

January 1986

Short Subjects: Southeastern State Archives and Local Records: A Sampler

Peter E. Schinkel

Georgia Department of Archives and History

Gerald J. Clark

Florida State Archives

Richard J. Cox

Alabama Department of Archives and History

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schinkel, Peter E.; Clark, Gerald J.; and Cox, Richard J., "Short Subjects: Southeastern State Archives and Local Records: A Sampler," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 4 no. 1 (1986).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol4/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

SHORT SUBJECTS



FEATURE

Southeastern State Archives and Local Records: A Sampler

[NOTE: Archivists at selected state archives were asked to write a short statement on the activities of their archives in encouraging local government officials to preserve records and in educating officials about records management.]

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY: LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Georgia has 159 counties, 187 school systems, over 500 chartered municipalities and numerous local boards, commissions, and authorities. Many are experiencing dramatic growth, and that is straining their resources and necessitating change in their traditional operations. Preservation of the historical record is a responsibility recognized by Georgia's local government officials. This fact is supported by requests to the Department of Archives and History, by laws passed by the legislature, and by recent studies.

Records in Georgia's local governments date from the mid-eighteenth century. The volume of the surviving records increases each year. Computers and increased demand for services have caused this growth in volume to reach almost exponential speed. The paperless office is still a dream of the future.

Identifying and separating records of historical, and of long-term legal and administrative value, and then providing them with curatorial care requires experience and knowledge that most local government

staff do not possess. Records management, records appraisal, and records preservation are not subjects generally taught, or even mentioned, in the schools and colleges of Georgia, or other states.

The reality is that until local government officials and staff understand, generally, the purposes and practices of records management and records conservation little lasting improvement in the preservation of historical records is likely. Georgia has too many governments with too many records for the Georgia Archives to inventory, accession or microfilm, or to provide protective storage for all local records of historical value.

The department sought and was awarded a National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant to develop contacts with the various state agencies, organizations of local government officials, and other groups in and out of the state that are interested in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of local government. The number of groups with communication networks involving local governments and the level of interest displayed by these groups indicates a previously untapped resource for educating local government staff in the basics of records management and Georgia records law. Cooperative efforts by the archives and a few of these groups are now being tried and an assessment of the results will be reported to NHPRC in July 1986.

The department's publication of the Managing Public Records series serves as the basis for the educational and training efforts. The five volumes include a handbook and common records retention schedules approved by the State Records Committee for counties, municipalities, school systems, and courts, each published in separate volumes. The handbook explains the Georgia Records Act and how to use the common schedules. Planned subjects for new publications of the series include micrographics, off-site storage, files management, and additional approved common records retention schedules.

Peter E. Schinkel
Georgia Department of Archives and History

FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES BUREAU OF RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: LOCAL RECORDS

The Bureau of Records and Information Management has worked closely with archivists at the Florida State Archives in encouraging the management and preservation of local government records. The archives has participated with the bureau in presenting workshops to local government records custodians and plays an active role in the scheduling and disposition process that insures the preservation of this information resource. Independently, the archives has provided workshops to local records custodians on the management of archival collections, document preservation and archival storage. A "Starting an Archives Workshop" was presented to local groups in Tampa in March, and this workshop will be offered on a continual basis. The Florida State Archives provides technical assistance to local government agencies through site visits. Specialists from the archives's Public Records Section, Conservation Laboratory, and Photographic Collection travel to localities when requested to provide technical information needed to manage and preserve local records. As a special service, the archives provides a security microfilm storage service to local government agencies insuring a protective off-site storage location for their valuable permanent film. The Florida State Archives continually strives to develop and expand its programs to encourage local government officials to preserve their records.

As part of the continuing effort to institute and maintain a training and information program in all phases of records and information management, the Bureau of Records and Information Management is offering specialized training again in 1986. The seminar series includes training in the Public

Records Law, Inventorying Techniques, Scheduling and Dispositioning, Files Improvement, and Machine-Readable Records Management. The seminars seek to bring approved and current practices, methods, procedures and devices for the efficient and economical management of records to the attention of all agencies.

All three seminars are already filled to capacity (over eighty registrants per session). The Bureau of Records and Information Management, as part of its continuing effort to reach and train state and local government records and information managers, is working with the Data Processing Managers Association (DPMA) on their Region 7 Conference and Expo. In addition to the fine seminars and speakers DPMA has arranged, the bureau is providing three nationally recognized speakers in the information management field. This event is scheduled for 14, 15, and 16 May 1986 at the Hyatt Orlando (Disney World).

Gerald J. Clark
Administrator, Public Records Section
Florida State Archives

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS AND THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Like other early state archives, Alabama was initially interested in the preservation of the historical local records by centralizing control. Today, the Alabama state archives is committed to a very different program, one that encourages and equips the local officials to care for their own records. Other than the acquisition of local records that are immediately endangered or available on microfilm, the state archives has adopted the principle that records should remain in the geographical and institutional settings in which they are created. In the localities the records can be better managed, understood, and appreciated.

The transition from a centralized to decentralized system has been one of slow evolution in Alabama. Like other state archives, Alabama was unable to develop a systematic centralized approach for the care of local public records. In 1955, Alabama's state archives became responsible for supporting a County Records Commission, a body charged with the statewide administration of county records, but this commission has been virtually inactive over the past three decades. Eight years later additional legislation--promoted by the Alabama League of Municipalities--was enacted that established procedures for the management of municipal records; this legislation has been more effective than other local records laws, but its focus has been on the destruction of selected records and not on the development of a comprehensive records program. For a brief time in the mid and late 1970s, the Alabama Department of Archives and History supported a small local records section to work with the local governments, but this program was largely reactive with little measurable impact in the improvement of Alabama's local government records.

A renewed interest in local records has emerged in the mid-1980s in evaluation, planning, and working for new resources, largely through the assessment and reporting project sponsored by the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Assessing Alabama's Archives: A Plan for the Preservation of the State's Historical Records, published in late 1985, concluded that the state's local records are in "deplorable condition," legislation is "inadequate" to allow proper administration of these records, and local officials are "greatly interested" in receiving assistance to improve the management of their records. Building on this last positive finding, the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board recommended that the state archives seek the necessary resources to develop a full assistance program and gain stronger legislation to support this development.

Nineteen eighty-five was the beginning of the

unfolding of a new local records program by the Alabama state archives. First, the institution acquired resources to hire three professional archivists to survey, appraise, and schedule local records, provide on-site technical assistance to local officials and records custodians, and develop an ongoing educational program for improved records administration by local officials. New staff will be hired by late 1986. Second, the Alabama Department of Archives and History has sought legislation that would reconstitute the County Records Commission into a Local Government Records Commission and adopt stronger technical standards and procedures for the production of microfilm of public records. The expanded commission will provide an improved means to establish a statewide focus on all local public records from the approval of general retention schedules to the monitoring and sponsorship of legislation that concerns the efficient and economical administration of these records. The legislation regarding micrographics adopts national standards, such as those of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), as state guidelines and reinforces the authority of the Local Government Records Commission in the regulation of local micrographics practices. Third, and finally, the department has made a concerted effort to have a higher profile among the local governments through workshops and attendance at their professional meetings. State archives staff increasingly participate in these meetings; for example, records management sessions are now a common feature of the workshops for the certification of Alabama's municipal clerks.

Local government records represent the most serious of archival problems and challenges in Alabama, but their future management looks brighter now. The staff of the Alabama state archives see themselves as the means to raising the ability of local officials to care for their records. The key is the acceptance by local officials of the responsibility to manage well their records as a

public trust.

Richard J. Cox
Head, Archives and Records Division
Alabama Department of Archives and History



NEWS REELS

Among the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grants approved in October 1985 were the following in the Southeast:

The University of South Alabama in Mobile received \$10,840 to preserve and make available 3,600 photographic negatives in the S. Blake McNeely Collection.

Kentucky State University at Frankfort will receive \$59,610 over two years to establish an archive by collecting historical materials relating to the education of blacks in the Upper South and by developing archives and records management programs for the university.

Of national interest is the NHPRC grant of \$7,500 to the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators to support the state archives preservation needs analysis projects.

★ ★ ★

The St. Augustine Historical Society has received from the city of St. Augustine, Florida city records dating as far back as 1821. The accession includes city council and commission minutes, municipal court documents, ordinances, tax rolls, licenses, and city department records. The materials have been organized and are available for research use. They also include major manuscript collections relating to St. Augustine and Florida history dating from the