

# Missouri—A Coordinated Records Program Needed

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THE STATE of Missouri has no organized records program. Local organizations and citizens interested in records have not coordinated their efforts toward preserving, maintaining, and disposing of official State records. Although current laws provide that some agencies of the State shall retain records for varying periods, there is no consistency in retention regulations, even for similar records. Before an agency may destroy records, however, a legislative committee must authorize the disposition recommended by the agency.

Very few persons are aware that Missouri has a State Archivist. Purely by accident, Philip C. Brooks, Director of the Truman Library, a few years ago read in a local newspaper about the retirement of Thomas D. Shiver, who had been State Archivist from 1943 to 1960. Thomas Gilstrap, appointed in 1960, now occupies that position. The State Archivist, however, operates within the Office of the Secretary of State and concerns himself with that department's records only. From the sketchy information available, it appears that he has few archival functions as we interpret them.

Several interested people have expressed concern about the State's apparent lack of a coordinated records program, but no one has spearheaded a movement toward joining forces. I assume that the natural independence of the native Missourian has made such cooperation difficult. Historical societies, libraries, museums, private collectors, and the State Archivist—each acting independently and each advancing particular interests—have captured groups of State records. State educators have not been able to furnish the leadership necessary to get a program underway.

In 1953 interested persons supported and the legislature passed House Bill no. 301, "An Act for the Establishment of the State

\* Paper read on Oct. 6, 1961, at the 25th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, in Kansas City, Mo., as part of a session concerning archives programs of the Central Missouri Valley States over which Theodore J. Cassady presided. The author is Regional Director, NARS, General Services Administration, Region 6, Kansas City. Before his present assignment he had records and administrative positions in the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, the Army, and the Air Force.

Reorganization Commission for the Study of State Executive Offices, Departments and Agencies." During the progress of its study, the commission found that one of the major problems of the State government was recordkeeping and records management. In 1955 the commission made a contract with Emmett J. Leahy, noted commercial records management consultant, to conduct a limited survey of Missouri's records problems. Within this limitation Leahy & Co. submitted a comprehensive report, including recommendations. The commission accepted the report and carried out a few of the recommendations, but only minor benefits actually resulted.

In 1960 Missouri procured the services of Lawrence-Leiter & Co., management consultants, to survey the State's space problems. The report, submitted to the director of the Division of Budget and Comptroller, summarized in general the present space requirements and projected 10-year and 20-year requirements. The survey pointed toward State-owned space and gave comparative cost estimates. This report also had no apparent effect.

The lack of a well-directed, well-planned, and adequately controlled records program has created a problem, as all archivists can readily imagine. Some agencies have done remarkably well in conducting an orderly disposal program, but archival and historical interests have suffered. No scholarly direction with the single purpose of preserving all records of enduring value has emerged within the State.

Using well-known techniques applied to meager information obtained in 1959, I was able to verify the Leahy survey figures. Later I projected the records picture to the 20-year requirements of the Lawrence-Leiter report. I came to the conclusion that an organized archival and records management plan could easily be financed from savings computed from data contained in those two management surveys.

Records held by the State of Missouri in 1955 approximated 250,000 cubic feet and occupied 200,000 square feet of space valued at \$1 per foot per year (the average cost of State-owned and -rented space). This space for records amounted to 35 percent of the total space occupied by the State government (570,000 square feet). Even paring down the cost figures obtained from the survey, I estimate that the State of Missouri is spending about a million dollars a year to store and maintain its records. By not taking advantage of well-known records management techniques, the State is losing \$477,500 a year. Applying the same formula to the Lawrence-Leiter report, I find that by 1980, if no proce-

dures are changed, the State will have approximately 300,000 cubic feet of records, stored and maintained in 250,000 square feet of space. By that time record space will cost the State an estimated \$1,200,000 a year and an annual loss of about \$594,375. The overall space requirements in the year 1980 are estimated at 760,000 square feet, costing \$190,000 more than in the year 1960. How can the State Fathers continue to pour down the drain approximately half a million dollars a year, deaf to the pleas of those interested in good management?

During the 1961 session of the 71st General Assembly of the State of Missouri, House Bill no. 318, an act "to provide for efficient and economical management of State records," was introduced. Drafters of this bill, following the pattern recommended by the Council of State Governments in its *Suggested State Legislation*, assigned the records function to the Division of Budget and Comptroller. The sponsors of the legislation believed that the introduction of records management through an established agency would be more economical and would meet with wider acceptance than would a new agency. The house passed the bill, but it was defeated unexpectedly in the senate because of the opposition of a few influential senators who contended that the Division of Budget and Comptroller was being given too many duties.

Those interested in good management now hope to launch a records program through executive action. Efforts should be made to interest key agency personnel, legislators, and educators in a records program and to introduce a bill similar to House Bill no. 318 in the next general assembly. If proper preparations are made, the passage of such a bill should be a certainty.<sup>1</sup> A records management clinic for key personnel would acquaint them with the problems and their solutions. A coordinated effort by historical societies within the State, the State Archivist, and influential educators to establish a State archival and records management program would overcome all petty opposition. Executive personnel of the State who are interested in good management practices have made every effort to improve records management methods, but uninformed individuals have frustrated their plans. We in the world of records hope, however, that the State of Missouri will soon be on the road to preserving its heritage through a well-managed records program.

<sup>1</sup> Pending in committee as of Apr. 25, 1963, is House Bill no. 496, which provides for the establishment of an administrative management function under the direction of the State's Budget and Comptroller Division. The bill provides for an overall records management and archival program.