

Kentucky—The Archives and Records Service

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Kentucky State Archives and Records Service

KENTUCKY is a land rich in history. One of its first two Senators, John Brown of Frankfort, represented Kentucky earlier in the Continental Congress as a member of the Virginia delegation. Yankee dollars and goods influenced the growth and development of Kentucky and the adjacent States by way of the Ohio River and the Cincinnati Southern Railroad. During the Civil War Kentucky was neutral and Unionist, but against Reconstruction the State rose in hot rebellion—a sentiment attested by its numerous Confederate monuments and the almost complete absence of counterparts for the Union.

East, North, South, and West: Kentucky contributed to the political and economic growth of East and North and the sectional growth of South and West, but it is the stamp of the frontier and sympathy for the Lost Cause that seem to have characterized this State well into the modern period and are primarily responsible for an ambivalence periodically reflected at the polls—an ambivalence that until rather recently has prevented real modernization of Kentucky's government.

Although some historians of the West tend to qualify the thesis that individualism was an attribute peculiar to the frontier, it was certainly omnipresent. If fields were cleared, the owner had to do most of the clearing himself. If the family hoped to rise above the subsistence level, the head of the family and his sons had to work hard from dawn to dark to earn hard cash to buy more and better cheap land. A few lucky Kentuckians might identify themselves with Lexington, "the Athens of the West," or with the rising metropolitan centers of Louisville, Nashville, and Cincinnati; but until very recently Kentucky remained largely a land of struggle for most of its hardworking but relatively poor citizens. Kentuck-

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ians felt this lack of opportunity and before World War II many a young lad joined the Army or the Civilian Conservation Corps to make one less mouth to feed at home.

Kentucky's post-Civil War identification with the South—its posture as a land of mint juleps, magnolias, and statesmanship—bears somehow, as one observer has noted, the pathetic hint of a homeless waif or orphan, of a State identified neither with the culture of the East and North nor with that of the South or West. Genealogical research, nostalgic fiction, and sentimental poetry have all too often preempted fields that might have been tilled by the scholar or the genuine manuscript collector. Kentucky is the home of the Taylors, the Smiths, the Colemans, and the Thompssons, each finding or seeking to establish relationships with the wealthy and important. It is not surprising that the Kentucky Historical Society has a fine genealogical library for research on Kentucky families and that its historical journal, published since 1903, is entitled *The Register* and has published poetic musings and genealogical findings along with scholarly historical papers. Eager search has gone on for years to connect Kentuckians with the leading Old South families of Virginia and Maryland. It still continues unabated and shows little likelihood of flagging in the years to come.

The period of World War II appears to have been one of transition from an older Kentucky to a modern State. Four-lane superhighways are bringing rural Kentuckians ever closer to contemporary realities and ambitions. From the beginning the University of Kentucky has been considered by the Kentucky Legislature to be either very practical, returning young people to farm or shop after advanced training in agriculture or mechanics, or oddly impractical, a school with an alien desire to be recognized in research and higher areas of scholarship. The university now receives more of the respect it so richly deserves, with its new college of medicine, its rapidly expanding arts and sciences facilities, and its network of community colleges. The Kentucky Historical Society, founded in 1836, was reorganized in 1960 to become truly a State society able to function more professionally than in the past. The State Library was reestablished by the legislature in 1962 to do more than library extension work. At the same time, the Kentucky State government was again reorganized. The 1962 legislature approved the findings of a comprehensive study of reorganization, conducted by Felix Joyner, professional public administrator. This study may produce in the future a more efficient

government for Kentucky without sacrificing effective contact between the program managers and the people.

Nowhere is the new outlook in Kentucky more evident than in its new appreciation of archives and records. The Kentucky Historical Society has been until recently the unit of government most interested in archival matters. (The State Archives and Records Service is now an adjunct of the Department of Finance.) The historical society, like those of other States, has had its problems in the past. G. Glenn Clift, Assistant Director of the Society, experienced in the areas of manuscript collection and arrangement, has been hampered by lack of funds, lack of professional assistance, and lack of appreciation and understanding by many historical society members. He has done excellent service in calling attention to the need for a State Archives. His initiative and resourcefulness in dealing with the society's small State archival holdings have been exceptional and are appreciated by those who have seen firsthand the climate in which he has worked.

The groups that have expressed most interest and have given most assistance in the movement to get a State Archives are the departments of history, political science, commerce, and library science of the University of Kentucky; the history department of the University of Louisville; Eastern and Western State College Libraries; the Daughters of the American Colonists; the Filson Club; the Jackson Purchase Historical Society; the Eastern Kentucky Historical Society; the Christopher Gist Historical Society; the Daughters of the American Revolution; the Kentucky Library Association; and the University of Kentucky Libraries.

It would be futile to assert that Kentucky is far out in front in the field of archives and records, for of course it is not. Although building plans were recently announced, Kentucky still has no archives and records center, and it never has had an archives building. Its archival holdings are dispersed among the University of Kentucky (the largest single collection, some 11,000 cubic feet), the Kentucky Historical Society, and the 75 departments, agencies, and commissions of the State government. Because it started late, however, Kentucky has had the advantage of profiting from the vast experience of the Federal Government, other State governments, and industry.

Kentucky knows, for example, what State archives are. It knows that such archives consist of materials accumulated by State offices in the conduct of public business and desired by professional historians, economists, public administrators, and political scientists

to make quality studies of government; but it is also aware that a high percentage—perhaps 95 percent—of State archival holdings are currently vital to the day-to-day operations of State governments. Kentucky is more concerned about “paper control” of archives and the condition of archives than it is about piling up impressive masses of documents. The archives will eventually find their way into the State archives center, there to be culled and processed for permanent storage, but Kentucky is anxious to avoid throat-cutting hassles over who has the most paper. The great quantities of paper being created annually in government are large enough to fill within a few years every public library, historical society, and college library in the State, if mass of paper holdings is the criterion. But of course it is not.

Thomas D. Clark, head of the history department of the University of Kentucky, is chiefly responsible for the establishment of an archives and records program in Kentucky. At every opportunity he has encouraged the State to undertake intelligent, non-partisan direction of its records and archives. In 1936, following the first Reorganization Act of Kentucky State Government (a very thorough and highly successful piece of work), the Services Division of the State was given the task of cleaning out old offices. This meant to the division's employees the destruction of all of the basic State documents outside the Office of the Secretary of State, which was sufficiently sacrosanct to escape the destructive plans. An early morning emergency call alerted Dr. Clark and James W. Martin, also of the university, to hurry to Frankfort, because the administrative and fiscal records of the State were at that very moment being loaded on trucks bound for an incinerator in Louisville. Dr. Clark and Dr. Martin enlisted the direct intervention of Gov. A. B. Chandler; and the basic pre-1936 records were saved and transferred to the university, where they are still under the provisional care of Jacqueline Bull, head of the special collections at the university library. These records will be transferred to the State Archives and Records Center for the unfinished work of classification and arrangement. The university has been able to do little with its limited funds, except to operate as a holding area for State records.

In 1954, when the Kentucky State Library (in existence since 1820) was abolished by the State legislature for reasons not completely explicable, its holdings were scattered. As the library had been the legal—though ineffective—authority for collecting State archives (1936-54), a question arose as to where the older records of the State court of appeals could go. Dr. Clark, Dr. Bull,

Lawrence Thompson (Director of the University of Kentucky Libraries), and Paul Oberst (professor at the University of Kentucky College of Law) were instrumental in saving these records, some dated as early as 1860 (still earlier records had been destroyed by a fire).

In 1957 Dr. Clark was able for the first time to reach the sympathetic ear of a State official—Lt. Gov. Harry Lee Waterfield, chairman of the Legislative Research Commission—who had sufficient power and interest to promote a State archival program. The commission made an excellent study of the records and archives problem, and the 1958 legislature, with Governor Chandler's support, passed a comprehensive act to establish archives and records management programs for both the State and local governments. Dr. Clark obtained the first appropriation for the State Archives and Records Service in 1960, with the assistance and support of Gov. Bert Combs and other State officials. The budget for the Service has been increased steadily as the following figures show: \$8,500 for 1960-61; \$27,168 for 1961-62; \$41,810 for 1962-63; and \$43,515 for 1963-64.

The Service expects by the end of 1963 to have records schedules for all 75 State agencies and to distribute its first *Checklist of Published State Documents* (for the 1962 calendar year) to depository libraries in the United States. It now has a Director, with 7 years' experience in archival and records work; 2 records administration analysts, with 15 years' experience in office management; an archival assistant; and a secretary.

In 1962 the Service became a unit of the State Department of Finance. On March 11, 1963, Commissioner of Finance David Pritchett announced that bids would soon be invited for the conversion of the "Old Hemp Plant" into a State Archives and Records Center. The remodeled building will have 11,072 cubic feet of space for archives and 72,785 cubic feet of space for semicurrent State records. An adjoining building with 2,880 square feet of floorspace will contain search rooms and offices, areas for archives processing and microfilming, and storage space for publications. It is expected that the State Archives and Records Center will be operating in its new quarters by August of 1963.

In State government no one can predict the future with complete assurance because of the occasional erratic behavior of American State and local governments, not to mention the electorate. Kentucky will not try to predict the future. It will instead continue to hope for understanding and support from elected State officials and the people of Kentucky.