Shorter Features

The Shorter Features department serves as a forum for sharply focused archival topics which may not require full-length articles. Members of the Society and others knowledgeable in areas of archival interest are encouraged to submit papers for consideration. Shorter Features should range from 500 to 1,000 words in length and contain no annotation. Papers should be sent to Maygene Daniels, Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 20565.

Records Appraisal: Practice and Procedure

KATHY ROE COKER

RECORDS APPRAISAL IS NO EASY TASK. The difficulty of that task seems to be directly proportional to the recency of the records. Few archivists need ponder long over the research/permanent value of eighteenth-century land grants to early settlers or of petitions made in the 1830s to the state's legislature. Archivists may puzzle long, however, over the research value of six hundred cubic feet of records of a recently liquidated insurance company, over five hundred cubic feet of welfare case records spanning five decades, or over one hundred cubic feet of criminal justice grants which are summarized financially elsewhere. We all know from our experience as archivists, manuscript curators, or records analysts that these situations are not unique, especially in the case of twentieth-century records. Even if the records are in fairly good shape physically (which, or course, is not always the case), one still has to deal with the problem of understanding their provenance; their original order; their original use; their current administrative, legal, and fiscal use; their relationship(s) to other records; their value toward documenting the agency's organization, policies, functions, and procedures (evidential value); their value toward evidencing the rights and/or responsiblities of individuals; and their value to future researchers. The appraisal

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of records which predate the twentieth century, records which are often scarce and unique, is not, of course, matter-of-fact. Such records do not, however, present archivists and records managers with the same problems as those of voluminous, often duplicated twentieth-century records. The appraiser of pre-twentieth-century records, in the absence of extant documentation, may grasp at almost anything that comes his way. Yet, the current information explosion makes such an approach uneconomical, impractical, and hardly feasible. That information explosion makes it essential to reach decisions as to the permanent values of records. Appraisal, then, is a fundamental concern of archivists and records managers, especially those beset with large collections of twentieth-century records.

Appraisal decisions, ranging from what suit or dress to wear to which cancelled checks to throw away, are made by most of us in the daily course of our lives. It could be thought that the archivist faces a problem similar to one posed by Kenny Rogers in his song "The Gambler": "You got to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, know when to walk away, know when to run."

Archival problems are somewhat akin to poker playing problems because once your are dealt an ace and throw it away, it is not going to be dealt again. It is gone, at least for that hand. Poker, however, is a game of probabilities, and one who is good at probabilities can figure out what they are and play accordingly. In records retention decisions, however, it is doubtful that probabilities are at work—at least none that can be figured out very easily or mathematically (except perhaps in statistical sampling). There are so many unknown factors, for example: How will this continuing record series be used in the future by the agency? and, perhaps even more nebulous, How will the record be used by future researchers? Unlike the gambler, once the archivist folds an ace it is forever lost. Once a record is sent to the shredder or to the incinerator, it certainly cannot be retrieved. The archivist must decide what to keep and what to throw away and have some degree of confidence in having made the correct decision.

How does the archivist make those decisions? How does the archivist analyze a given body of records and reach decisions as to current administrative, legal, and fiscal value and as to the long-term or permanent value of those records? On what is that analysis based?

A succinct look at the records appraisal procedure of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History provides some answers. As a state archives, the department is concerned with the retention of records of permanent value which will document the government's discharge of its responsiblities—to safeguard the records of individual rights/responsiblities, and to retain and preserve documentation of the state's heritage. The appraisal process is designed to consider the records of a department or agency as a whole entity. We prefer not to inventory/schedule record series piecemeal. In this way we are able to discover most efficiently which series are related to others and which summarize others. It is then that chasms or overlaps appear and lack of or surplus documentation can be remedied. It is this view of the forest as well as the trees which makes this appraisal process somewhat unique in practice, if not in theory, because this is where the records are related to the historical period in which they were created. Now the archivist can see the significance of the records being appraised. The records as a whole must be placed in historical context or other settings before their appraisal is complete.

At the South Carolina state archives, the first step in the procedure is handled by the State Records Survey Division. The division, consisting of a state records analyst supervisor and three teams of records analysts, conducts an inventory of the records of the given state agency or institution. The records analysts identify records which, due to their physical form, arrangement, subject, function, or some other common characteristic, are maintained as a unit—a record series. The record series is then listed and described by noting on a worksheet the type, content, and purpose of the records.

The accuracy and thoroughness of the inventory and the series descriptions are vital to the next stage, an analysis of the series by the records analyst. This is done in an attempt to devise an appropriate retention schedule which will meet the agency's current administrative, fiscal, and legal uses and needs for the records, and which will assure the proper disposition of the archival and nonarchival records. Essential to this process is the state records appraisal form, which an analyst completes for each series. This form identifies and records general characteristics about the series—causative creation, interrelationships among series, restricted or open status, and uniqueness. The value or use to the agency (the legal retention requirements) and the archival value/condition (the evidential and informational values) of the series are also noted.

Once these forms are completed, the records analysts' draft of each proposed record series retention/disposition schedule is prepared and forwarded along with the appraisal forms and worksheets to the appraisal archivist. Upon receipt of the schedules, the archivist then begins a study of the state agency or institution, its historical origin and development, and its past and current administrative, legal, and fiscal functions and responsibilities. A variety of records help in this analysis of the agency's organizational, functional, and programmatic development. These include the agency's annual reports and publications, organizational charts, state statutes and regulations governing the agency from its creation to the present, the state's legislative manual, and any records of the agency or its predecessor which are retained already by the state archives. The records analyst who prepared the schedules, appraisal forms, and worksheets also provides assistance. South Carolina has an integrated program, one which relies heavily on an exchange of information between the records analysts and the appraisal archivist.

During the appraisal of the schedules, the archivist is concerned with the agency's current need for the records. Major attention is given, however, to identify which scheduled record series document the agency's origin and changing governing authority as well as its policies, procedures, programs, fiscal accountability, and functions, and which series are or may be of value to researchers. The archivist basically employs T. R. Schellenberg's and Maynard Brichford's approach to records appraisal and utilizes Schellenberg's tests of evidential and informational values.

During this sometimes frustrating process, the appraisal archivist uses the records appraisal forms and the proposed retention/disposition schedules to prepare a functional summary chart of the scheduled record series. The chart serves as a basis for an individual and comparative analysis of the record series in order to correlate each scheduled record series with other functionally and programmatically related series and in order to identify the major functions of the given agency, which series document those functions, the purpose of each

series, gaps in the records and subsequent gaps in documentation, the existence of summaries of the record series, concentrations of information, and sparseness of documentation. As noted before, the records of an agency are considered as a whole entity in order to effectively assess the interrelationships between the series.

During this review of the proposed schedules, the archivist considers numerous questions. Which record series document the creation and organization of the agency (e.g. statutes, executive orders, agency histories, and organizational charts)? Which record series provide evidence of the formulation and execution of identified agency directives, policies, and procedures (e.g. minutes and administrative orders)? Which record series document agency programs and projects (e.g. particular project case files or grant files)? Which series evidence the agency's public relations activities (e.g. news releases, printed informational reports, or brochures)? Which record series evidence internal management functions (e.g. personnel records, payroll, or purchase/inventory of equipment)? Are the records unique—are they duplicated elsewhere in the agency under review or in the scheduled record series of another agency? If so, which series provides the most thorough, concentrated source of information? Is the federal government retaining related records? If so, for how long? To what extent are the records duplicated, and where is the record copy to be found? Does the series document or concern the rights and/or responsiblities of individuals? If so, are these evidential or informational records? Does the series document a significant or unique event, occurrence, or the activities of a prominent individual or group of individuals? Does the series record an important sociological, political, or economic trend or development (e.g. South Carolina's increased involvement in nuclear energy)? Does the series evidence a departure from a previous state policy? Does this series document a defunct program not summarized or available elsewhere? Is the record series restricted? If so, why and for how long? Will the format of the records (e.g. computer printout paper, reel-to-reel tapes, magnetic tapes, or film) warrant special consideration or cause additional concerns if the records are retained? If so, how will these concerns be resolved?

Only after these and more of the relevant/applicable questions are answered, analyzed, and placed in their proper perspective does the archivist arrive at Meyer Fishbein's "reasoned decisions" as to the temporary or permanent value of the record series and what their disposition should be. After these decisions are reached, the proposed schedules are returned to State Records Survey for any needed revision, clarification, resolution of outstanding concerns and problems, and approval by the state agency or institution.

Once the agency's approval is obtained, the schedules are returned by the records analysts to the archivist for a final review. Any resulting issues are discussed with the records analysts and any necessary changes are made to the proposed schedules. This phase of the second review stage is not treated routinely. Then the archivist prepares a written appraisal report to the deputy director and director, which is accompanied by the final version of the summary chart, the proposed schedules, and other material such as the agency organizational chart, legislative outline, and brief historical sketch of the agency, which may aid in the appraisal. The appraisal report—a series by series account of those records recommended for archival retention and a summary of those recommended for eventual destruction—serves to docu-

ment and support the archivist's recommendations. The deputy director reviews and appraises the schedules along with the archivist's recommendations. Questions raised by the deputy director are resolved, and his recommendations are incorporated into the schedules and the appraisal report. Only then are the schedules presented to the director for his approval in a meeting between the director, deputy director, and appraisal archivist. Subsequent recommendations by the director are recorded before the scheduled record series retention/disposition schedules are forwarded to State Records Survey either for further revision and/or for approval by the State Budget and Control Board. After the final approval of the schedules is obtained, the appraisal documentation is filed for permanent retention, and the process of implementing the schedules is started.

It is obvious that records appraisal is not a scientific process whereby the archivist routinely selects records for permanent retention or destruction. It is equally obvious that voluminous twentieth-century records mandate effective records management and records appraisal. The profession in general has adopted the appraisal guidelines developed over the years by Phillip C. Brooks, Herman Kahn, T. R. Schellenberg, Meyer Fishbein, and Maynard Brichford. These general guidelines provide assistance in identifying the short-term, long-term, and historical value of records. Utilizing these guidelines along with the information, input, and review provided by the records analysts, the archivist's analysis and appraisal of the inventoried record series, and the recommendations of the archivist, deputy director, and director, South Carolina's archivists make appraisal decisions with a high degree of confidence in having made "reasoned decisions" as to the permanent or temporary value of the state's public records.

A Warehouse of Forestry History: A Success Story in Records Management and Records Appraisal

KATHY ROE COKER

APPRAISAL OF RECORD SERIES retention and disposition schedules can sometimes leave the archivist thinking he or she is only shuffling papers about records, some of which may eventually find their way into the archives. Yes, the schedules represent records, and yes, the disposition instructions mean the life or death of those records. It is refreshing, however, to actually become enmeshed in the records behind the schedules. That is what happened recently to an archivist, who donned unusual work attire—jeans, an old shirt, and tennis shoes—and, toting a flashlight, entered a warehouse containing over fifty years of forestry records. It proved to be a dirty but most rewarding experience.

From an earlier visit to the warehouse, I knew that valuable records, especially early records of the state park system and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) projects, along with a tattered, ten-foot tall Smokey the Bear, were housed there. Some prodding by state records management and the Forestry Commission's own need for the warehouse space resulted in permission to remove the records scheduled for transfer to the archives. The Forestry Commission wanted them out in a week.

With that time frame in mind, and with the assistance of one to three records analysts, I entered the warehouse armed with schedules, flashlights, and a bit of trepidation over what we might find in addition to the records. Smokey was gone. In his place were collapsing and crushed boxes of records, loose records in disarray on the grubby cement floor, map cases, and metal storage cabinets, all of which made passage between the rows of filled metal and wooden file cabinets impossible. Feeling at first overwhelmed by the approximately nine hundred cubic feet of records, we began our task of sorting through the mass of identified (a rare surprise), unidentified, and disheveled material. The only light was a droplight provided by the agency, two flashlights, and the sun—when it chose not to hide behind the clouds.

We began by identifying records clearly of no permanent value and removing them with the help of Forestry Commission personnel. After some initial confusion, we developed a systematic approach to the identification and disposal of the records. The archivist, with the aid of an analyst, earmarked the records for destruction or further review. This meant crawling over boxes and wooden crates, on top of cabinets and into cobwebs, and pulling and tugging at drawers to verify the contents. A knife was required to open the cardboard tops of two cubic-foot cabinet drawers which refused to budge after years of peaceful neglect. Pliers also came in handy as did a hatchet, which was used to pry open a huge wooden crate sealed like a time capsule for posterity. (We owe much to the resourcefulness of the Forestry Commission personnel, who always seemed to be ready with an appropriate tool.)

Records marked for immediate destruction were loaded onto a flatbed truck. The most voluminous of these were vouchers—every voucher from the 1930s to the 1960s had been saved. Other material earmarked for immediate destruction included purchase orders, requisitions, travel reimbursements, equipment and supply order forms, and the decomposing skin of a rabbit or opposum—it was hard to tell which. We

loaded the truck three times. Then began the task of sorting through what we had set aside for further review or scrutiny—after spraying it to minimize the number of bugs, removing strips of wood from records stored in wooden crates, removing mud dauber nests, and reboxing or introducing some records to boxes for the first time. Fortunately no mold was found.

After four days of working with this material as best we could, we were ready to transport the records to the archives for further screening and retention. Meeting the Forestry Commission's deadline, we transferred approximately two hundred twenty cubic feet of records from the early 1930s to the mid 1970s. Among these records are some real treasures, including the master plans of early state parks and state forests, meeting minutes, bylaws, and correspondence of the early forestry protective associations and county forestry boards. There are radio talks by forestry rangers on a variety of topics ranging from soil conservation to the World War II timber conservation effort, forestry surveys complete with photographs, and records of the Civilian Conservation Corps projects. The CCC material includes a set of timber-type county survey maps, camp job completion reports and correspondence, and a photographic volume of work done by the CCC—landscaping, excavation, building and bridge construction, transplanting trees, clearing nature trails, quarrying rock, sodding, erosion control, dam preservation—at Cheraw, Edisto, Poinsett, Myrtle Beach, Table Rock, King's Mountain, Edisto Beach, and Chester State Parks.

As time permits, the records transferred to the archives will be screened more closely to assure the retention of archival material needed in documenting more than fifty years of forestry history and the destruction of the more ephemeral material. Some records, especially the CCC photographic volume, warrant microfilming due to the deteriorating condition of the records. The annoyance of the cobwebs, bugs, nests, decomposing skin, strained eyes, and dirt was overshadowed in the end by the significant and diverse records recovered from that warehouse and by the satisfying feeling of becoming enmeshed in the records represented by the retention schedules.

The foregoing account is a success story in records management and records appraisal; however, that success was long in coming. Thirteen years passed from the beginning of the story to the transfer of records recounted above. In 1971, the department's State Records Management Division conducted an inventory of the State Commission on Forestry and drafted proposed record series retention/disposition schedules. The schedules then were reviewed and prepared for the agency's approval. Due to a lack of cooperation from the agency, these schedules were never approved and implemented. In 1979, another inventory of the agency was conducted and 137 schedules were prepared. Those schedules represented approximately eighteen hundred cubic feet of records spanning from 1929 to the 1979 inventory date. The volume of records, time span involved, and agency reorganization along with some indifference resulted in a time-consuming schedule review and approval process. The disarray of the records and their location in the Forestry Commission's warehouse further complicated the review.

The records analysts and appraisal archivist worked together closely in the review of the schedules, discussing at length questions over agency programs and program documentation. These included the Forestry Commission's early administration of the state park system, the operation of forest fire protective

associations formed by groups of landowners and the agency in 1928 as the first organized effort to combat forest fires and the 1945 evolution of this program into a countywide system, the reforestation program which began in 1929 with legislation authorizing the Forestry Commission to establish nurseries and expanded in 1961 to include seed orchards, the active forestry management program offering direct assistance to farmers which commenced in 1931, and other diverse programs and their development and change throughout the agency's existence. We also were concerned, of course, with documenting the financial administration of the agency, the agency's reorganization over more than fifty years, and short-lived or temporary programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps projects at the state parks and wayside parks and the CCC's county timber-type surveys. We needed to ascertain gaps in documentation and discern how the Forestry Commission's records complimented other state agency's records as in the case of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, which assumed the administration of the state park system in 1967.

In short, this was a comprehensive inventory, review, and appraisal of an agency with diversified programs, an agency whose equally diversified records fortunately dated from two years after its beginning to the present. We felt a sense of accomplishment after resolving the questions which arose during the review of the schedules. That feeling, however, began to waver when a year had passed from the time the records analysts and appraisal archivist had approved the proposed schedules and forwarded them to the agency for their approval and signature. The director of the archives finally had to intervene by personally requesting that the Forestry Commission take action on the schedules and then return them to the archives for final approval. In 1983, that long-awaited day came. After years of intermittent work, the schedules were formally approved by the agency, the archives, and the state's Budget and Control Board. The department staff sighed in relief.

That sigh of relief changed to real concern over the implementation of the schedules. We were particularly worried over the records in the agency's warehouse. After some negotiation by the State Records Management Division with the Forestry Commission, coupled with the agency's own need for the warehouse space, our trek to the warehouse finally began. That trek and the exploration of the records resulted in the transfer of approximately two hundred twenty cubic feet of records to the archives for further evaluation. The evaluation has begun, and the excitement over the records is mounting. That excitement, like the exploration of the agency's warehouse, has overshadowed the frustrations occasioned during the long schedule review and approval process. With this in mind, we look forward to the implementation of other Forestry Commission schedules as they become eligible for disposition and to the receipt of additional records documenting the state's forestry history as administered by the Commission on Forestry.