

January 1976

## Mass Education in Archival Resources: A Case Study

Lindley S. Butler

*Rockingham Community College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia\\_archive](https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia_archive)



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Butler, Lindley S., "Mass Education in Archival Resources: A Case Study," *Georgia Archive* 4 no. 2 (1976) .

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia\\_archive/vol4/iss2/3](https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia_archive/vol4/iss2/3)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Archive by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

*MASS EDUCATION IN ARCHIVAL RESOURCES  
A CASE STUDY*

Lindley S. Butler

---

**I**n the fall of 1972, the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges began offering in a number of its institutions a course entitled "Research in Local History and Biography: Materials and Methods." The course is designed to provide instruction and experience in research techniques for lay genealogists and local historians. The chief purposes of the course are to upgrade the quality of research being done by countless genealogists and local historians, especially the nonacademically trained, and to awaken interest in the preservation of local history data, artifacts, and architectural fabric. Although the content varies widely because of the diversity in background and experience of the instructors, essentially the students are exposed to primary and secondary sources in the fields of genealogy and local history, learn research methodology and techniques, take trips to local and state archival repositories, and are required to demonstrate their newly acquired skills with a research topic of limited scope.

This course was the dream of Dr. Dallas Herring, Chairman of the State Board of Education, who secured the position of State Coordinator of local history programs in the Department of Community Colleges. The coordinator, Dr. Maurice Stirewalt, then organized a state advisory committee

---

Dr. Butler is Historian-in-Residence at Rockingham Community College, Wentworth, North Carolina. A version of this paper was delivered at the South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference, Raleigh, North Carolina, May 2, 1976.

to formulate and provide guidance for the course. Various members of the state advisory committee have helped the coordinator produce a course syllabus, and some are now engaged in overseeing the writing of a textbook. There are 57 community colleges and technical institutes in North Carolina, and in the first two years (1972-1974) over 1,200 persons enrolled in 59 classes for normally 33-40 hours of instruction. In a few locations a sequel course, or advanced seminar, has been offered so that research projects of greater depth could be completed.

The local history courses at Rockingham Community College, which serves a county of 75,000 population divided evenly between rural and urban settlement, are taught in the continuing education division and are eligible for teacher certificate renewal credit. In the period 1973-1975, the basic research course was offered each fall quarter to a total of 113 students. In the winter quarter of 1974, the advanced seminar was taught to a selected group of 9 students. A natural follow-up to the research courses is a narrative course in Rockingham County history, which has been taught in the spring of each year, and in the period 1974-1976, has attracted 141 students. The basic requirement in the county history course is a research project, such as a brief written report on family or local history, a tape relating to local history, the recording of a cemetery, or a slide-illustrated report on an old home or historic site.

The research course is best taught as a seminar, but with over thirty-five students in each class, it has been conducted with lectures, demonstrations, a sample project kit using deeds, wills, and family records, field trips to the state archives, and guest lectures by archivists, archaeologists, and historians. In the early sessions, the students are introduced to basic historiography and an extensive bibliography of county history and genealogical sources. Then they are exposed to the pertinent county, state, and national records. Major private manuscript repositories, such as those at the Universities of Duke, North Carolina, and Wake Forest, are explored, particularly relevant family, local, and church records. In the context of a survey of Rockingham County history, the importance of private records, newspapers, folklore, historic preservation, and archaeology is stressed.

The student projects vary widely in interest and quality. At present, approximately fifty documented historical



and genealogical studies of a limited nature are available; numerous cemetery surveys have been completed and several published; a tape library has been established; documented studies of a half dozen homes have direct application to a county historic sites survey; a town history has been privately published; and a number of records (especially church records) have been identified and preserved.

The most important result of the local history research courses has been the evolution of *The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy*, a semiannual publication of the county historical society and the first of its kind in North Carolina. After the first year of classes, it was evident that a few publishable articles would be produced, but there was no medium for publication. The journal is directly related to the local history program, and its future depends on continuation of the classes.

Another tangible result is the position of "Historian-in-Residence" at the community college. As a result of the obvious community interest generated by the courses, the college administration in 1974 approved the first Historian-in-Residence in North Carolina and defined the position as a "resident academic humanist thoroughly committed to the teaching and writing of local history. Ideally he will support any history-related community interest and seek to meet the needs of the total community in the field of local history. The position as envisioned is flexible, demanding of the resident historian that he be interested in teaching, research, writing, archives, lecturing, public relations, archaeology, preservation, and restoration." Obviously one person could not possibly be a historian, an archaeologist, a preservation architect, and an archivist, but he would serve as a liaison with regional and state historical agencies that could provide the professional support for specialized activities.

The Division of Archives and History in Raleigh has supported local history instruction from the outset by conducting workshops for new instructors, offering special attention to class groups visiting the state archives search room, providing low-cost student and instructor materials packets, and sending various staff members to conduct class sessions on the state archives and its records. The workshops have been particularly meaningful to the less experienced instructors who were introduced to the holdings of the archives, from government records to private sources, and to the concept

of archival research. Since the courses began, the use of the archives search room for genealogical and historical research has increased tremendously, necessitating the hiring of additional staff. Once introduced to the archives through the research course, many students return on their own time.

The archives materials packets, which contain published guides and leaflets on the use of the state archives, have been especially valuable to both the instructors and the students. Among the materials in the packet are a guide to the Civil War Records, a guide to North Carolina newspapers available on microfilm, a county history bibliography, a leaflet on the federal census, a selected genealogical bibliography, and a leaflet on writing county history.

By far the most important contribution that the state archives has made to local history instruction, however, is the development and distribution of the Core Collection. Very early the state archives staff realized that it had neither the facilities nor the personnel to support adequately the genealogical and historical research being conducted by more than a thousand persons throughout the state. The Core Collection was developed as a microfilm library of those local records, dated before 1868, most frequently used by genealogical and local history researchers. The county collections could be purchased at cost by each instructional institution. The archives was soon inundated with orders for the microfilm, and presently more than fifty of the institutions in the community college system own at least part of the Core Collection, all of which is available through interlibrary loan.

Through the local history research courses, staff members of the Department of Community Colleges, the Division of Archives and History, and many of the individual institutions in the community college system have completely changed the course of local history and genealogical research, writing, and publications in North Carolina. The results have been so overwhelming that the future of local history in this state looks bright for some time to come.



NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Maurice R. Stirewalt, *Local History Research: The First Two Years. A Partial Report* (Raleigh: Department of Community Colleges, 1974), 101.