

Multiple Uses of a Survey: Training, Guides, Records Management, and Beyond

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SENECA—POLITICIAN, POET, AND ESSAYIST—summed up the Roman love for cooperation, practicality, and efficiency in the maxim *manus manum lavat*, “one hand washes the other.” In archives and records management fields, we can profitably follow Seneca’s advice by combining a number of compatible functions in a traditional archival practice, the records survey.

As a tool for archivists and a records management implement for public and private agencies, the records survey has a long and illustrious history. As

early as 1930 the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies were considering a systematic survey of local records, and in 1935 a major project to identify and catalog important records commenced under the auspices of the WPA’s Federal Writers Project.¹ Many private concerns followed the federal lead, and subsequently a number of good surveys of business and other non-public records have been undertaken.² As a records management tool in both government and business, the

¹ For a general look at other archival work of the Federal Writers Project and New Deal involvement in cultural life generally, see William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), pp. 759–828. For more detailed information on the Historical Records Survey, see Chester W. Bowie, “The Wisconsin Historical Records Survey, Then and Now,” *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 247–61; Edward C. Papenfuss, “‘A Modicum of Commitment’: The Present and Future Importance of the Historical Records Survey,” *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 211–21; Trudy Huskamp Peterson, “The Iowa Historical Records Survey, 1936–1942,” *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 223–45; and Leonard Rapport, “Dumped from the Wharf into Casco Bay: The Historical Records Survey Revisited,” *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 201–10.

² In this regard, see especially Oliver W. Holmes, “The Evaluation and Preservation of Business Archives,” *American Archivist* 1 (October 1938): 171–85; William D. Overman, “The Pendulum

procedures and purposes of the records survey are well established and have been refined over a number of years.³

Yet the records survey as an integrating, cooperative activity for archival and records management fields is only now emerging. Too often, archivists hold their activities apart from those of records managers;⁴ and records managers recognize the archival importance of some of the records they hold but consider archival functions distinctly secondary to their major work. Most records managers still see their work as the control of paperwork volume and regard archival material as something to be sent away to another custodian for safekeeping.⁵

The problems, philosophical differences, and methodological dissimilarities which divide these two fields are too numerous to solve, indeed even to enumerate, here. However, the following documents an endeavor in which seemingly disparate elements have been brought together in a project fulfilling many functions and using many resources; the records management interests of a number of agencies merged with archival and historical in-

terests of the academic community, the requirements of an educational program with needs of state archivists. The examples of cooperation could be proclaimed, but they become evident as the story of the Pacific Northwest Public Power Records Survey unfolds. It will also become evident that such a project necessitates a new kind of records survey, literally a multi-purpose undertaking.

The Pacific Northwest Public Power Records Survey is the product of cooperation and coordination. In January 1976, members of the History Department of Western Washington University and the department's Graduate Program in Archival and Records Management Training (archival program, for short) conceived the idea of a non-repository records survey to be used as a part of the practicum normally undertaken by students as a part of their educational experience.⁶ The state archivist provided a list of suggested agencies. Of these, Public Utility Districts were chosen for the archival program because they were agencies with a lengthy and important history. The Washington legislature passed an act permitting the formation

Swings," *American Archivist* 22 (January 1959): 3-10; and Robert Polk Thomson, "The Business Records Survey in Wisconsin," *American Archivist* 14 (July 1951): 249-55.

³ The most recent, standard treatment of this topic in book form is Wilmer O. Maedke, Mary F. Robek, and Gerald F. Brown, *Information and Records Management* (Beverly Hills, California: Glencoe Press, 1974), pp. 59-64.

⁴ A happy anodyne to the perennial problem between archivists and records managers can be found in Maynard G. Brichford, "The Relationship of Records Management Activities to the Field of Business History," *Business History Review* 46 (1972): 220-32. Here he shows the direct relationship between intelligent records management and the preservation of records for the scholarly community. See also Gerald T. White, "The Business Historian and his Sources," *American Archivist* 30 (January 1967): 19-21.

⁵ Maedke et al., *Information and Records Management*, while a good manual, still retains this point of view; see especially p. 62.

⁶ For the definition and scope of such a survey see John A. Fleckner, *Archives and Manuscripts: Surveys*, Society of American Archivists Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977), pp. 2-3. This is the best guide for defining, planning, justifying, administering, and completing a records survey, whether a records management survey, repository survey, or non-repository survey. For an eloquent discussion of the connection between history and archives, see Hugh A. Taylor, "The Discipline of History and the Education of the Archivist," *American Archivist* 40 (October 1977): 395-402. A somewhat older treatment of a related matter is Everett O. Alldredge, "Archival Training in a Record Center," *American Archivist* 21 (October 1958): 401-7.

RECORDS SERIES INVENTORY				PACIFIC NORTHWEST PUBLIC POWER RECORDS SURVEY				FORM #1 2/17/77 (Draft)		
A. ORGANIZATION	B. OFFICE OF RECORD	C. CONTACT	D. TELEPHONE	E. LOCATION (ADDRESS) OF RECORD	F. NAME OF SURVEYOR	G. DATE				
KEY-PURCHUED ITEMS										
COMMON ENTRIES (Office Use Only)			1. RGN	B. OFF CODE	B. SERIES 12. DUMMY	19. R/A CODE	20. FA CODE			
					0,0,0,0,0,0					
110. RECORD SERIES TITLE										
200. CONTENTS <input type="checkbox"/> AGREEMENTS <input type="checkbox"/> AUDIO-TAPED <input type="checkbox"/> BIDS <input type="checkbox"/> CHARTS <input type="checkbox"/> CONTRACTS <input type="checkbox"/> DIRECTIVES <input type="checkbox"/> DRAWINGS <input type="checkbox"/> JOURNALS <input type="checkbox"/> LEDGERS <input type="checkbox"/> LETTERS <input type="checkbox"/> MATHEMATICS <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (Specify):			201. ARRANGEMENT <input type="checkbox"/> ALPHABETICAL <input type="checkbox"/> CHRONOLOGICAL <input type="checkbox"/> GEOGRAPHICAL <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (Specify): <input type="checkbox"/> NUMERICAL <input type="checkbox"/> ORGANIZATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> SUBJECTIVE			202. RECORD-SIZE <input type="checkbox"/> SMALLER_THAN__LETTER__SIZE <input type="checkbox"/> LETTER__SIZE <input type="checkbox"/> LEGAL__SIZE <input type="checkbox"/> LARGER_THAN__LEGAL__SIZE		203. PHYSICAL-CHARACTERISTICS <input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINALS <input type="checkbox"/> REPRODUCTIONS <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH_ORIGINALS_AND_REPRODUCTIONS <input type="checkbox"/> BOUND <input type="checkbox"/> LOOSE <input type="checkbox"/> FLAT__FILED <input type="checkbox"/> FOLDED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (Specify):		
250. INCLUSIVE DATES From _____ To _____			300. VOLUME OF RECORDS Cubic Feet _____ Linear Feet _____ Microfilm Reels _____		400. LOCATION CODE <input type="checkbox"/> DES (Official Public Record) <input type="checkbox"/> DSM (Office Files & Memoranda)		500. RECORD CLASSIFICATION <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHIVAL_VALUE <input type="checkbox"/> NO_ARCHIVAL_VALUE		550. ARCHIVAL VALUE <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHIVAL_VALUE <input type="checkbox"/> NO_ARCHIVAL_VALUE	
600. LEGAL			601. ORGANIZATION			602. SURVEYOR				
			RECOMMENDED RETENTION			700. SERIES INCONSISTENCIES <input type="checkbox"/> FILE_BREAKS <input type="checkbox"/> MISSING_ITEMS <input type="checkbox"/> NO_FILE_BREAKS_OR_MISSING_ITEMS				
FUNCTION/PURPOSE/COMMENTS										
9,0,0										
9,0,1										
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of PUDs in 1930. When, with federal support and encouragement, the hydroelectric potential of the Columbia Basin was developed, the PUDs began to play major roles in the state's political and economic development. They were, then, an important part of the New Deal saga.⁷

But surveying PUDs presented some difficulties. The Public Utility District is a unique creation, but not unique to Washington State. Oregon also has PUDs, there called People's Utility District, so such a survey could not exclude Oregon. Idaho, the other state in the "electric region" with Oregon, was also added to the survey.

Moreover, PUDs were part of an intertwined, public-power movement that included electrical cooperatives and municipal utilities. After 1935 the cooperative movement broadened into the Rural Electrical Cooperative, using cheap federal power and the low-cost federal loans provided by the Rural Electrification Act. Cities in the Pacific Northwest, many of which had been active supporters of public power for as long as a half century, also expanded with cheap federal power. Clearly, the Pacific Northwest Public Power Records Survey illustrated the need for cooperation, coordination, and planning beyond the initial concept of its organizers.

Basic to planning was an important question: could Public Utility Districts, not to mention REA co-ops and municipal utilities, be persuaded to open their doors and records to eager archi-

val and records management trainees? To answer it, the planners approached the Snohomish County Public Utility District, largest of the PUDs of Washington and Oregon, and discovered the PUD warm to the idea of a historical records survey but having also a massive problem: records management. Snohomish PUD, founded in 1936, had been collecting, but not destroying, paper for more than forty years, and storage of such a volume of records had become a critical matter. The district had attacked the problem, but the results were uneven and, on the whole, not very successful. It had begun to film records, but it retained the hard copy in addition to the film. It had also begun to computerize some phases of its records work, but computerization had not been coordinated with microfilming. It had called in a records management consultant and been dissatisfied with his work. If, then, our historical survey could be linked to a records management program, the project could expect support from the PUD.

Contacts with PUD directors associations in each state revealed that this experience was typical. They were happy to see someone interested in their records and history, but their chief need was for records management.

Accordingly, a multipurpose survey was planned to begin in September 1976. Five interns trained as field surveyors would collect basic information for the complete archival description

⁷ There is no good published history of the PUDs. A good introduction to the public power movement is William E. Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 11, 87, 156-7, and 164. See also his *The New Deal: A Documentary History* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 34-42 and 54-56. The best treatment of the public power movement is Philip J. Funigiello, *Toward a National Power Policy: The New Deal and the Electric Utility Industry, 1933-1941* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973). Another good study which touches the general problem of electrical utilities is Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966).

of every record series in each surveyed agency, to be assembled for inclusion in a guide to the records. In addition, the surveyors would collect a good deal of information to be used to construct a records management system. Information would include data on records size and form and on the manner of storage, also on the legal retention period and agency retention practices, the differences between the two, and the reasons therefor. This data would in turn serve as a basis for a records schedule and training manual to be produced for use in the PUDs.

Ultimately the project was expected to yield (1) training for students in the archival and records management program at WWU, (2) a published history and guide to PUD records, and (3) a records management document.

First, interns were recruited and trained in an intensive academic course in archival and records management administration, with practical experience in cooperating institutions.⁸ This prepared them for their field work and for professional placement in the future.

Because the functions undertaken by the survey were numerous, the survey form devised was necessarily complex. In addition to standard information on record content, date, volume, and location, the form contained a large number of check-off boxes for records management items.⁹ (see Illustration, p. 303.)

Wholehearted cooperation came in the initial contacts with PUDs, but problems too, both expected and un-

expected. As the project office already knew, most of the PUDs had no records officers, and records management was often added to the functions of an already overworked staff member. In many PUDs, however, no one had exact knowledge of the location of all the organization's records. Except for those few with a functioning, sophisticated records program, no PUD had an accurate idea of the volume of records it held. This lack of definite information meant that surveyors were often shooting in the dark and frequently had to do a good deal of on-site detective work. Once in the field, the interns discovered that several PUDs had branch offices not even mentioned in bulletins of the public power agencies and not recorded in any available publication. As the project proceeded, some of these problems were solved by preliminary surveys either by telephone or visit to determine in advance as nearly as possible the extent of material.

Yet another problem, for which no solution was found, was the perennial, uncooperative, jealous, secretive, or downright cantankerous custodian of records. While the PUDs were generous with staff time, and frequently were personally kind, some of the REA cops closed their doors to surveyors. The reasons are diverse: the escalating public-power war in the Pacific Northwest; fear of anyone representing "The Government" or "Big Brother"; and lack of staff time to assist the surveyor.

As the survey forms were completed, they were returned to the proj-

⁸ These institutions were the Washington State Archives, Olympia, Washington; the Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon; and the Federal Archives and Records Center, Seattle, Washington. Our special thanks are due to Sidney McAlpin (Washington), James D. Porter (Oregon), and Phillip Lothyan (Federal Archives and Records Center) for their efforts in this phase of the work.

⁹ The form did indeed prove to be time-consuming to complete. Surveyors indicated that the completion of twenty-five forms (i.e., surveying twenty-five record series) per day was about average with thirty being a good day. Some work days saw an intern complete no more than fifteen.

ect office for proofing and coding. The data they contained was loaded into the computer. Problems with the Spindex II system developed by the National Archives and Records Service required a redesign of the data base to provide an improved means of indexing access to the guide, and some recoding of the data. Nevertheless, printouts of the information provided the basis for the printed materials to be produced from the survey: the history and guide, the records management training manual, and a records schedule linked to a files classification guide.

Finally, there is the matter of agency follow-up. Obviously, a records management program cannot be implemented by mail. The management manual and schedule must be presented and explained to the agency personnel. With some forty PUDs and more than one hundred and fifty agencies involved in the survey, this was no small matter. To disseminate the management-schedule package, the project organized approximately a dozen workshops to be presented at central locations in the three-state region. Follow-up in a project of this sort is, and must be, an integral part of the work.

In spite of problems, some impressive and useful accomplishments have come from the survey. The interns who performed the field work obtained valuable experience and all

found work immediately after in either archival or records management positions. Their exposure to the real world of the profession was invaluable and, more important, something no classroom setting could provide. The history and guide has created interest within the scholarly community. Perhaps most rewarding, the survey has provided an obvious measure of aid to the PUDs, and the REAs and municipalities are expected to receive similar benefit. A number of PUDs scrapped plans to use other records management systems when it became evident they would be furnished with a system designed expressly for them.

Finally, no one should conclude that a cooperative, field-based multipurpose survey is a panacea. Despite the problems we have encountered, the survey has worked well because it identified and met the real needs of the agencies surveyed and served. It has functioned because the survey and its constituent parts were well conceived. It has succeeded because simple good will has existed among all the parties involved.

Yet if these circumstances exist infrequently in the world of the professional archivist or records manager, the lessons herein contained are important; cooperation and intelligent planning can produce a survey beneficial to all the parties involved. Indeed, one hand does wash the other.

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