing cause—the unsatisfactory performance of county officials—which resulted in poor recordkeeping in some of the counties.

Wholesale condemnation of the early county officials is, nevertheless, unjustified. Many were obviously faithful public servants, who carefully recorded legal instruments and preserved the public records within their jurisdictions. The fact that so much early documentation still exists is ample testimony to the dedication and efficiency of the officials. Indeed, it is even surprising that so many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records have withstood the ravages of time, for local governments since the Revolution have continued to suffer losses of records. For instance, Onslow County, referred to above as having lost its courthouse by storm in 1752, was struck by a similar calamity in 1786.<sup>6</sup> Harnett County lost its records in two fires—in 1892 and 1894.<sup>7</sup> Even within the past few years fires and bursting steampipes have damaged records in several counties. These are only a few examples of the losses of county records. Municipal records have fared probably even worse.

While more substantial courthouses, better filing procedures, and more efficient officials in recent decades have reduced the possibility

<sup>3</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are from Walter Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, 23: 387, 804, 842 (Winston, 1895-96, and Goldsboro, 1898-1907. 16 vols.).

<sup>4</sup> Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 3: 160-167, 185, and 4: 540. See also Paul M. McCain, *The County Court in North Carolina Before 1750*, p. 31-35 (Durham, 1954). For a detailed discussion of the duties of registers and clerks, see Charles Christopher Crittenden and Dan Lacy, *The Historical Records of North Carolina; the County Records*, vol. 1 (Raleigh, 1938. 3 vols.).

<sup>5</sup> William S. Powell, *The War of the Regulation and the Battle of Alamance, May 16, 1771*, p. 7 (Raleigh, 1949).

<sup>6</sup> Crittenden and Lacy, *Historical Records*, 3: 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 247.

of loss by traditional causes, a new enemy of records preservation has arisen: lack of space for expanding operations. The building of vault facilities has not kept pace with the increasing records; more and more records are crammed into inadequate vaults and offices. Too often public officials have gone to one of two extremes: they have either kept everything, or they have destroyed records indiscriminately. Those who have attempted to keep everything in inadequate storage often find it difficult to locate an important record buried beneath useless materials. On the other hand, as an example of indiscriminate destruction, the marriage bonds—the only official marriage records kept before about 1850—have disappeared in over a third of the counties. Many were burned deliberately by public officials in misguided zeal to “clean house.”

For 250 years the fate of local records rested solely with their custodians and the governing county and municipal officials. Except for specific legislation, there was no control over preservation and disposal. Thus, today, the quantity and quality of early local records depend largely upon the interest and care of individual county officials over the years.

The first statewide action to preserve local records was the establishment of the North Carolina Historical Commission (now the State Department of Archives and History) in 1903. Chapter 767, Public Laws of 1903, provided “That an Historical Commission be . . . established, whose duty it shall be to have collected from . . . court records . . . valuable dockets pertaining to the history of the State.” In 1907 this law was broadened so that

Any State, county, town or other public official in custody of public documents is hereby authorized and empowered in his discretion to turn over to said Commission for preservation any official books, records, documents, original papers, . . . not in current use in his office, and said Commission shall provide for their permanent preservation.<sup>8</sup>

But even with this authority little was done for several years to salvage deteriorating local records. In 1914 R. D. W. Connor, then secretary of the Historical Commission, wrote:

The county archives of North Carolina contain an immense amount of exceedingly valuable material. At present this material is almost useless to students because it is, as a rule, unknown and inaccessible. No greater service, I believe, to the history of the State could be rendered than for the Historical Commission to publish reports on these archives in order to show what material they contain, the methods employed in the various counties to preserve it, and to make it accessible and to suggest to county officials better methods of caring for their records.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 714, Public Laws of 1907.

<sup>9</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1912-1914*, p. 21.

In 1914 the State Literary and Historical Association adopted a resolution calling upon the General Assembly for an annual appropriation of not less than \$2,500 to be expended under the direction of the Historical Commission "in the work of advising with municipal and county officials relative to the proper care, arrangement and preservation of the public archives and records in their charge, and of making such records and archives accessible for historical purposes."<sup>10</sup> The Assembly did not grant the appropriation, but in 1916 the Historical Commission began to carry out the intent of the resolution. In that year Connor wrote, "We have been fortunate during the past year in the number of valuable local and county records which have been deposited with the Commission. This is the beginning of a movement which ought to be encouraged."<sup>11</sup> He listed, as having been received, records of the counties of Beaufort, Carteret, Edgecombe, Halifax, New Hanover, Orange, Perquimans, and Wilkes.

Primarily responsible for the success of the Commission in bringing to Raleigh local records that otherwise might have been lost in succeeding decades was Col. Fred A. Olds, the collector for the Hall of History (which became a part of the Commission in 1914). Olds poked into basements, attics, and storerooms and located long-lost but historically valuable records, which he transferred to the Commission. There they were repaired, arranged, and preserved.<sup>12</sup> In 1918, Olds wrote:

Much traveling was required, and every county in the State was visited in order to secure county and local records of a purely historical character and not in current use. It was found that fully half the counties have no records of historical value except those in current use, mainly because of destruction by fire or by carelessness in past years. In some cases moths and other pests, or exposure, have destroyed a vast number of documents.

He reported that inventories were made of the records in many courthouses. During the biennium records were listed as having been received in the Archives from 27 counties.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, beginning in 1916, the Commission took the first great step in preserving county records by urging the deposit of valuable non-current records in the Archives. By 1920 a total of 47 counties had permitted the transfer of varying quantities of records, by 1922

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1914-1916*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> D. L. Corbitt, ed., *Handbook of County Records Deposited With the North Carolina Historical Commission*, p. 3 (Raleigh, 1925).

<sup>13</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1916-1918*, p. 14, 22.



this number had risen to 50, and by 1924 to 59.<sup>14</sup> The program has continued so that now the State Archives has at least some records from almost every county in the State.

For about 30 years after the law of 1907 was passed the Commission's role was simply one of accepting the transfer of county records. The law was permissive only; it did not authorize the Commission to require transfers or require public officials to keep their records in good condition. A. R. Newsome, secretary of the Commission, wrote in 1932 that

failure of North Carolina to make systematic provision for the preservation of public records has resulted in untold losses from fire, water, rats, carelessness, deliberate destruction to make space for rapid accumulations of new records, and by gifts and unreturned loans by public officials to private individuals.

He urged the adoption of a State law giving the Commission general supervision over public records.<sup>15</sup>

The second stage in developing a local records program came in 1935 with the passage of "An Act to Safeguard Public Records in North Carolina." Chapter 265, Public Laws of 1935, incorporated most of Newsome's suggestions. It defined public records; fixed legal responsibility for their care; prohibited their destruction, sale, loan, or other disposition except with approval of the Historical Commission; required officials to deliver all public records to their successors; required legal custodians to demand records from anyone in illegal possession of them; enjoined officials to make their records available to the public and to keep them in fireproof safes or vaults; and empowered the Historical Commission to examine the condition of public records and to aid and advise officials in the solution of their records problems. The 1935 act, as amended, remains the Public Records Act (Chapter 132 of the General Statutes).

Armed with legislation of its own writing, the Historical Commission might well have launched a comprehensive archival program in 1935. But the bugaboo of all archivists—lack of funds—raised its ugly head. Not until 1945 did appropriations to the Commission (by then the State Department of Archives and History) again reach the level of the predepression years,<sup>16</sup> and by then the Department had expanded its functions. Thus, except for the limited prog-

<sup>14</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Eighth Biennial Report, 1918-1920*, p. 7-9, and *Ninth Biennial Report, 1920-1922*, p. 8; Corbitt, *Handbook of County Records*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Fourteenth Biennial Report, 1930-1932*, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Twenty-First Biennial Report, 1944-1946*, p. 10.

ress possible with the meager funds of the archival program, emphasis on a local records program had to await a better day. That day did not arrive for another decade, because of the necessity of giving primary attention to the growing problems of State records and the launching of the State's records management program, including the centralized microfilming project begun in 1951 and the State Records Center opened in 1953.

In the meantime, however, two significant projects were carried on with funds from other sources. The first of these was the work of the Historical Records Survey (a project of the Works Progress Administration—later the Work Projects Administration), which inventoried county records.<sup>17</sup> More than a hundred workers were employed on this project at one time or another, and in 1938 and 1939 the Commission published in three volumes *The Historical Records of North Carolina; the County Records*, edited by Charles Christopher Crittenden and Dan Lacy. North Carolina was the only State in the Union to publish the WPA inventory for all its counties, and these volumes served to publicize the availability of county records. The Survey, moreover, provided help in arranging hundreds of thousands of county documents in the Archives, and the local workers, while inventorying records in the courthouses, tried to identify the various record groups and label them. The inexperience of the employees accounted for the poor quality of this work, but even imperfect work may be credited with the salvage of many records that otherwise would have been lost.

The second program sponsored by non-State funds began in May 1941, when the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (then the Genealogical Society of Utah) of Salt Lake City, in cooperation with the Historical Commission, started a program to microfilm the older records of many counties.<sup>18</sup> This work continued for more than a decade and, when positive film copies of these early records became available in the Archives, research in county records was stimulated.

In the past decade an increasing awareness of records problems

<sup>17</sup> A superficial inventory of the records of 17 counties was made early in the century by John Spencer Bassett, Charles Lee Raper, and J. H. Vaughan and published as "North Carolina County Archives" in American Historical Association, *Annual Report for the Year 1904*, p. 603-627 (Washington, 1905). Other bits of information on early county records may be found in "Historical Review of the Colonial and State Records of North Carolina," printed in Stephen B. Weeks, ed., *Index to the Colonial and State Records of North Carolina Covering Volumes I-XXV*, 4 (S-Z): 1-169 (Raleigh, 1914. 4 vols.). This volume stands as vol. 30 of the combined series, *The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*.

<sup>18</sup> North Carolina Historical Commission, *Nineteenth Biennial Report, 1940-1942*, p. 25; A. F. Bennett to C. C. Crittenden, July 8, 1941, in the State Archivist's files.

in local government, combined with a growing interest in historical and genealogical research, has brought about the first comprehensive local records program in the State's history. Three forces contributed to this accomplishment: (1) the strengthened statewide organizations of county officials and their annual conventions, (2) the assistance and interest of the Institute of Government of the University of North Carolina, and (3) the leadership of the State Department of Archives and History.

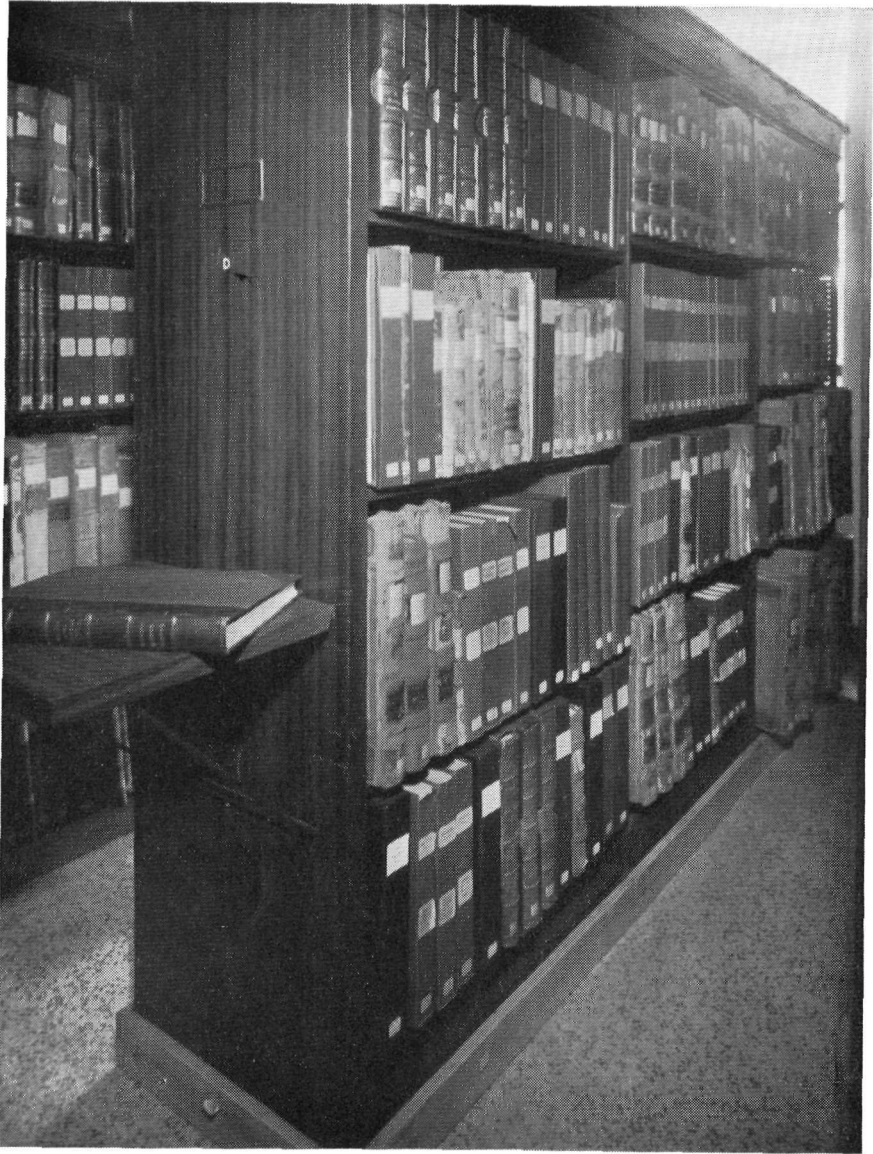
It was largely through the activities of the Institute of Government that the associations of county officials became a vital force in North Carolina. The Institute furnished staff members for organizational and secretarial purposes and facilities for short courses and annual conventions. County and municipal officials were brought together to discuss their common problems—and a very common problem is one of records. For example, when registers from the various counties got together, they found that one of their problems was the space required for keeping chattel mortgage books; interestingly enough, there seemed to be general agreement that these records were seldom used after a few years. Likewise, financial officers discovered that other counties and cities had the same problem of mounting stacks of tax abstracts, seldom used after ten years.

The Department of Archives and History, concerned primarily with the preservation of historical records, entered the picture. Armed with the legal requirement of its approval before any public record could be destroyed, the Department set about the inauguration of a positive program to encourage the destruction of useless records and thereby make space and equipment available for the better housing of those to be retained permanently. In 1951 the Department appointed an Advisory Committee on Disposal of Non-Current Records.<sup>19</sup> This group of county officials, plus the Director of the Department, the State Archivist, and other interested persons, discussed retention schedules for the bulkiest of county records. Such schedules were drawn up, but there was some reluctance to issue them to local officials for their guidance. Instead, the Department used the schedules as its own guide when requests for destruction were received. Not until 1957, when the present State Archivist revised the schedules, were they made available to public officials, and even then only in mimeographed form.

The time was ripe for more positive action on local records, and

<sup>19</sup> The first meeting of the committee was on July 19, 1951. Other meetings were held in 1952. See "Minutes of Meeting of Advisory Committee on Disposal of Non-Current Records, May 21, 1952," in the State Archivist's files.

the General Assembly of 1957 appropriated funds for an assistant to the State Archivist for that purpose. This position, then classified as public records examiner, was filled in August 1958 by Rear Adm. A. M. Patterson, U. S. N. (Ret.). For the first time the Department had a representative available for full-time local records work. In the next few months the State Archivist and Admiral Patterson—or the latter alone—visited key officials in each county of the State. These visits were revealing. First, many county officials—



SOME NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY RECORDS  
TRANSFERRED TO THE STATE ARCHIVES

Carolina should follow Georgia's lead. Thus repair of deteriorating records was added to the proposed program. Already it had been determined to include a complete inventory-schedule for each county.

With the scope of the plan so well worked out, the problem early in 1958 was one of cold-blooded politics: how to get the appropriations bill through the General Assembly. From the start it was decided to make the program a partnership. Instead of selling the idea to the General Assembly, it would be sold to the county officials, who in turn would convince the legislators. The avenue of communication to the county officials was through their State associations, and the first organized support came on April 11, when the legislative committee of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners endorsed the plan, resolving that "The Committee recognizes the value to the counties of such a project, particularly the possibility it offers to replace with photographs the original records in cases where the latter have been destroyed or damaged by theft, fire, or other catastrophe."<sup>21</sup> The interest of the county commissioners brought an invitation to the State Archivist to speak on the proposal at the annual convention of the association at Carolina Beach on June 23 of that year. Seizing the opportunity, he delivered an appropriate address, "A State Program for Microfilming Essential County Records." The text of this was printed in the minutes of the association and was processed for future publicity. The convention asked the General Assembly to give "careful study" to the project, with the hope that a start could be made on the project in 1959, "within the fiscal abilities of the state."<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, the proposal had been submitted to the North Carolina Association of Registers of Deeds. Coincidentally, the State Archivist was invited to address the annual convention of that association on the same day when he was to speak to the county commissioners. It was agreed that Christopher Crittenden, Director of the State Department of Archives and History, would present the plan to the convention of registers, but that the State Archivist would attempt to drive the 165 miles from Carolina Beach to Chapel Hill in time to reach the meeting before Dr. Crittenden had finished speaking. This plan worked, even though the State Archivist arrived with blisters from too much beaching at the other conven-

<sup>21</sup> John Alexander McMahon, Assistant Director, Institute of Government, to H. G. Jones, Apr. 15, 1958, in the State Archivist's files.

<sup>22</sup> "Resolution Number Five," in North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, 1958 *County Yearbook*, p. 121 [Chapel Hill, 1958]. For a text of the address, see H. G. Jones, "A State Program for Microfilming Essential Records," *ibid.*, p. 71-75.

tion.<sup>23</sup> The registers on June 24 adopted the proposed county records program as a phase of their own legislative program.<sup>24</sup>

Thus within two days two of the three major associations of county officials had endorsed the plan in their annual conventions. The other group, the North Carolina Association of Clerks of Superior



Crittenden and Admiral Patterson. A frank discussion on strategy followed. It was decided that the wisest course would be to introduce a bill calling for a higher appropriation and a shorter completion period than had been planned at first, but to hold in reserve an alternate plan carrying a lower appropriation if the bill ran into difficulty. It was also decided to introduce identical bills in both houses simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

With the introducers ready to begin action, the next step was the actual preparation of the bill. This was done on February 26, when Messrs. Johnson and McMahon and J. Russell Nipper, Clerk of Court of Wake County and legislative chairman of the Association of Clerks of Superior Court in North Carolina, met with the State Archivist and Admiral Patterson. The heart of the bill as approved by the group and as later introduced read:

The North Carolina Department of Archives and History is hereby authorized and directed to formulate and execute a program of inventorying, repairing, and microfilming for security purposes those official records of the several counties which the Department determines have permanent value, and of providing safe storage for microfilm copies of such records.

The bill carried an appropriation of \$108,055 for 1959-60 and \$97,092 for 1960-61.<sup>28</sup>

The bill was simultaneously introduced as S. B. 101 and H. B. 268, the former with three signatures (those of Senators Bason and Simpkins and Ernest W. Ross of McDowell County), and the latter with about two dozen signatures, headed by those of Representatives Davis and Wilson. The legislative maneuvering need not be recounted here; it is sufficient to state that there was no real opposition. Only one minor amendment (to insure that the microfilming would be done in the counties) was adopted in committee, with the consent of the introducers. But the major hurdle lay in the Joint Appropriations Committee.

Because the Department of Archives and History was requesting several other increases in appropriations, a sub-subcommittee was appointed to inquire into the merits of these requests, with specific instructions to study the proposed county records microfilming bill. This sub-subcommittee, comprised of Senator D. J. Rose of Wayne and Representatives John H. Kerr, Jr., of Warren and Irvin Belk of Mecklenburg, met with the Director and the State Archivist and unanimously recommended adoption of the county program. When the bill reached the Joint Appropriations Committee, Senator Ross,

<sup>27</sup> See typescript "Agenda," Feb. 24, 1959, in the State Archivist's files.

<sup>28</sup> "Memorandum for Record," Feb. 26, 1959, in the State Archivist's files.

# NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY — DIVISION OF ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS

## State Archivist

### ADMINISTRATION

1 Archivist II      1 Steno II      1 Clerk II (PT)

Coordinate work of the various sections, handle general correspondence and public inquiries, maintain divisional office for personnel and budgetary work, and serve as clearinghouse for all matters pertaining to division's functions.

### NEWSPAPER MICROFILM PROJECT

1 Archivist II      1 Clerk II (Cameraman)      1 Clerk II (PT)

Locate and microfilm all North Carolina newspapers published prior to 1870, retain custody of master negative, provide positive copies therefrom, and maintain finding aids to film and location of original newspapers.

### ARCHIVES SECTION

*Asst. State Archivist (Archives)*

2 Archivist II  
2 Archivist I  
1 Clerk III (Laminator)  
1 Janitor

Maintain physical custody of all records, manuscripts, maps, and other historical materials in the Archives.

Receive, process, and accession all State records and other historical materials (except local records), and accession local records.

Service all materials in the Archives for mail inquiries, make available materials in the search room, and do research on assigned projects.

Maintain finding aids for historical materials.

Laminate and rebind materials in need of repair (except local records).

### LOCAL RECORDS SECTION

*Asst. State Archivist (Local Records)*

1 Archivist II  
3 Archivist I  
1 Steno II  
2 Clerk IV (Cameraman)  
1 Clerk III (Cameraman)  
2 Clerk II (Laminator)  
1 Clerk II (PT)

Receive, process, and catalog all county and municipal records transferred to the department and submit accessioning list to the Archives Administration Section.

Shelve all local records so transferred with agreement with State Archivist and Assistant State Archivist (Archives) as to location.

Inventory and schedule all county records, laminate and have rebound those in need of repair, and microfilm in the counties those of permanent value.

Receive and inspect microfilm copies of county records filmed, retaining the security copy, and preparing indexes to security and positive copies.

Advise county and local officials in their records problems and, in accordance with policies established by the Director and State Archivist, approve retention, disposal, or transfer of such records.

### STATE RECORDS SECTION

*Asst. State Archivist (State Records)*

1 Archivist II  
2 Archivist I  
5 Clerk II (Microfilmer)  
1 Clerk II (PT)  
1 Janitor-Messenger

Inventory and schedule all State records wherever located with the concurrence of the head of the agency, the Director of the department, and the State Archivist.

Operate the State Records Center for filing of semi-current State records.

Weed and process State records transferred to the Archives.

Microfilm State records so scheduled, and maintain such film and finding aids thereto.

Advise State officials on their records problems and, with the concurrence of the Director and State Archivist, approve retention, disposal, or transfer of such records.

one of the introducers, moved the substitution of the lower figures previously agreed upon as an alternative, and S. B. 101 as amended was reported favorably. The bill was passed unanimously in both houses and was ratified on June 19, 1959. As finally passed, the bill appropriated \$75,730 for 1959-60 and \$71,680 for 1960-61 for the operation of the program. These amounts were subsequently increased as a result of salary revisions.

With a legislative mandate to inaugurate a program already outlined by the Department and with funds available for the purpose, the next task was to set up an organization to carry out the plans. A new section was established in the Division of Archives and Manuscripts, at first called the County Records Section but a year later more appropriately named the Local Records Section. Admiral Patterson was transferred to the new section as its head. The section now consists of the Assistant State Archivist (Local Records) and a stenographer; four archivists who evaluate and process the county records received for permanent preservation in the Archives and who proofread, splice, file, and catalog microfilm copies of county records; three camera operators who microfilm records in the county courthouses; and two laminators who restore (by the Barrow laminating process) county records in need of repair. The section has six main functions: (1) the arranging and processing of county records transferred to the State Archives for permanent preservation; (2) the inventorying and scheduling of all official records in the counties; (3) the repair (by lamination) of county records needing immediate attention; (4) the microfilming, in the counties, of records designated as essential; (5) the proofreading, splicing, and preservation of security copies of microfilms; and (6) the extension of these services to municipalities and other subdivisions of government as time and funds permit. Present services are provided at no cost to the counties.

Before entering a county permission is obtained from the Board of County Commissioners, after a letter (and sometimes a conference) setting forth the plans for that particular county. Armed with this approval, the Assistant State Archivist and one or more of the cameramen go into every county office that holds official records, and there they inventory each series of records by title, dates, quantity, and location. To this inventory is added a schedule for each series, indicating how long it is to be preserved—whether permanently or for a specified number of years. This inventory-schedule is edited, mimeographed, assembled in a volume, and distributed to all interested officials of the county. This publication serves as a catalog of the records of the county and also lists county records

now in the Archives. It indicates the records to be microfilmed for security purposes and includes recommended schedules of retention and disposal. Adherence to these schedules will result in the preservation of all essential records and the timely disposal of nonessential records, with resulting economy in space, personnel, and money and with improved efficiency in office operation.

Many historical records of no further administrative value in the counties are scheduled to be transferred to the State Archives under authority of Chapter 121-5 of the General Statutes. Although such a schedule is not mandatory upon the county, it often serves to encourage the transfer. Upon their receipt in Raleigh, the records are cleaned, repaired, classified, arranged, accessioned, cataloged, and shelved. More than 3,000 persons a year visit the search room to use the historical materials, and about 3,500 get information by mail or by telephone. These researchers (representing 48 States and 8 foreign countries in the last biennium) would be unable to visit the State's hundred courthouses. Consequently, if the materials they want are not available in a central depository, they are likely not to see them at all. Thus, county records in the Archives are used far more often than they would be if left in the county, even if the latter is prepared with personnel, space, and satisfactory arrangement to care for the records properly. Taking this a step further, it is obvious that a county's role in the history of the State will be more adequately and frequently told if its early records are in the State Archives. On the other hand, the schedules permit the destruction of records deemed of no further administrative or historical value. For instance, chattel mortgages are scheduled for destruction after 15 years, and tax abstracts after 10. By following these schedules, county officials will be able to make available for current and valuable records space that otherwise would be occupied by records of no further use.

about 16 to 1. For the filming of loose papers, a Recordak portable 16 mm. rotary camera is used. The film is processed and sent to the Department for proofreading by the archivists. Orders for corrections are sent to the cameraman if retakes are necessary. When the retakes have been spliced in, the master negative is ready for positive printing. Upon the return of the negative and positive, cataloging begins. The master negatives are cataloged and put into security files in the Archives. The positives are cataloged in the search room and put into cabinets in the microfilm reading room for use by the public. The master negative is used only for the reproduction of positives; it may not be used for reference. (Some records microfilmed have permanent value but infrequent use for reference; as a rule, no positive copies of such microfilms are made.)

Records already microfilmed, either by the Genealogical Society or by the counties themselves, are not refiled if the film is of archival quality. Instead, a positive copy is obtained by special arrangement and kept in the Archives vault as a security copy.

When the work in a county has been completed, the following results have been accomplished: (1) an inventory of every record group in each county office (as well as of any in the Archives) has been published, showing title, dates, quantity, location, and recommended schedule for each series; (2) records in need of repair have been laminated and rebound; (3) officials have been furnished with schedules to use as a guide for the destruction of records of no further value; (4) records of permanent value have been preserved and microfilmed, and the master negative film has been stored in a security vault for reproduction purposes should the original records be lost through any means; and (5) the helpful role of the Department of Archives and History in advising and assisting county officials in their records problems has been demonstrated.

The first phase of the inventory-microfilming program is expected to take at least seven years for completion within all counties. When this phase has been completed, the staff will return to each county and bring the work up to date. It is expected that thereafter each county can be visited at least every two years so that the security filming can be kept as current as possible. The program, therefore, is a continuing one. By the end of 1960, the work had been done or was being done in the following counties: Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Carteret, Chatham, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Hyde, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell, Wake, and Wilson. Except in unusual cases, counties are taken in the order of their age.

One further piece of work in the local records program should be mentioned. A need has long existed for a manual for the guidance

of county officials and Department personnel in matters pertaining to the preservation, repair, retention, and disposal of county records. This need became more urgent and acute as plans for the microfilm program developed. Under authority of Chapter 121-2 (12) of the General Statutes, the Department in 1959 appointed an Advisory Committee on County Records, consisting of nine county officials representing many years of experience in various county offices, four members of the Institute of Government, and—as ex officio members and editors—the State Archivist and the Assistant State Archivist (Local Records). This committee held its first meeting in Raleigh on February 8, 1959, to begin work on a manual. The committee was divided into subcommittees, each assigned sections to prepare. Thereafter, the subcommittees met as necessary until a first draft was prepared. It then fell to the editors to complete the job, and this they did by January 1960. Distribution was made in March to county officials, to interested State agencies, to a number of libraries, and to archival institutions in other States. *The County Records Manual* contains two chapters of general instructions, eight chapters in which records of the different county officers are listed, with schedules of retention and disposal and with indication of those to be microfilmed, and an appendix that contains general statutes pertaining to public records. It is believed to be the first such manual to be published in the United States, and its enthusiastic reception by county officials and others has been gratifying.<sup>29</sup> It is designed to publicize the schedules that the Department will follow in approving disposal of county records before the microfilming program reaches any particular county. Of course, when the inventory-schedule is completed for a county, specific schedules supersede those in the manual.

In the field of municipal records, the Department in October 1960 appointed an Advisory Committee on Municipal Records, made up of representatives from the municipalities of the State, and this committee is now preparing retention-disposal schedules for the records of towns and cities. The committee's recommended schedules will be edited and published as *The Municipal Records Manual* early in 1961. The permanently valuable municipal records—such as the minutes of the city council—will be included in the microfilming program as time and funds permit.

North Carolina's program offers to local officials a comprehen-

<sup>29</sup> State Archivists may obtain copies of *The County Records Manual* by writing the author at the State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C. For a review of the *Manual* by Gust Skordas, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Md., see *American Archivist*, 23:444-445 (Oct. 1960).



sive plan whereby they and representatives of the State Department of Archives and History can join in a partnership designed to control the growth of records, provide adequate storage facilities for records, and insure the disposal of useless records while assuring the preservation of those of permanent value. Perhaps the State's experience in developing such a program may be of assistance to other States in similar undertakings.

**"I will not say of experts . . ."**

Les archives municipales de Shrewsbury antérieures à 1837 ont été classées et inventoriées par une Commission composée "I will not say of experts, but of local gentlemen and one lady." Ce catalogue sera très prochainement publié, s'il ne l'est déjà. Le rev. W. G. D. Fletcher, dans *The Archaeological Journal*, 1894, LI, p. 283-92, donne le cadre de classement et indique la consistance des principales séries. Quelques-unes de ces séries commencent au temps du roi Jean.

—"Chronique et Mélanges" in *Revue Internationale des Archives, des Bibliothèques, & des Musées*, 1: 31 (mars 1895).

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