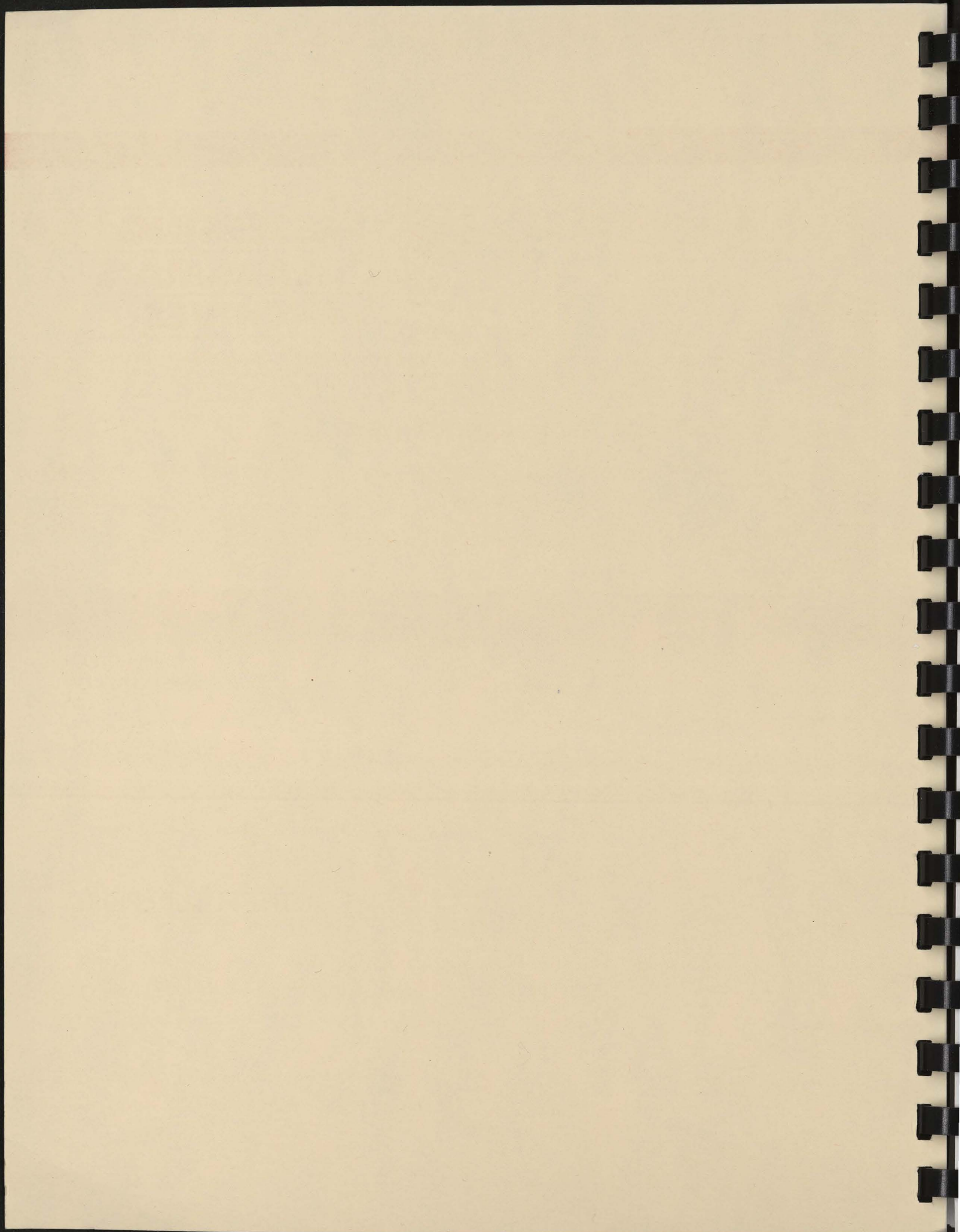


# **ASSESSING ALABAMA'S ARCHIVES:**

A PLAN FOR  
THE PRESERVATION  
OF  
THE STATE'S  
HISTORICAL RECORDS

THE FULL REPORT

Montgomery  
Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board  
1985



ASSESSING ALABAMA'S ARCHIVES

**ASSESSING ALABAMA'S ARCHIVES**

ASSESSING UTAHANA'S ARCHIVES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgments vii

Introduction

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the State Assessment Projects 1

Methodology for Alabama's Assessment Project 4

Limitations of This Report 15

The Structure and Distribution of This Report 17

ASSESSING ALABAMA'S ARCHIVES

Alabama's Archival Heritage (by Richard J. Co.) 18

Records in Early Alabama, 1507-1819 19

"Compelled to hunt up and buy": The Period of Archival Neglect, 1819-1850 23

The Vicissitudes of Documentary Preservation and the the Alabama Historical Society, 1850-1894 26

Thomas M. Owen and Archival Professionalism, 1894-1920 30

Marie Beakhead Owen and the Quest for a State Archives Building, 1920-1945 40

Lost Opportunities: The Historical Records Survey in Alabama, 1936-1942 43

The Emergence of Other Archival Programs, 1948-1967 54

The Resurgence of Archival Professionalism in Alabama, 1967-1984 63

The Report

State Government Records 69

Introduction 69

FINDINGS 70

The program for managing state government records is ineffective. 70

ASSESSING ALABAMA'S ARCHIVES

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Preface and Acknowledgments</u>	vii
<u>Introduction</u>	
<u>The National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the State Assessment Projects</u>	1
Methodology for Alabama's Assessment Project	6
Limitations of This Report	15
The Structure and Distribution of This Report	17
<u>Alabama's Archival Heritage</u> (by Richard J. Cox)	18
Records in Early Alabama, 1507-1819	19
"Compelled to hunt up and buy"; The Period of Archival Neglect, 1819-1850	23
The Vicissitudes of Documentary Preservation and the the Alabama Historical Society, 1850-1894	26
Thomas M. Owen and Archival Professionalism, 1894-1920	30
Marie Bankhead Owen and the Quest for a State Archives Building, 1920-1940	40
Lost Opportunities: The Historical Records Survey in Alabama, 1936-1942	49
The Emergence of Other Archival Programs, 1940-1967	56
The Resurgence of Archival Professionalism in Alabama, 1967-1984	63
<u>The Report</u>	
<u>State Government Records</u>	68
<u>Introduction</u>	68
<u>Findings</u>	70
The program for managing state government records is ineffective.	70

The historical records of Alabama's state government are endangered because of the lack of resources for conservation and preservation. 85

Alabama's state-supported colleges and universities have inadequate programs to administer their records and to preserve their documentation of enduring value. 88

Although information is essential to the operation of democratic institutions, much of the historically valuable information produced by Alabama's state government is inaccessible to itself and to its citizens. 91

Major portions of the existing records legislation are inadequate for the maintenance of an effective administration program for state government records. 96

Despite the present lack of an effective administration program for state government records, there is a general awareness of the need for such a program among state government agencies and the framework in which such a program can be developed. 101

#### Recommendations 105

The state government records administration program must be improved to efficiently manage the state's active records and to identify and preserve those having historical value. 105

The administration of state government records should be promoted by the Alabama Department of Archives and History as an information source for the operation of state government and for the citizens of Alabama. 111

There must be a comprehensive program for the preservation of the state government's historical records including the acquisition of additional high quality storage space. 115

Alabama's state-supported colleges and universities must develop records administration programs that efficiently manage their active records and identify and preserve their historical sources. 120

Legislation must be strengthened to support an effective administration program for state government records clarifying the role and authority of the state archives and State Records Commission. 123



The Alabama Department of Archives and History must cooperate with other state archival institutions and professional records associations to develop strategies for administering state government records.	126
<u>Conclusion</u>	128
<b><u>Local Government Records</u></b>	130
<u>Introduction</u>	130
<u>Findings</u>	134
Many of Alabama's local government records are in deplorable condition - threatening the destruction of this element of the documentary heritage, limiting the use of their informational content for the administration of local government, and jeopardizing the rights of the state's citizenry - and there is no program at present for rectifying this situation.	134
Existing legislation is inadequate for the proper administration of Alabama's local government records, especially the preservation of those having historical value.	143
Local government officials and civil servants are greatly interested in acquiring assistance to improve the administration of their records, although they favor the maintenance of the records in the localities and are not sufficiently aware of the needs of records conservation.	148
<u>Recommendations</u>	154
The Alabama Department of Archives and History should assist Alabama's local government to develop adequate records administration programs.	154
Alabama's records legislation should be strengthened to provide for a statewide, unified administrative program for all local government records.	158
There needs to be a fully developed statewide plan for the administration, identification, preservation, and use of Alabama's local government records having historical value that emphasizes the responsibility of the local public officials.	163
<u>Conclusion</u>	170

<u>Historical Records Repositories</u>	171
<u>Introduction</u>	171
<u>Findings: General Characteristics of Alabama's                   Historical Records Repositories</u>	175
Although there are important collections of historical sources in Alabama's local repositories, institutional acquisition programs are uncoordinated and leave numerous gaps in the documentation of the state's history.	175
Alabama's historical records repositories are under- funded and understaffed, jeopardizing the preservation of the state's documentary heritage.	178
The staffs of Alabama's historical records repositories are interested in improving their programs.	182
<u>Findings: Characteristics of Repository Types in                   Alabama</u>	184
The Historical Society	184
The Local Public Library	187
Colleges and Universities	189
Museums	190
Businesses	193
Churches and Religious Organizations	195
Professional Associations	198
<u>Recommendations</u>	199
Alabama's historical records repositories require a centralized clearinghouse of information to assist them in the improvement of their care and administration of their collections.	199
Alabama's historical records repositories require the creation of a mechanism or mechanisms that will foster cooperation and planning for the improved care of the state's documentary heritage.	203
Alabama's archivists must educate the public about the nature and importance of their work if they hope to preserve the state's documentary heritage.	209

<u>Conclusion</u>	211
<u>Common Problems, Coordinated Solutions</u>	213
<u>Introduction</u>	213
<u>Findings</u>	217
Archivists and historians need to be more effective in demonstrating to the public the value of historical records preservation.	217
Archival cooperation in Alabama has not been as strong as needed for the adequate preservation of the state's documentary heritage.	220
Alabama's documentary heritage is endangered by the lack of adequate preservation facilities.	224
Educational programs about archives and records administration need to be strengthened in Alabama.	227
Alabama's modern history is not being adequately documented by the state's archival repositories.	230
Alabama's records custodians and archivists are strongly interested in improving the administration and preservation of the state's historical records.	231
<u>Recommendations</u>	232
Alabama's archivists must be more effective in informing the public about the value of historical records and of programs to ensure the proper preservation and use of these records.	233
Alabama's archivists and archival institutions need to cooperate in developing stronger archival training and education programs to support those responsible for the state's documentary heritage.	238
There needs to be a planning mechanism that will foster cooperation and coordination for the improved management and preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage.	243
<u>Conclusion</u>	248

Where Do We Go From Here?: Priorities for Alabama's Archives, 1985-87

249

Appendices

Glossary of Used Terms

257

Suggestions for Further Reading

261

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The important thing this report tells us is that we have a great deal to do if we are to preserve Alabama's historical records. It seeks to describe how massive and complex this challenge is and to outline recommendations for improving our effectiveness. Many Alabamians interested in our documentary heritage participated in this study. Although there were occasional disagreements over particular points in the analysis, all the participants shared the common goal of ensuring the preservation and accessibility of our historically valuable records. They also showed remarkable unanimity in the recommendations that are presented here about what needs to be done. The Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board is deeply indebted to all of these participants for the time and the energy they gave to this project.

The study was undertaken by the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board with the support of a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The Commission is sponsoring similar projects in 41 other states as a way of gaining a national view of our historical records preservation needs. Much of what is in this report is a result of the terms specified in the NHPRC guidelines, but the Alabama Board has also tried to tailor the project to the particular needs of our State. The Board, whose membership is listed below, is appointed by the Governor to serve as a grant review body for Alabama projects submitted to the NHPRC. The Board is also responsible for efforts to improve the coordination of archival activities in Alabama.

The Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board wishes to express its gratitude to Governor George C. Wallace for the enthusiastic support he and his staff members have given to this project. Despite very heavy workloads, they have been readily accessible and helpful to us throughout this project, and the interest they have shown for our State's history and historical records is one of the most encouraging signs that future improvements will be forthcoming.

Also, the Alabama Legislature, at the request of the Board, established an Oversight Committee to consider the findings of this project. Representative Glen Browder of Jacksonville is the Chairman of the Committee. Other representatives are Bobby Junkins from Gadsden and George Perdue from Birmingham. The senate members are Chip Bailey from Dothan, Ann Bedsole from Mobile, and Ted Little from Auburn. The Board is grateful to the members of this Committee for their interest in the project and for their thoughtful deliberations over the issues raised in this report.

The project was divided into three major areas--local government records, state government records, and historical records repositories. Three task forces were appointed by the Board to consider the current conditions and needs in each of these areas, and each task force met a number of times, wading through formidable amounts of material. We thank these task

force members, whose names are listed below, for their advice, criticism, and support. Special thanks are due to the task force chairpersons--the Honorable James Record of Huntsville for local government records, the Honorable Carl Elliot of Jasper for state government records, and Mrs. Elizabeth Shown Mills of Tuscaloosa for historical records repositories.

Much of the day-to-day work on this project, and the lion's share of the work in writing it up, was handled by Richard J. Cox, the project director and head of the Archives and Records Division of the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Richard was assisted in the data-gathering, analysis, and project administration by Beth T. Muskat, who worked as project archivist on a part-time basis. Other departmental staff members who contributed time and ideas were Pamela Richardson, Lori Trawick, Alden Monroe, Miriam Jones, and Jane Britton. Margaret Johnson and Deborah Robbins, two Auburn University archival interns, also offered valuable assistance. The work of these staff members at the Department of Archives and History was indispensable to this project.

With our society's development of many new information systems, records are increasing in quantity, complexity, and also fragility. Many of us sense that we are in the midst of a period of major cultural change, comparable in scope to the changes associated with the development of printing presses, but compressed into a far more compact period of time. To ensure

that the historical legacy we received will be passed on to those who come after us, we have to find new and better ways of managing our archival resources. This project is an effort to point out some of the courses that Alabama archivists and those interested in archives believe we must follow if we are to meet this objective.

Edwin C. Bridges, Coordinator  
Alabama Historical Records  
Advisory Board

#### ALABAMA HISTORICAL RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD

Allen W. Jones, Auburn University  
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Daniel T. Williams, Tuskegee Institute  
L. D. McLaughlin, Ozark  
George R. Stewart, Birmingham Public Library  
Edwin C. Bridges, Alabama Department of Archives and History

#### TASK FORCES

##### Local Government Records

James R. Record, Chairman, Huntsville  
Betty Collins, Birmingham  
Grace Hooten Gates, Anniston  
Jay Higginbotham, Mobile Municipal Archives  
Luther M. Holt, Jr., Lee County Council of Governments  
Douglas C. Purcell, Historic Chattahoochee Commission  
David J. Rosenblatt, Auburn University  
Hal Smith, Probate Judge, Lee County  
John F. Watkins, Alabama League of Municipalities  
Marvin Y. Whiting, Birmingham Public Library Archives  
Pete Yonce, Association of County Commissions in Alabama



State Government Records

Carl Atwood Elliot, Sr., Chairman, Jasper  
Joseph D. Caver, USAF Historical Research Center  
Elizabeth C. French, Alabama Commission on Higher Education  
Allen W. Jones, Auburn University  
Ronald C. Jones, Department of Examiners of Public Accounts  
Tennant S. McWilliams, University of Alabama in Birmingham  
Alfred Henry Mitchell, State Finance Department  
Eunice W. Moore, Alabama State University  
Deborah H. Owen, Montgomery

Historical Records Repositories

Elizabeth Shown Mills, Chairman, Tuscaloosa  
Edwin L. Brown, Center for Labor Education and Research, UAB  
Joyce H. Lamont, University of Alabama  
Anthony W. Miele, Alabama Public Library Service  
F. Lawrence Oaks, Alabama Historical Commission  
Lee E. Pike, Alabama Library Exchange  
Marlene Hunt Rikard, Samford University  
Leon P. Spencer, Talladega College  
Michael V. Thomason, University of South Alabama  
Daniel T. Williams, Tuskegee Institute  
Avolee D. Wooten, Southern Natural Gas Company

INTRODUCTION

State Government Records

Carl Atwood Elliott, Sr., Chairman, Jasper  
 Joseph D. Carter, USAF Historical Research Center  
 Elizabeth C. French, Alabama Commission on Higher Education  
 Allen W. Jones, Auburn University  
 Ronald C. Jones, Department of Examiners of Public Accounts  
 Thomas S. McWilliams, University of Alabama in Birmingham  
 Alfred Henry Mitchell, State Finance Department  
 Eunice W. Moore, Alabama State University  
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 F. Lawrence Oaks, Alabama Historical Commission  
 Lee E. Pike, Alabama Library Exchange  
 Marlene Hunt Rikard, Samford University  
 Leon P. Spencer, Talladega College  
 Michael V. Thompson, University of South Alabama  
 Daniel T. Williams, Tuskegee Institute  
 Avonlea D. Woollen, Southern Historical Gas Company  
 Sarah Woolfolk Niglas, University of Alabama  
 Virginia V. Hamilton, University of Alabama in Birmingham  
 Glen Browder, Alabama House Representatives  
 Joseph H. Harrison, Jr., Auburn University  
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 Hal Smith, Probate Judge, Lee County  
 John F. Watkins, Alabama League of Municipalities  
 Marvin T. Whiting, Birmingham Public Library Archives  
 Kate Joyce, Association of County Commissioners in Alabama

**INTRODUCTION**

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# ИНТЕРВЬЮ

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THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS COMMISSION  
AND THE  
STATE ASSESSMENT PROJECTS

This report, the result of a year-long study supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (hereafter referred to as the NHPRC), is about the preservation, management, and use of Alabama's historical records. Before discussing the nature of the Alabama project, however, some mention should be made about the NHPRC, the importance of the state assessment and reporting projects, and Alabama's place in an ambitious effort to compose a plan for the improved care of the nation's documentary heritage.

The NHPRC has a long history, going all the way back to the establishment of the National Archives in 1934.<sup>1</sup> For its initial four decades, until 1975, the purpose of the National Historical Publications Commission, as it was originally called, was to encourage and support the publication of documentary editions. In 1975 the commission expanded its mission to include the funding of projects for the administration of private papers and public records having historical value. Over the past decade the NHPRC has endeavored to spur on the development of plans and priorities for preserving America's documentary heritage. In 1976 the NHPRC's guidelines for records projects affirmed that its

<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction to the origins of the Commission see Waldo Gifford Leland, "The Prehistory and Origins of the National Historical Publications Commission," American Archivist 27 (April 1964): 127-34.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction to the origins of the Commission see Waldo Gifford Leland, "The Prehistory and Origins of the National Historical Publications Commission," American Archivist 27 (April 1964): 187-94.

responsibility was to encourage "a greater effort at all levels of government and by private organizations to preserve and make available for use those records, generated in every facet of life, that further an understanding and appreciation of American History."<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve this, the NHPRC encouraged each state to set up a historical records advisory board to evaluate grant proposals according to state priorities and needs and that could participate in developing a national agenda for the preservation of historical records.<sup>3</sup> "From the very beginning of the records program," wrote one archivist about the NHPRC's program, "it was clear the commission saw the records program as a vehicle to break down those introspective and proprietary attitudes that isolate archivists and to bring together competing interests within a state to talk about basic archival problems and develop common approaches to their solution - in short, to make some plans."<sup>4</sup>

It was out of such sentiments that the state assessment and reporting projects, of which Assessing Alabama's Ar-

<sup>2</sup> NHPRC, Records Program Guidelines and Procedures: Applications and Grants (1976), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Larry J. Hackman, Nancy Sahli, and Dennis A. Burton, "The NHPRC and A Guide to Manuscript and Archival Materials in the United States," American Archivist 40 (April 1977): 201-05; Larry J. Hackman, "The Historical Records Programs: The States and the Nation," ibid. 43 (Winter 1980): 17-32; and F. Gerald Ham, "NHPRC's Records Program and the Development of Statewide Archival Planning," ibid. 43 (Winter 1980): 33-42.

<sup>4</sup> Ham, "NHPRC's Records Program," p. 33.

chives is only one of over forty similar reports, developed.

In 1980 the various state historical records coordinators met in Atlanta to evaluate NHPRC's program and to suggest improvements in its policies and procedures. One of the primary recommendations of the meeting was to promote archival planning as a strategy:

Thorough and skillful planning is a fundamental precondition for progress . . . . It is essential to the process of identifying and analyzing records needs, delineating objectives, devising and testing strategic approaches, and evaluating achievement. The state [historical records advisory] board is an "indispensable vehicle" for such planning, for it can reflect the diverse, sometimes competing, archival interests that must develop a colloquy about mutual problems and their solutions. At the same time, a structure must be created to maintain a dialogue between the boards and the commission so that national planning and priorities mesh with, and truly reflect, state needs. The commission must give greater emphasis to assistance in planning, for it is apparent that many states can greatly benefit from outside help in identifying

responsibility was to encourage "a greater effort at all  
developed. planning goals and developing step-by-step  
planning procedures.<sup>5</sup>

In 1982 the NHPRC provided funds to twenty-seven states and in 1983 assisted an additional fifteen states, including Alabama, to follow this important recommendation in creating statewide historical records plans. The purposes of these projects were to assess the conditions of and make recommendations for improvement in the administration of state government records, local government records, and historical records repositories; evaluate statewide functions such as conservation, education and training, archival and records management advisory and assistance services, and archival program coordination; prepare a report to the public about these concerns; and encourage the state historical records advisory boards to assume leadership in planning and composing records priorities.<sup>6</sup>

The first-round of these state assessment projects were evaluated in June 1983 at a conference sponsored by the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators at the Georgia Department of Archives and History in

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<sup>5</sup> "A National Conference of State Historical Records Coordinators and Representatives of State Historical Records Advisory Boards. Atlanta, Georgia. June 6-7, 1980," Georgia Archive 9 (Spring 1981): 64.

<sup>6</sup> See Guidelines and Goals: NHPRC State Historical Records Assessment and Reporting Projects (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, December 1981).

Atlanta. Several important observations emerged from this meeting. First, historical records programs throughout the United States share many similar problems and weaknesses and, in general, their condition is not good. Second, the degree of success achieved by these assessment projects varied considerably from state to state. And, third, the chances of improvement in the care of historical records appeared to be excellent in the states that had invested significant resources and staff time in the assessment project.<sup>7</sup> Supporting this latter observation is the experience of the New York Historical Records Advisory Board which published one of the best reports and in the two years since then has established a number of important records-related programs that relate to its goals. In this relatively short period of time the New York board has used the report to establish a statewide coalition of archivists and historical records programs, gain state funding for a statewide historical records inventory, make progress towards the creation of a regional repository system, commence a statewide historical documents preservation strategy, and help the state's unified court system to establish a records program.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lisa B. Weber, ed., Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States ([Albany]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators in cooperation with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, [1984]).

<sup>8</sup> Larry J. Hackman, "From Assessment to Action: Toward a Usable Past in the Empire State," Public Historian 7 (Summer 1985): 23-34.

Hopefully, Assessing Alabama's Archives will be the catalyst for similar action in this state.

### Methodology for Alabama's Assessment Project

The methodology used in this project was based upon guidelines issued by the NHPRC and a careful evaluation of the first-round of the assessment projects.<sup>9</sup> An archivist was hired for support in administering the project and in gathering and interpreting information about historical records programs; two intern students spent limited periods of time assisting with the project; task forces of records users, creators, and custodians were set up and used for evaluating state government records, local government records, and historical records repositories; questionnaires were the primary means of gathering information along with some limited interviews and on-site visitations; and every effort was used to publicize the project work, its progress, and its results. Each of these methods will be discussed in greater detail below.

The decision to use a project archivist was made as a result of an evaluation of the first-round of the state assessment projects. Many of these states had hired full-time project directors, turning the planning process over to them and not involving the regular staff of the state ar-

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<sup>9</sup> The Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Head of the Archives and Records Division delivered papers on the assessment project at the June 1983 meeting; see Weber, ed., Documenting America.

chives as fully as possible; the reports of these states were often the weakest, with the least chance of continuing planning after the completion of the grant or in actively using the final report as an advocacy tool. Because of this, and the tremendous changes already underway at the Alabama Department of Archives and History that required considerable planning, it was decided that the Head of the Archives and Records Division should be the project director, that grant funds would be used for support of the project, and that existing staff would be involved as fully as possible. Throughout the assessment process an internal group of staff reviewed and critiqued drafts and revisions of the report. This practice seems to have instilled the notion of planning within the state archives and should strengthen its continuance in the future. At the least, it assisted in the preparation of a better report.

The task force approach has also contributed to the production of a much better project report. The membership of these task forces was carefully selected with two main purposes in mind - to provide a broad variety of perspectives that would be useful throughout the year-long project and to gain supporters for the final report that would play a valuable role in disseminating its results. The former turned out to work well. The task forces evaluated questionnaires before they were sent out, suggested institutions and individuals to contact about the project, identified gaps in the drafts of the report's various sections, corrected errors of

judgment or interpretation, and proposed stronger recommendations for improvements of programs for Alabama's documentary heritage. All signs indicate that the task forces will be extremely helpful in the ongoing use of the final report.<sup>10</sup>

The use of questionnaires turned out to be a difficult, often frustrating, but generally very useful process. The questionnaires' structure and content were based upon NHPRC guidelines and excellent models used by the first-round assessment states of New York, Mississippi, and Minnesota. Questionnaires were individually designed and sent to the following groups: state government agencies, local governments, historical repositories, colleges and universities, and historians within the state. Each questionnaire was sent out with a letter of support from Alabama's governor, a letter of explanation from the state archives director and the project director, a brochure that described the project in greater detail, and a self-addressed envelope to facilitate a greater rate of return. A total of 1685 questionnaires was mailed with a return of 368 (21.8 percent). The use of the questionnaires is considered in greater detail below.

The most successful use of the questionnaires was with Alabama government organizations. Questionnaires were mailed to all ninety-two state constitutional and executive agencies

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<sup>10</sup> The task forces each met three times, and included at least one member of the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board to ensure that group's involvement in all stages of the project.



with sixty-three (68.4 percent) returned: the majority of these questionnaires was completely and accurately filled out and provided, with a few exceptions,<sup>11</sup> a fairly complete portrait of records conditions. Although the rate of return for local governments was lower (26.1 percent of 539) even after follow-up mailings and telephone calls, a good assessment of the condition of these records was gained. A fair representation of the important local government bodies - probate judges, circuit clerks, tax assessors, county commissions, school boards, and municipalities with populations in excess of 1000 - was received that enabled an accurate judgment of the condition of their records programs.

Responses from historical records repositories - private and public institutions that held other than public records - was not as good as those of government bodies. The best rate of return, although a not very satisfactory one, came from historical societies (twenty-four of 138 or 17.3 percent) and public libraries (forty-three of 219 or 19.6 percent). In both cases questionnaires were sent to every one of these institutions and, considering the great importance of these institutions to the preservation of the state's documentary heritage, the low rate of response was further revelation of

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<sup>11</sup> For example, there was a misunderstanding about what "machine-readable" records meant to encompass, some agencies including microfilmed records as well as computer-generated records.

the generally poor condition of their programs.<sup>12</sup> However, responses were received from the vast majority of the larger libraries and historical societies, and a reasonably accurate picture of their records could be drawn. There was also an effort to contact a variety of other repositories and for this sampling was used with mixed results. Fifty businesses of Alabama's primary industries were selected<sup>13</sup> but only five (10 percent) responded. A small number of hospitals from the major urban areas of Montgomery, Birmingham, Mobile, and Huntsville were selected, again producing a low rate of response (three of sixteen or 18.7 percent). The great number of religious institutions in the state posed a difficult problem which was resolved by sending questionnaires to all those known to have archival holdings<sup>14</sup> along with a sampling of churches of each major denomination in the Montgomery area; the response rate (twelve of thirty-four, 35.2 percent) was not conclusive but allowed some reasonable observations. A questionnaire was sent to at least one daily

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<sup>12</sup> The mailing lists of the Alabama Public Library Service and Alabama Historical Commission were utilized for this purpose with cross-checking from other sources such as the directories of the American Association for State and Local History and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

<sup>13</sup> Using the 1980-81 Alabama Directory of Mining and Manufacturing, businesses related to agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction, forestry, and utilities and services were selected; other criteria included companies older than twenty-five years, with fifty or more employees, and geographical distribution across the state.

<sup>14</sup> Based upon information from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

from every Alabama county known to have one with extremely disappointing results (five of fifty-four or 9 percent); fortunately, the recent work of the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama's Newspapers was able to be drawn upon in a useful way. Finally, professional organizations - such as chambers of commerce and fraternal organizations<sup>15</sup> - and museums<sup>16</sup> also were contacted with poor results (only eight of 102 or 7.8 percent of professional organizations and seven of forty-three or 16.2 percent of museums).

One of the most formidable challenges faced by the assessment project was determining how to proceed with the state-supported colleges, universities, and community and technical colleges. These institutions are not only part of the state government system but many collect private papers and even local government records as part of special collections operations. Because of this a longer questionnaire, covering all of these various subjects, was sent to all of these schools with a good return rate (twenty-seven of eighty-four or 32.1 percent) and responses from all of the known major records programs such as the University of Alabama and

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<sup>15</sup> Professional organizations such as business and trade associations, chambers of commerce, fraternal organizations, labor organizations, arts councils, and religious organizations other than churches were contacted in Mobile, Montgomery Birmingham, and Huntsville.

<sup>16</sup> The list of museums was received from the Alabama Historical Commission.

Auburn University.<sup>17</sup>

Questionnaires were also used to gather information about research trends in the state's history and education opportunities for the training of archivists and records managers. Members of the Alabama Association of Historians received questionnaires seeking their opinions about the comprehensiveness of research coverage of Alabama's history and their experiences in conducting research in the state's past. Although the response rate was not great (twenty-five of 150 or 16.6 percent), the replies received provided some very useful information for the project. Questionnaires were also sent to the major colleges and universities about records-related training with an excellent rate of return (thirteen of twenty or 65 percent) including some illuminating reactions about archival education.

The limitations of the questionnaires were corrected in three important ways. First, and most important, the membership of the task forces included representatives from each of the major repositories, records creators, and user groups being queried. Their comments and suggestions helped to correct many of the gaps in the questionnaires and formed the basis of many of the recommendations and findings of the report. Second, the project director used extensively the professional literature available to him to draw broader

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<sup>17</sup> On the other hand the private schools were not as responsive with only six of forty-nine (12.2 percent) completing questionnaires.

conclusions and to formulate preliminary recommendations. For example, the poor results of data gathering from historical societies and museums were somewhat rectified by the publication of a major evaluation of these institutions by the American Association for State and Local History.<sup>18</sup> Such studies have been liberally cited throughout this report for that reason. And third, the Spring 1984 meeting of the Society of Alabama Archivists included a one day open session to consider preliminary findings and recommendations. This meeting was well-attended and included spirited discussion of many of the issues considered in this report.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the assessment project a serious effort was made to publicize it and to encourage responses from the interested public. At the beginning of the project a brochure describing it was published and over twenty-five hundred were mailed to state legislators, members of the Alabama Historical Association and Alabama Association of Historians, local government officials, members of the Society of Alabama Archivists, public libraries, historical and genealogical societies, religious archives, and members of the Council of

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan, The Wages of History: The AASLH Employment Trends and Salary Survey (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984) and A Culture at Risk: Who Cares for America's Heritage? (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> Larry J. Hackman, New York State Archivist and former head of the NHPRC's records program, presented a keynote address on the importance of archival planning at this meeting.

Alabama Libraries, Friends of the Alabama Archives, and the Alabama Historical Commission. Press releases were mailed to over one hundred and thirty newspapers in the state, and the project director and other staff of the archives appeared on television and radio programs, presented talks to various groups,<sup>20</sup> and prepare articles for various state publications like the Alabama Municipal Journal and the Friends of the Alabama Archives newsletter. In addition to this, a legislative oversight committee - composed of three members each of the Alabama House and Senate - was set up to review the report's findings and to visit other state archives.<sup>21</sup> All of this activity produced some useful reactions from the public<sup>22</sup> but, more important, laid the foundation for the future wider use of this final report. A summary of the full report's recommendations has been published and already distributed extensively to generate additional public discussion about the issues concerning the preservation of the state's historical records.

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<sup>20</sup> Such as a workshop for tax assessors and collectors, the annual meeting of the Alabama League of Municipalities, Society of Alabama Archivists meetings, the annual meeting of the Alabama Library Association, and a number of Alabama historical and genealogical societies.

<sup>21</sup> This committee visited the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives.

<sup>22</sup> For example, letters were received from genealogists describing the poor conditions of records in county courthouses.

### Limitations of This Report

Despite efforts, such as those described above, to make this report as accurate and comprehensive as possible in assessing the condition of Alabama's historical records programs, certain limitations remain and need to be stated at the outset. The most important limitation is that this is a planning study which often dictated more restricted investigation than was desired; this is readily evident by the number of recommendations that call for further study. Another limitation was the limited time available for conducting this project which curtailed the possibility of extensive on-site visitations and interviews; this, however, should be more than compensated for by the distribution of the report and further discussions in the future. More serious problems developed in dealing with certain aspects of the state's documentation. The broad responsibilities of the state's colleges and universities caused the discussion of these institutions to be broken apart across the report, restricting the opportunity to focus in great detail upon the problems and needs of these important programs.<sup>23</sup> A similar problem occurred with the county courts which are now part of a unified judicial system under the operation of a state agency, the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC). This

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<sup>23</sup> The most important recommendation regarding these institutions is the need for the development of a mechanism to provide statewide planning and coordination. When, and if, that occurs these institutions will acquire the necessary focus.

structure, plus the fact that the AOC is currently evaluating its own records program, caused this aspect of Alabama's records program to receive briefer attention than might have seemed desirable. Finally, there was little opportunity to study the documentation of Alabama's Native American population which has played an important role in the history of the state<sup>24</sup> or to consider documentary editing projects which have been an essential part of the work of the American archivist throughout this century.<sup>25</sup>

All of the above should also serve as reminders that Assessing Alabama's Archives is not a final report but is intended to serve as an agenda for further archival discussion and planning in the state. If further planning and subsequent activity is successful then this report should be obsolete, except as an historical document of the mid-1980s, within a few years. Its present limitations, along with its more specific findings and recommendations, should be viewed as opportunities and needs for further study, discussion, and action.

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<sup>24</sup> Some "feelers" were put out on this subject but there was not time or staff to investigate more thoroughly. A general observation is that these records suffer from the same problems as other segments of the state's documentary heritage.

<sup>25</sup> See Lester J. Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing Past and Present," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, 23 (January 1966): 56-75 and "American Historical Editors Before Jared Sparks: 'They Will Plant a Forest. . .,'" ibid., 3rd series, 30 (July 1973): 375-400.



### The Structure and Distribution of This Project

The structure of Assessing Alabama's Archives generally follows the guidelines for the project provided by the NHPRC. Specifically, chapters three through seven constitute the official report of the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board; chapter seven, which identifies short-term priorities for the next two years, is a slight variation from the NHPRC guidelines.<sup>26</sup> This chapter, explaining the nature of the project, and the next, providing a review of the history of Alabama's records programs, are an introduction to the project. The final appendices, suggestions for further reading and a glossary of terms, are included to facilitate the use of Assessing Alabama's Archives.

It must also be stated that this version of the report is being distributed only on a limited basis to selected archivists, librarians, historians, and legislators to support further archival planning. This report is available for others who wish to examine its content. For the general public an abbreviated report, focusing upon the recommendations, is being disseminated for inspection. Hopefully, both versions will stimulate discussion and assist in better preserving and managing Alabama's documentary heritage.

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<sup>26</sup> The NHPRC requested the identification of short and long-term priorities for each recommendation. Because of the condition of Alabama's historical records, it was decided to allow the main chapters of the report to serve as the long-term priorities with a separate chapter on immediate needs and priority actions.

The Structure and Distribution of This Project, ...  
The structure of Alabama's Archives, generally,  
follows the guidelines for the project provided by the NHRAC.  
Specifically, chapters are grouped into three categories: the  
official reports of the Alabama Historical Records Advisory  
Board, chapters seven, which identify short-term priorities  
for the next two years, as a slight variation from the NHRAC  
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project, and the next, providing a review of the history of  
Alabama records projects, are an introduction to the pro-  
ject. The final appendix, suggestions for further reading  
and a directory of terms, are included to facilitate the use  
of Alabama's Archives. Archivists and all interested parties  
of Alabama's Archives should find this version of the report  
of all must also be noted that this version of the report  
includes a list of related materials to assist in the  
archival and historical research and to assist in the  
work. Further archival research is available for  
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passing and making Alabama's documents accessible  
to the public. A thorough review of this report will  
assist the public in understanding the report and the  
recommendations. It is hoped that the report will  
assist in the identification of short and long  
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**ALABAMA'S ARCHIVAL HERITAGE**

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by Richard J. Cox

**УГУВВАМЫН ЭВЭЧИЛЭЛТ НЭВЭЛЭГ**

## ALABAMA'S ARCHIVAL HERITAGE

During the past decade or more, the American archival profession has been undergoing intense change. Archivists have questioned the purposes of their profession, debated their identity, scrutinized long-established traditions and practices, and re-formulated the components of their training. Although this period has been, at times, chaotic and tumultuous, there has come out of it a stronger sense of professional purpose and commitment to the archivist's primary mission - the management, preservation, and use of historical records.

Alabama's archivists have been part of this process, but there was an earlier time when Alabamians demonstrated national leadership. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Alabama's Department of Archives and History, the first state archival institution in the country, put the state in the forefront of the fledgling American archival profession. Alabama was a model for the establishment of other statewide records preservation movements. Yet, beginning in the 1920s, the quality of this state archival institution's programs failed to keep up with the continued growth of the profession, and the state lost its position of leadership in the national archival community.

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Records in Early Alabama, 1507-1819

Alabama's colonists were naturally orientated toward Europe. Throughout these years their governmental administrative focus remained with the various mother countries - Spain, France, and England - and the geographical area of what is now Alabama progressed little beyond a wilderness region; the major center of settlement remained on the Gulf of Mexico and even the quantity of population there remained significantly less than most other European colonies in North America.

Consequently, except for scattered letters, diaries, and manuscript remnants, the researcher interested in early Alabama must use European archival resources. In the more populous English colonies of the Eastern coast of North America, government was more equally shared by local governmental bodies and the colonial empire and local public records seemed to possess a greater importance. In some colonies there were even efforts to preserve essential documents in records buildings, primitive by today's standards, but progressive for the eighteenth century colonists.<sup>1</sup> In colonial Alabama, however, the major records

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<sup>1</sup> Both Chesapeake colonies of Maryland and Virginia constructed central repositories for its records considerably before the American Revolution. See Richard J. Cox, "Public Records in Colonial Maryland," American Archivist 37 (April 1974): 263-75 and Louis H. Manarin, "A Building . . . for the Preservation of the Public Records," Virginia Cavalcade 24 (Summer 1974): 22-31.



were created and maintained by the colonial administrative units of the Spanish, French, and British governments. Fortunately, all three of these Western European nations have had long and impressive traditions of archival administration, and the researcher will discover vast quantities of historical records still extant.<sup>2</sup> However, even after a long history of American transcribing and microfilming projects in European archives,<sup>3</sup> the paucity of studies on colonial Alabama subjects reflects the difficulty of researchers achieving access to these materials.<sup>4</sup> Despite the preservation of countless numbers of records concerning early Alabama, scholars interested in those years have found themselves handicapped by the inability of Alabama's modern archivists to acquire adequate finding aids and references to, along with copies of, these important records.

From 1798 to 1817 Alabama was part of the Mississippi Territory and for a much briefer time, until 1819 and statehood, constituted its own territory. Except for a small

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<sup>2</sup> For citations to the literature about this subject, refer to Frank B. Evans, comp., The History of Archives Administration: A Select Bibliography (Vendôme, France: UNESCO, 1979), pp. 45-69, 95-98.

<sup>3</sup> Roscoe P. Hill, American Missions in European Archives (Mexico: Instituto Pan Americano De Geografia e Historia, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> For example, of 315 theses or doctoral dissertations on Alabama history accepted by Alabama's universities and colleges between 1900 and 1968, only nine concern the period prior to the year 1800; Allen W. Jones, comp., "Theses and Dissertations in Alabama History 1900-1968," Alabama Review 22 (July 1969): 208-29.

quantity of records of the Alabama Territory, the responsibility to preserve these documents rested with others. As a result of a territorial form of government, the records for these years became split among Mississippi, Alabama, and federal institutions. Under the Mississippi Territory, records were created and maintained much as they had been in the English colonies and early American states. For example, there were judges of probate, county registers, county treasurers, and a clerk of the legislature all responsible for the orderly maintenance of public records.<sup>5</sup> When the territory was divided into the state of Mississippi and an Alabama Territory in 1817 the care of the older territorial records was also divided. The records of the older Mississippi Territory went with the new state and became the responsibility of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in 1902, where the records remain today.<sup>6</sup> The records of the brief-lived Alabama territory remained with the new state of Alabama, created two years later in 1819, and eventually found their way into the custody of the Alabama Department of Archives and History organized in

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<sup>5</sup> Mississippi Territorial Statutes 1799 (Birmingham, Alabama: Historical Records Survey, 1939), pp. 25, 30, 41-47, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas W. Henderson and Ronald E. Tomlin, comps., Guide to Official Records in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1975), pp. 1-4.

1901.<sup>7</sup> Since the territories were part of a larger federal system, a substantial amount of records also accumulated in the national capitol. These records were gathered and described in 1911, begun to be edited and selectively published in the 1930s, and transferred to the National Archives after its opening in 1934.<sup>8</sup>

Although the territorial records are substantially easier to work with than the earlier records, their scattering among state and federal institutions has hampered research. There is an inventory of the records in the Mississippi state archives, but there is no similar finding aid to the records in Alabama. And efforts to publish comprehensive editions of these records by both states, in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Although these records are rather limited in scope, there are similar records in the counties created as part of both the Mississippi and Alabama territories. These records need to be inventoried and a microfilm edition prepared to preserve them.

<sup>8</sup> For general description of the records and the publications projects, refer to Clarence E. Carter, "The Territorial Papers of the United States," American Archivist 8 (April 1945): 12-35 and "The Territorial Papers of the United States: A Review and a Commentary," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 42 (December 1955): 510-24. For the specific volumes in the series, see Carter, comp. and ed., The Territorial Papers of the United States Volume V: The Territory of Mississippi 1798-1817 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937); Volume VI: The Territory of Mississippi 1809-1817 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938); and Volume XVIII: The Territory of Alabama, 1817-1819 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952).

stimulate research, have been only partial successes.<sup>9</sup> Despite the federally-sponsored publication series, its severe selectivity has only aided limited forms of research. This, and the lack of adequate finding aids to the private manuscripts of merchants and businessmen, politicians, and other pioneers, has fostered a general neglect of early Alabama history.

**"Compelled to hunt up and buy"; The Period of Archival Neglect, 1819-1850**

The years between the War of 1812 and the Civil War brought a tremendous upsurge of interest in historical research and writing and the preservation of historical sources. Histories proliferated, historical societies were organized, documentary editions poured off the presses, historical novels captured the interest of the general populace, and autograph collecting became a passion of the more affluent classes. One historian, striving to label this period, called it a time of "documania."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Dunbar Rowland, comp. and ed., The Mississippi Territorial Archives 1798-1803: Executive Journals of Governor Winthrop Sargent and Governor William Charles Cole Claiborne (Nashville: Brandon Printing Company 1905).

<sup>10</sup> David D. Van Tassel, Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), chapters 9-14. See also George H. Callcott, History in the United States, 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970) and Leslie W. Dunlap, American Historical Societies 1790-1860 (Madison, Wisconsin: Privately printed, 1944).

Aspects of this new national obsession with the past appeared in Alabama. In 1838 the historical novelist W. Gilmore Simms used the state as the setting for one of his books, Richard Hurdis, or the Avenger of Blood: A Tale of Alabama.<sup>11</sup> During the same period Hosea Holcombe traveled throughout the state searching for the records of Baptist churches, producing in 1840 A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Alabama.<sup>12</sup> And, in the mid-1840s, Albert J. Pickett began the vast labors that resulted in the first general history of Alabama, his 1851 History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the Earliest Period.<sup>13</sup>

One effort that did not occur in these years was the venture to preserve original historical sources. Pickett aptly summarized the problem in the beginning of his history:

I have sought materials for a correct history of my country, wherever they were to be procured, whether in Europe or in America, and without regard to cost or trouble. All

<sup>11</sup> William Stanley Hoole, "Alabama and W. Gilmore Simms," Alabama Review 16 (April 1963): 83-107; (July 1963): 185-99.

<sup>12</sup> Davis C. Woolley, "Hosea Holcombe: Pioneer Alabama Baptist Historian," Alabama Review 14 (January 1961): 5-17.

<sup>13</sup> Frank L. Owsley, Jr., "Albert J. Pickett, Historian of Alabama," Alabama Review 11 (January 1958): 31-43.

the Atlantic States have Historical Societies, and books and manuscripts related to those states have been collected. In addition to this, agents have been sent to Europe by different Legislatures, who have transcribed the colonial records which relate to their history - I have had none of these aids. I have been compelled to hunt up and buy books and manuscripts connected with the history of Alabama, and to collect oral information in all directions.<sup>14</sup>

To some extent, Pickett overstated his case in his description of the effectiveness of what many of the other states were doing with their public and private historical records. Despite the creation of historical societies, and scattered documentary projects, all over the South fires and general neglect plagued the preservation of this region's historical sources.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Charles G. Dobbins, "Old Alabama Books: A Collector's Notes," Alabama Review 29 (January 1976): 49.

<sup>15</sup> J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Three Centuries of Southern Records, 1607-1907," Journal of Southern History 10 (February 1944): 3-36 and Philip M. Hamer, "The Records of Southern History," ibid., 5 (February 1939): 3-17. For the best treatment of a single state, refer to H. G. Jones, For History's Sake: The Preservation and Publication of North Carolina History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

The extent of neglect of Alabama's historical records during these years is clear from the maintenance of the public records. From the creation of the state to the mid-nineteenth century there were few laws enacted to safeguard the public records. The most important of such legislation came in 1820 with the provision that the Secretary of State's office be responsible for the care of the legislative records and with efforts in 1822 and 1833 for the consolidation and copying of British, French, and Spanish records in Alabama relating to its colonial period.<sup>16</sup> Even major destructions of records by fire, including the 1849 burning of the new State capitol building, did not stimulate interest in the better care of the documents other than some copying or improved arrangement on shelving.<sup>17</sup> Alabama's documentary heritage remained neglected.

#### The Vicissitudes of Documentary Preservation and the Alabama Historical Society, 1850-1894

By the eve of the American Civil War, the historical society was firmly fixed upon the landscape of American life and culture. Diarist George Templeton Strong eloquently summarized this in 1854 when he noted that these institu-

<sup>16</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1820, p. 112; 1822, pp. 34-35; 1932, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1842, pp. 64, 88-89. Thomas M. Owen, ed., Report of the Alabama History Commission to the Governor of Alabama, December 1, 1900 (Montgomery: Alabama Historical Society, 1901), pp. 87-90.

tions had proliferated as a panacea for the nation's youthful self-consciousness: "We are so young a people that we feel the want of nationality, and delight in whatever asserts our 'American' existence. . . . We crave a history, instinctively, and being without the eras that belong to other nationalities. . . we dwell on the details of our little all of historic life, and venerate every trivial fact about our first settlers and colonial governors and revolutionary heroes."<sup>18</sup> It was precisely such an interest that resulted in 1850 in the creation of the Alabama Historical Society.

The founding of the Alabama Historical Society was largely the effort of a single individual, Basil Manly, President of the University of Alabama, who possessed a religious fervor for education and the ennobling features of patriotism and nationalism. In his 1850 circular soliciting support for the organization, Manly stated that "it is doubted whether any ingenuous and earnest patriotism can be transfused beyond its founders, when a State fails to record and preserve its own history."<sup>19</sup> Although the Society

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<sup>18</sup> George Templeton Strong, Diary, eds. Allan Nevins and M. H. Thomas, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), 2: 196-97.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas M. Owen, "Dr. Basil Manly, The Founder of the Alabama Historical Society," Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1899-1903, ed. Owen (Montgomery: Alabama Historical Society, 1904), pp. 125-40 (quote p. 128). See also Allen J. Going, "Historical Societies in Alabama," Alabama Review 1 (January 1948): 39-43 and Peter A. Brannon, The Years of the Alabama Historical Society (Montgomery: Privately printed, 1964).



issued two transactions during its first few years of existence, it never had more than a small cadre of membership that did more than read historical essays and reflect upon the significance of history.<sup>20</sup> When Manly left the state in 1855 the organization declined quickly, finally killed off by the turmoil of the Civil War years.

Two decades later, in the mid-1870s, the Alabama Historical Society was resurrected. By then there resided in the state historians of all persuasions and interests; local, state, school, and military histories were beginning to be researched, written, and published.<sup>21</sup> The reorganization of the historical society clearly reflected this reborn historical activity, this time led by Joshua Foster, another faculty member of the University of Alabama. A circular issued by the society in 1878 or 1879 included a lengthy list of manuscripts, publications and artifacts that this group was interested in collecting and preserving for re-

<sup>20</sup> Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society at Its First Annual Meeting, Held at the University of Alabama, July 14, 1841 (Tuscaloosa: J. W. and J. F. Warren, 1852) and Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, At the Annual Meeting in the City of Tuscaloosa, July 9th & 10th, 1855 (Tuscaloosa: J. F. Warren, 1855).

<sup>21</sup> For the variety of histories being written during these years see Virginia Pounds Brown and Jane Porter Nabers, "Mary Gordon Duffee, Historian of the Hill Country," Alabama Review 6 (October 1953): 243-55; Lee N. Allen, "John Allen Wyeth: Historian," ibid. 24 (July 1971): 182-91; and Milo B. Howard, Jr., "Histories of Alabama," ibid. 22 (October 1969): 245-50.

searchers.<sup>22</sup> The theme of its monthly newsletter, the Alabama Historical Reporter, likewise stated the society's primary concern to be the preservation of historical sources. In January 1880 the Reporter noted that the "principle object of the Alabama Historical Society, is to collect the data with which the future historian will be enabled to reveal to the coming generation those principles of fortitude, heroism, and patriotism, with which their ancestors opened to civilization the foundations upon which the superstructure of our glorious old Commonwealth is built. . .

."<sup>23</sup> However, by the mid-1880s the society was nearly dormant again, and the task of assembling the state's historical sources quietly forgotten.

The Alabama Historical Society's second demise retarded the preservation of the state's documentary heritage. The society collections were, at best, meager even during its most energetic years. The interest in the care of the public records continued to be occasional legislation aimed at rebinding, reprinting, and indexing.<sup>24</sup> The only bright spot during the second half of the nineteenth century was William Henry Fowler's appointment as State Superintendent of Army Records, and his subsequent gathering of the records of Alabama's soldiers during 1863-1865 formed the nucleus of

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<sup>22</sup> A copy of this circular is in the Joshua Hall Foster Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as A-Ar).

<sup>23</sup> Alabama Historical Reporter 1 (January 1880): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1858, nos. 267 and 268; Second Session, 1861, no. 111; 1865, no. 18; 1888, no. 116; 1892, no. 390.

one of the later Alabama Department of Archives and History's most important collections.<sup>25</sup> Still, an interest in public records never expanded beyond more than modest activity nor could it without the influence and leadership of a statewide historical organization. When the society reappeared in the mid-1890s, the young Thomas M. Owen recorded among its minutes that all that could be done was to meet annually, to endeavor to collect records and sources, and wait until funds were available "to provide proper houses and vaults for preserving the archives which have been collected" in a permanent repository.<sup>26</sup> A new era in Alabama's archival heritage was about to open.

#### Thomas M. Owen and Archival Professionalism, 1894-1920

By the turn of the century two major trends in American historiography appeared that would have an immense impact on American archival development. One was the rise of professional history in the guise of a "scientific" history that emphasized the systematic and objective use of archival sources. Graduate history seminars were likened to laboratories, and historical research was a careful evaluation of sources for absolute truth. The other trend that emerged

<sup>25</sup> Thomas M. Owen, "The Work of William Henry Fowler as Superintendent of Army Records, 1863-1865," Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society 1897-1898, ed. Owen (Tuscaloosa: Alabama Historical Society, 1898), pp. 178-88.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes, June 19, 1894, Alabama Historical Society Press Papers, A-Ar.

was the interest in the Civil War as an epic American event and subject of serious study. From the end of that conflict until well into the 1890s, what passed for its history was generally pro-Northern or Southern rhetoric. In the South, especially, led by the new professional historians, there was a new movement to study the sources and to write more realistically about those years.<sup>27</sup> What pioneer professional historians in Alabama like Walter L. Fleming and George Petrie at Auburn<sup>28</sup> required, however, were collections of historical sources for their and their student's research.

In some ways Thomas M. Owen's emergence as a leader in this period was unlikely.<sup>29</sup> Owen was not formerly trained as a scientific historian. Born in Alabama in 1866, he

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<sup>27</sup> Bert James Loewenberg, American History in American Thought: Christopher Columbus to Henry Adams (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), chapter 16 and Harvey Wish, The American Historian: A Social-Intellectual History of the Writing of the American Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), chapter 11.

<sup>28</sup> Wendell H. Stephenson, "Some Pioneer Alabama Historians: I. George Petrie," Alabama Review 1 (July 1948): 164-79; "II. Walter L. Fleming," ibid. (October 1948): 261-78.

<sup>29</sup> Owen's early career in the creation of a state archives is amply documented in Robert R. Simpson, "The Origin of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," Alabama Historical Quarterly 34 (Summer 1972): 155-70; Wendell H. Stephenson, "Some Pioneer Alabama Historians: III. Thomas M. Owen," Alabama Review 2 (January 1949): 45-62; Milo B. Howard, Jr., "Thomas McAdory Owen: Alabama's Greatest Bibliographer," ibid. 28 (January 1975): 3-15; and James F. Doster, "Thomas McAdory Owen, Sr.," Keepers of the Past, ed. Clifford L. Lord (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 97-108.

studied at the University of Alabama and graduated in 1887 and soon after tried to make a living as a lawyer. As president of the University of Alabama Alumni Society from 1888 to 1890, he began to collect the university publications; this pastime soon blossomed into a wider interest in the history of the state as he realized how poorly its historical sources were being treated. Although there is some evidence that he endeavored to become involved with other individuals of a like mind through the auspices of the Alabama Historical Society, Owen's interests and commitment to the task of the preservation of the state's historical records seems to have emerged independently. Within a few years he had accumulated a library of over two thousand titles of Alabama imprints and histories and towards this end "he begged, borrowed, and purchased."<sup>30</sup>

Because of his declining legal practice, Owen accepted in 1894 a patronage position as a chief clerk in the division of post office inspectors in Washington D.C. Even though he had already embarked upon his personal collecting campaign, his residence in the nation's capitol profoundly renewed his commitment to the need for the preservation of Alabama's historical records. Owen spent a large portion of his time at the Library of Congress, and he became friends with professional Southern historians like Colyer Meriwether and Stephen B. Weeks along with others like Ainsworth R.

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<sup>30</sup> Howard, "Owen," p. 5.

Spofford, the Librarian of Congress, and Thomas Nelson Page, the Southern historical novelist. Owen also became involved with the American Historical Association, for which he undertook two bibliographies of Alabama and Mississippi, projects emanating from his own long-time interests and encouraged by his new colleagues. Indeed, before Owen left Washington he had become intensely dedicated to the notion of a statewide, publicly-funded program for the preservation of Alabama's historical records. In 1897 he prepared a bill recommending the creation of a state commission to study the public and private records of the state and to compose recommendations providing for preservation. Although this was introduced into the Alabama legislature there was no support, and the bill quietly died.

The initial defeat of Owen's efforts did not discourage him but, instead, caused him to realize that he needed to build a broader base of support for his work. Owen turned his attention to the moribund Alabama Historical Society, an organization in which he had briefly been involved in the early 1890s and in which he now recognized its potential as a lobbying force. Owen managed to get a reorganizational meeting in late June 1898 at the University of Alabama and his leadership and dedication to the cause of preserving Alabama's historical records quickly emerged. One historian has stated that his "ability to generate enthusiasm" lay in his "applying the psychology of positive thought." "His genuine enthusiasm about historical work in Alabama and his

assuring his hearers that the state's cultured people were ready to support a substantial revival of the historical society, created in his audience the feeling that they were part of a significant movement."<sup>31</sup> Elected as secretary and treasurer of the organization and persuading the meeting that the governor should be elected its president, Owen, within a year, built a significant membership, generated positive attention to the society's activities by the press, and even secured some modest public funding.

Owen's efforts were rewarded when in December 1898 the state legislature passed his bill for the creation of a historical commission to study the condition of Alabama's historical records and to issue a report to the governor with recommendations for action. The commission, composed of members of the Alabama Historical Society and led by Owen, first met in mid-1899 and at the end of 1900 issued a massive report to the governor. The essential recommendation of the report was the creation of a state-supported department of archives and history that would gather and preserve both public and private historical documents; the remainder of the recommendations, such as for documentary publications and the marking of historic sites, were amply discussed, but were obviously secondary. In the report Owen stated that

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<sup>31</sup> Simpson, "Origin," p. 158.

while the present condition is far wide of what is needful to be done, it is still highly gratifying to note that substantial interest in historical work, investigation and study, is steadily increasing, and as its high moral and ethical value comes to be more understood, that interest will be marvelously quickened.<sup>32</sup>

A publicly-supported state archives was essential, in Owen's estimation, for the nurture and perpetuation of such interests. With the support of the governor,<sup>33</sup> such an institution was established in 1901, the first of its kind in the United States.

The mandate of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, as formulated by the originating legislation, was clear and concise - to collect all historical sources and to encourage research in and greater understanding of the history of the state.<sup>34</sup> Owen immediately made collecting a priority, issuing circulars that solicited the deposit of

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<sup>32</sup> Owen, ed., Report, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Message of Governor William J. Samford, Urging the Importance of a Department of Archives and History (n.p.: Alabama Historical Society, 1901).

<sup>34</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1901, no. 476.



historical sources in the state archives,<sup>35</sup> sensing that serious historical research could not be undertaken until public records and manuscripts were collected and available. In his annual report of 1905 to the board of trustees, Owen strongly argued that the "collection of historical materials was our first duty" since many sources were endangered and other collectors were active. He himself feared that this might appear "onesided," but he was committed to the notion that "let the materials be assembled and the [historical] writing will take care of itself."<sup>36</sup>

There is little question that the collection of Alabama's historical records remained Owen's primary focus. However, Owen realized that the success of this goal was dependent upon the use of these historical resources in serving state government and the citizens at large. For this reason, Owen frequently appeared as a member of important state committees and commissions and effectively used his institution's information resources to support the improved administration of government. These services brought increased support for the archives. For example, in

1903 Owen stated that the primary problem confronting his

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Appeal for Old Newspaper Files, Early Imprints, Portraits and Photographs of Editors and Publishers, and Relics of the Alabama Press, circular no. 7 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1904) and Flags and Relics of Alabama Commands in the Confederate States Army, circular no. 2 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1903).

<sup>36</sup> 1905 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

program was a lack of space;<sup>37</sup> in the same year, he became secretary of the Alabama Capitol Building Commission, the group responsible for overseeing the enlargement of that structure, and used this position to acquire a significant allocation of space for the archives program when the work was completed four years later.<sup>38</sup>

Owen's success with the building commission perhaps was the catalyst for the expanded role of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. After 1907, Owen seemed to emphasize an extremely multifaceted program that concentrated upon one mission, the establishment of the state archives as the source of information for the administration of state government. In 1907 the responsibilities of the institution were expanded to provide a program for the establishment and maintenance of public and school libraries and to provide a reference system for the Alabama legislature.<sup>39</sup> Whether Owen directly lobbied for this new program is uncertain, but it is obvious that he energetically labored at both new responsibilities, especially that of legislative reference,

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<sup>37</sup> 1903 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar. See also his "Survey of History Teaching in Alabama," Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the Alabama History Teachers Association April 6, 1917, Montgomery, Ala. (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1917), pp. 13-34.

<sup>38</sup> Laws Governing the Department of Archives and History, Bulletin no. 4 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1907), p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1907, no. 255.

as a means of achieving strong support for the state archives. In his 1914 annual report, Owen graphically described his ambitious aims:

As soon as the list of the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives could be made up after the primaries, letters were dispatched to each, tendering the Department services by way of assistance in all matters of a legislature character which might engage their attention. In a few days copies of the 1913 edition of the Official and Statistical Register were forwarded. Later the members of the present Legislature who had already served in that capacity, were written suggesting that if they were interested in any old legislation which had failed of passage, we would be glad to send them copies of the original bills which had been submitted on such questions.<sup>40</sup>

For such assistance, the Alabama legislature commended the Alabama Department of Archives and History,<sup>41</sup> placed Owen on an important commission to study and prepare legislation for

<sup>40</sup> 1914 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>41</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1915, no. 799.

the next session of the legislature,<sup>42</sup> and, most importantly, passed a law that required all public officials to properly maintain their records including the provision that all non-current records must be transferred to the state archives.<sup>43</sup>

Underlying all of Owen's activities was his strong sense of commitment to the developing archival profession, a movement that began with the founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History in 1901 and culminated in the founding of the Society of American Archivists in 1936.<sup>44</sup> Owen assumed a leadership role in this movement, presenting papers to the American Historical Association advocating the creation of other state archives, writing numerous letters to his colleagues about archival matters, chairing the Conference of State and Local Historical Societies, and serving on the Historical Manuscripts Commission.<sup>45</sup> Owen

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<sup>42</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1915, no. 828. Other members of the commission included the governor, chief justice of the Supreme Court, presiding judge of the Court of Appeals, and the attorney general.

<sup>43</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1915, no. 237. Owen considered this the most important achievement of the Department of Archives and History to that point; 1915 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>44</sup> William F. Birdsall, "The Two Sides of the Desk: The Archivist and the Historian, 1909-1935," American Archivist 38 (April 1975): 159-73.

<sup>45</sup> Stephenson, "Owen," pp. 53-61 and Doster, "Owen," pp. 105-06. For one of his most important papers, see "State Department of Archives and History," Annual Report of the American Historical Association 1904 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), pp. 237-57.

remained abreast of and adopted archival principles, such as that of provenance (the arrangement of records by creating office), for his work in the state archives.<sup>46</sup> For the first twenty years of its existence, the Alabama Department of Archives and History was one of the pre-eminent institutions in the nascent archival profession and a model for other states to emulate.

### Marie Bankhead Owen and the Quest for a State Archives

#### Building, 1920-1940

Thomas M. Owen's premature death in 1920 was a severe blow to the continuing development of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Owen had achieved significant success in making his institution a vital administrative arm of state government and a professional leader for the public libraries and historical societies, but the program was far from established. The Alabama Department of Archives and History was underfunded, understaffed, and without a permanent home. The choice of his wife, Marie Bankhead Owen, a member of one of Alabama's oldest and most politically powerful families, appeared to be the right choice to correct these ills, as well as the individual most cognizant of Thomas' goals and plans for the archival institution.

<sup>46</sup> Richard C. Berner, Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), p. 13.

From 1920 to 1940 the directorship of Marie Bankhead Owen was devoted to a single cause, the construction of a separate building for the Alabama Department of Archives and History. In 1919 the Alabama Memorial Commission, formed to commemorate the veterans of the First World War and earlier wars, decided that the most appropriate memorial would be a permanent home for the state archives, acknowledging the fact that its historical collections were poorly housed in the capitol building.<sup>47</sup> This commission set out to raise the necessary funds from private sources, and Mrs. Owen resolutely made this campaign her first priority, calling its success in her first annual report "one of her heaviest responsibilities."<sup>48</sup>

Mrs. Owen's quest for a state archives building was, of course, a justifiable one. In 1921 she lamented that the collections were "scattered all over the capitol building," and there was not even sufficient room to work on the organization of these materials.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the decade the "temporary" storage of many of the collections in buildings such as an old Baptist church, daily subjected these histor-

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<sup>47</sup> Campaign Handbook: Suggestive Speech and Publicity Material for Use of Speakers, Directors and Others, in the Campaign for Funds for the Alabama Memorial (Montgomery: Alabama Memorial Commission, 1919), pp. 7-8, 13-16.

<sup>48</sup> 1920 Annual Report, p. 19, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>49</sup> 1921 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

ical sources to pilferage and vandalism.<sup>50</sup> A year later the condition of the state archives was described as one of "embarrassment," sufficient to have "aroused the various patriotic and civic organizations to a determination to use their influence and efforts for relief...."<sup>51</sup> Mrs. Owen likened her role in this matter to that of "the importunate widow of Scripture who cried for bread for her children."<sup>52</sup> Even so, this begging would have to continue for many more years.

The ultimate success of Marie Bankhead Owen in acquiring the state archives building did not come through any of her pleadings within the state, but rather through her political connections on the national level and the availability of large amounts of funds for state and local projects through the New Deal programs. Mrs. Owen had nearly resigned in the early 1930s because of her repeated failures to acquire a better financial foundation for the state archives and her own declining fortunes.<sup>53</sup> But the new federal program provided an excellent opportunity because of

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<sup>50</sup> 1929/30 Annual Report, p. 21, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>51</sup> Tyler Goodwin, "Alabama State Department of Archives and History," Alabama Historical Quarterly 1 (Winter 1930): 364, 366.

<sup>52</sup> 1930/31 Annual Report, pp. 3-4, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>53</sup> Wayne Flynt, Montgomery: An Illustrated History (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1980), pp. 98-99.

her brothers, John H. Bankhead, one of the ranking members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and William B. Bankhead, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Senator Bankhead, a member of the state archives' board of trustees, was appointed to lobby in the nation's capitol for the necessary funds in 1934 and an architect was employed to design the building.<sup>54</sup> By 1938 the building was under construction, and it was fully operative by the early 1940s.

The acquisition of the building was a major accomplishment, one that drew attention from other archivists, attracting the fourth annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists to Montgomery in late 1940. But the dedication address of the new building by the Archivist of the United States, R. D. W. Connor, revealed a major weakness of Alabama's archival program in those years. Connor lavished praise upon Thomas Owen's career and achievements and saw the new building as his success; there was hardly a mention of Mrs. Owen or the nature of the Alabama program as it was then constituted.<sup>55</sup> The truth of the matter was that

through the twenty years after Owen's death, despite the campaign to acquire the building, the goals and vision that Owen had possessed for the program had been dissipated by

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<sup>54</sup> 1938 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>55</sup> R. D. W. Connor, "Dedication of the Archival Section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building," American Archivist 4 (April 1941): 77-83.



efforts to cover too broad an area with too few resources. Despite the magnificent new building, the program of the Alabama Department of Archives and History was probably weaker in 1940 than it had been in 1920.

Mrs. Owen sought to expand the scope of the Department with the creation of a museum, not just on the history of the state but on art and other broadly-conceived schemes. In 1924, she accepted copies of European paintings; "while these pictures are not of a character pertaining to our history," she wrote, "they will form the foundation of a collection for our fine arts section which in time the Department will inevitably set up."<sup>56</sup> In fact, Mrs. Owen saw the need for the Memorial building as greater for a museum function than a repository for the public records and historical collections. The original 1919 report of the Memorial Commission had envisioned the building as a "memorial...rather than utilitarian agency" and as "a temple of patriotism with the relics of a heroic struggle set around and about,"<sup>57</sup> a purpose which Mrs. Owen apparently saw as paramount. The new home of the Alabama Department of Archives and History was primarily a memorial to honor those who had served the state and was not designed as a functional building in which to preserve the past's artifacts and

<sup>56</sup> 1924 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>57</sup> Campaign Handbook, p. 16.

sources or to study them.<sup>58</sup>

One of the programs most revealing of the weaknesses of the state archives during these years was its publication "series". During Thomas Owen's tenure there was a continuity to the publications, the majority of them being tracts on the purposes of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, plans for collecting historical sources and artifacts, references for the administration of state government, and articles about Alabama history. Under Marie Bankhead Owen the publications appeared more sporadically and reflected her own eclectic interests in historical novels and plays and essays on patriotism.<sup>59</sup> The state archives published promotional literature about the state, Indian treaties, a few superficial biographical sketches, revisions of the State constitution, editions of the Official and Statistical Register, along with several noteworthy

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<sup>58</sup> 1927/28 and 1938 Annual Reports, p. 11, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>59</sup> Her most successful work was in the editing and publishing of material previously gathered by Thomas: Thomas M. Owen, History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, 4 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1921) and Marie Bankhead Owen, comp., Our State - Alabama, Historical and Patriotic Series no. 7 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1927).

historical studies.<sup>60</sup> Missing were annual reports of the department, published plans and goals of the state archives, and publications that reflected a commitment to a focused program for the systematic identification and preservation of the state's historical records. The most innovative of the publications was the Monthly Bulletin, started in January 1925 for the purpose of providing news about the programs and activities of the institution to both the general public and state government. However, the newsletter soon deteriorated into nothing more than historical vignettes with little of the activities or explanations of purposes of the state archives; it quietly ceased publication with the May/June 1926 issue and appears not to have been missed.

The most unique program that appeared during the twenty years after Thomas Owen's death was a program for the creation of model county historical societies. Mrs. Owen recorded in her 1927/28 report that it had "long been" her plan "to attempt as a model demonstration the organization

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<sup>60</sup> For the diversity of these publications, see the following: The Mobile Basin and Tennessee River Improvement Association Promoters of Improved Waterways to the Gulf of Mexico, Water Transportation and the Development of Hydroelectric Power, Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 8 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1928); Nicola Marschall Designer of First Confederate Flag, Historical and Patriotic Series, no. 12 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, c. 1934); and Thomas Perkins Abernethy, The Formative Period in Alabama 1815-1828, Historical and Patriotic Series, no. 6 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1922).

of a County Historical Society."<sup>61</sup> Actually, this appears to have been the idea of Peter A. Brannon, who had served on the staff of the state archives in a variety of positions for over twenty years and who was acting director in 1926 when Mrs. Owen took a leave of absence. During his brief tenure, Brannon aggressively tried to extend the services of the Alabama Department of Archives and History to counties throughout the state. He even endeavored to inventory county records, using questionnaires and friends and colleagues who volunteered their time.<sup>62</sup> A few years prior to that Brannon had done extensive field work for the state archives and, primarily on his own and in his capacity as President of the Alabama Anthropological Society, succeeded in establishing several county historical societies.<sup>63</sup> Brannon's interests and plans and those of Mrs. Owen for the state archives led to an inevitable clash upon her return that nearly cost Brannon his job and generated considerable publicity about the tensions within the institution.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, Mrs. Owen never discussed such leadership for

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<sup>61</sup> 1927/28 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>62</sup> 1926 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>63</sup> 1923 Annual Report File, Brannon's Report to the Director, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar. See also the list of county historical societies in the Monthly Bulletin 1 (May 1925): 45.

<sup>64</sup> 1927/28 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

the state archives again until she issued reports of the work accomplished by the Historical Records Survey a decade later.

Despite the 1940 meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Montgomery and their celebration of the opening of the Memorial Building, the Alabama Department of Archives and History had long ceased to be the professional leader that it had been under Thomas M. Owen. In 1940, upon the urging of the society's president, the Society of American Archivists composed a model public records act that had little similarity to what existed for the Alabama state archives. The model act included a definition of public records, standards for the physical maintenance and protection of these records, their legal protection, provisions for their orderly disposition and selective destruction, and the centralization and public access to these records.<sup>65</sup>

Although Thomas M. Owen had originally conceived the main purpose of the Alabama Department of Archives and History to be the protection and management of the state's public records, few of the necessary elements of the Society of American Archivists' model law were evident in the legal foundation of the Alabama institution. Instead, much greater attention was given to the location and preservation of aboriginal mounds and antiquities, the newly created

<sup>65</sup> "The Proposed Uniform State Public Records Act," American Archivist 3 (April 1940): 107-15. See also Albert Ray Newsome, "Uniform State Archival Legislation," American Archivist 2 (January 1939): 1-16.

public library service division, and assistance to the county and municipal libraries.<sup>66</sup> Many of these services, of course, had been anticipated by Thomas Owen, but by the 1940s they had somehow become paramount or, at the least, had overwhelmed the primary responsibilities of the Alabama State archives because of the limited staff and financial resources. The construction of the Memorial building was a wonderful achievement, but even it could not hide the fact that the Alabama Department of Archives and History had not kept pace with the archival profession and its improving standards and practices. Alabama's premier archival institution seemed to lack a coherent plan and a strong commitment to providing leadership within the state for the preservation of historical records.

**Lost Opportunities: The Historical Records Survey in Alabama, 1936-1942**

It was a queer paradox that during the same years that any coherent mission of the Alabama Department of Archives and History seemed to be ebbing, there appeared one of the greatest opportunities within this century to identify and preserve the records of America's past. The Historical Records Survey (hereafter cited as the HRS) was a federally-funded relief program that appeared in the mid-1930s, producing thousands of guides and inventories to manuscripts and public records, and providing a major stimulus to the

<sup>66</sup> The Code of Alabama, 1940, Title 55, chapter 7, articles 1-4.

young archival profession. In Alabama, however, as in many other states, the story of the HRS was that of a lost opportunity.<sup>67</sup> By the end of the HRS in 1942, the staff of the Alabama Department of Archives and History possessed more information about the records in the state than it had had at any other time in its forty-year history, but it failed to capitalize on that knowledge in developing coordinated records programs.

One of the primary reasons for this failure was the differing philosophies of the state archives and the HRS. Ironically, the state archives had begun to use relief funds in 1933, three years before the HRS, to work with the state's historical records. Early in that year the Alabama Red Cross had asked the state archives if it could develop programs for individuals on relief and from then until 1936 - with funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Civil Works Administration, and the Federal Emergency Relief Agency - it employed hundreds of individuals in many of the counties on historical projects. Although eventually inventories of selected county public records were started, Marie Bankhead Owen's interest was in the labor-intensive

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<sup>67</sup> For background on the HRS see Edward Francis Barrese, "The Historical Records Survey: A Nation Acts to Save Its Memory," Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1980; David L. Smiley, "The W.P.A. Historical Records Survey," in In Support of Clio, eds. William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958), pp. 3-28; and Loretta L. Hefner, ed., The WPA Historical Records Survey: A Guide to the Unpublished Inventories, Indexes, and Transcripts (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1980).

production of transcriptions to be deposited in the state archives, work that the HRS would continue but not emphasize.<sup>68</sup>

When the HRS commenced in early 1936 the differing approaches, exacerbated by other factors, caused the Alabama Department of Archives and History to hesitate in its support of the federal program. The HRS was primarily interested in the production of guides to records and not in massive copying. Gradually, the HRS also became conscious of its role in the promotion of improved records administration. In mid-1938, James E. Rice, Director of Alabama's HRS, wrote that the survey, among other things, would assist local governments in their political administration and in the proper care of their records.<sup>69</sup> By the end of the project this was recognized as one of the major accomplishments of the HRS. But Marie Bankhead Owen did not fully appreciate this. For one thing, the HRS, working out of the state headquarters in Birmingham, was not under the control of the Alabama Department of Archives and History as were previous relief projects, a problem for Mrs. Owen since

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<sup>68</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen to Thad Holt, 23 February 1933; Thomas M. Owen, Jr. to the Alabama Relief Administration, 25 April 1933; Marie Bankhead Owen to the American Red Cross, 20 January 1933; Thomas M. Owen, Jr. to Marie Bankhead Owen, 11 May 1935; and Marie Bankhead Owen to A. J. Hawkins, 25 July 1935, all in the WPA Records, A-Ar. See also the 1931-34 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>69</sup> James E. Rice to Luther H. Evans, 3 June 1939, WPA Records, A-Ar.



she had used these projects to find positions for friends and acquaintances.<sup>70</sup> The HRS program also shifted the focus of these projects away from the state archives, seeming to threaten its four decade old dominance of control over Alabama's historical records. Peter Brannon, who ran some of the relief programs for the state archives, revealed the nature of this concern when he suggested in early 1936 that the state archives should direct the new HRS because of its resources and staff expertise: "The material through which your Historical Records Survey could be carried on is here in our files, and I unhesitatingly say that I believe you could do more effective work right here in the Capitol than any group of untrained and temporarily-working assistants will ever be able to do by a field campaign. Without any egotism whatever, I believe I can say that I know the location of practically all of the historical material, in public and private hands, in the State."<sup>71</sup> And, finally, Marie Bankhead Owen's preoccupation with the use of historical records for genealogical research and patriotic projects was not shared by the HRS. The start of the HRS work coincided with the full emergence of her idea of the build-

<sup>70</sup> The WPA records, A-Ar, contain correspondence with Mrs. Owen on this subject. Most revealing, of course, is the fact that she placed her son in charge of these projects, her heir-apparent until he went to the newly-established National Archives in 1935, remaining there until his death in late 1948.

<sup>71</sup> Peter A. Brannon to Marvin M. Capps, 24 February 1936 and Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, 28 January 1936, WPA Records, A-Ar.

ing of the Department of Archives and History as a patriotic memorial and shrine.<sup>72</sup>

Gradually, the hostilities between the HRS and the Alabama Department of Archives and History subsided into peaceful and cordial co-existence. The state archives acquired some staff for their limited projects of cemetery transcriptions and newspaper clippings, and the HRS administrators in Alabama seemed especially adept in working with Mrs. Owen, deferring to her in many areas and encouraging the deposit of discovered collections within the archival repository.<sup>73</sup> When in 1939, Congress required that the states jointly sponsor such relief projects as the HRS, the Alabama Department of Archives and History took over its sponsorship, chiefly, it seems, to staff the new archives building and to resurrect projects that could be more consistent with its interests.<sup>74</sup> Mrs. Owen used the new sponsorship role to successfully resist many projects not within her interests and to equip the large new building with a

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<sup>72</sup> This was, of course, chiefly embodied in the construction of the archives building, a project that occurred during the HRS years.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Mrs. Owen contended that the clipping of newspapers was an archival project and the state HRS provided assistance; see Mary Weber to Marie Bankhead Owen, 6 June 1939, and Owen to Weber, 7 June 1939, WPA Records, A-Ar.

<sup>74</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen to Mary Weber, 5 February 1940, WPA Records, A-Ar.

suitable workforce.<sup>75</sup> As the HRS project slowly closed down in 1941 and 1942, the director of the state archives, as reflected in her annual reports to the trustees, had little to say about the HRS and its value and, instead, was stressing art and museum projects to fill the rooms of the spacious building.

The Alabama HRS accomplished many important projects in the state. It inventoried most of the records of Alabama's sixty-seven counties, publishing guides to the records of thirteen between 1938 and 1942.<sup>76</sup> It also published several important guides to church records, public vital statistics, and early Alabama imprints,<sup>77</sup> all of which remain valuable to researchers even today. In fact, a large portion of the reference resources of the Alabama Department of Archives and History continue to be based upon the products of the HRS workers. Certainly, the HRS was second only to the founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

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<sup>75</sup> For example, she refused to help with a military history of Alabama because she did not wish "untrained research workers and amateurs" to "mess up" their military records, records long administered by Peter Brannon; see Marie Bankhead Owen to Mary Weber, 2 July 1941, WPA Records, A-Ar.

<sup>76</sup> The following counties were subjects of published inventories: Clay (1941), Colbert (1939), Conecuh (1938), Cullman (1941), Greene (1942), Hale (1940), Lowndes (1939), Madison (1942), Marengo (1940), Sumter (1940), Talladega (1940), Wilcox (1942), and Winston (1941).

<sup>77</sup> For example, Inventory of the Church Archives of Alabama: Protestant Episcopal Church (1939); American Imprints Inventory: No. 8 Check List of Alabama Imprints 1807-1840 (1939); and Guide to Public Vital Statistics in Alabama: Preliminary Edition (1942).

in its importance to the preservation and use of the state's historical records.

However, the HRS could have been far more important and useful than it was. Some of these lost opportunities were not peculiar to Alabama. The beginning of the Second World War abruptly ended the program and in not one state were all of its projects completed. In fact, in most states the records of the HRS were dumped, forgotten, abused, and destroyed.<sup>78</sup> As one recent historian has pointed out, the

HRS was in existence above all to employ the unemployed and it was successful in that regard, any other benefits being simply icing on the cake.<sup>79</sup> Still, the reasons for the

neglect of the HRS in Alabama was due to the increasingly limited vision of the state archives. The construction of its building diverted attention to itself and away from any wider role as a force in identifying and preserving the state's historical records. The HRS provided the state archives with tremendous knowledge about the state's records

that it could have utilized for the establishment of a much more effective and comprehensive program for state and local government records and the repositories of historical re-

<sup>78</sup> Leonard Rapport, "Dumped from a Wharf into Casco Bay: The Historical Records Survey Revisited," American Archivist 37 (April 1974): 201-10.

<sup>79</sup> Burl Noggle, Working with History: The Historical Records Survey in Louisiana and the Nation, 1936-1942 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

cords.<sup>80</sup> Instead, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and all Alabamians interested in their state's past, lost a golden opportunity.

#### The Emergence of Other Archival Programs, 1940-1967

After the Second World War, Alabama, along with many other states, again experienced a tremendous renewal of interest in its history. Expanding graduate history programs, increased interest in family and local history, the beginning of a historic preservation movement, and the organization of professional and amateur scholars all directed attention to the need for the preservation and management of the state's historical resources. The coming of age in Alabama was signified by the creation of the Alabama Historical Association in 1947 and the founding a year later of its historical journal, The Alabama Review. The association developed programs for the marking of historic sites, the holding of meetings and pilgrimages, the encouragement for the creation of local historical organizations, all fostering a greater awareness of the history of the state.<sup>81</sup> The Alabama Review had an especially significant role through the publication of articles about the

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<sup>80</sup> For example, it condensed and codified legal requirements regarding record keeping in A Partial Check List of Records Required or Permitted by Law in Alabama (1938).

<sup>81</sup> James F. Sulzby, Jr., "The Alabama Historical Association, 1947-1957," Alabama Review 10 (July 1957): 176-83 and "The Paths We Came By: Our Silver Anniversary," ibid. 25 (October 1972): 262-80.

state's past that pointed up the need for better ways to manage the state's documentary heritage. In 1954, for example, a prominent Southern historian wrote that the history of the region was being neglected and, as a consequence, its records were being allowed to rot: "Old family letters, diaries, county and city records, account books of stores, farms, and plantations are daily perishing, and with them a substantial evidence of the past. Courthouse records. . . are being burned, destroyed by rats, insects, and mould, or being used for door stops and sold for scrap paper."<sup>82</sup> A few years later Alabama congressman Carl Elliot, a local historian and collector, wrote about the need for every citizen to be involved in the process of preserving historical sources:

The preservation of local historical materials is worthy of the interest of every man, woman, and child in the community. Teachers, librarians, scholars, and amateur historians working together will save our history and bring about a better understanding of our community life now and for those who come after us . . . . The history of our town, county, state, and of our nation,

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<sup>82</sup> Frank L. Owsley, "The Writing of Local History," Alabama Review 7 (April 1954): 114.

begins at home -- with you and me.<sup>83</sup>

When such renewed interest in the past appeared, the Alabama Department of Archives and History was still the dominant archival repository in the state, and it was certainly not insensitive to that interest being generated for protecting the state's documentary heritage. Immediately after the close of the Second World War the state archives initiated programs for the protection of the public records and hired a field worker who traveled across the state visiting courthouses, soliciting private manuscript collections, and speaking to local genealogical, patriotic, and historical associations about the programs of the state archives. Out of this came two new laws in 1945 allowing for the depositing of non-current county records in the Alabama Department of Archives and History and providing an improved definition of public records that insured their inspection by staff of the state archives for the identification of those that possessed historical value.<sup>84</sup> By the end of the 1940s, as well, the state archives launched a

<sup>83</sup> Carl Elliott, "History Begins at Home," Alabama Review 11 (July 1958): 196.

<sup>84</sup> Maud McLure Kelly, "Recent Legislation Concerning Alabama's Public Records," Alabama Historical Quarterly 7 (Spring 1945): 77-82; Acts of Alabama, 1945, nos. 291, 486; 1945 Annual Report, pp. 17-21, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

modest microfilm program for county records.<sup>85</sup>

These efforts by the Alabama Department of Archives and History, however, were not sufficient to make a substantial impact on the state's records problems. Very few county records were accepted for deposit and fewer still were microfilmed. In the 1954 annual report, for example, it was noted that the fieldworker "believes that there is a great need for someone in the field all the time just working in this phase of our work [with the counties], because as county officials change the new ones have to learn the value of their records and the assistance we can give them, to the advantage of all."<sup>86</sup> Manuscript collections steadily arrived at the state archives throughout these years but they received only rudimentary cataloguing. Meanwhile, by the early 1950s the public records had filled the building, and the quest for additional space had begun.<sup>87</sup> All of the archives' programs were severely limited by the number of staff and the variety and quality of resources in general.

This period also brought with it a transition in the leadership of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

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<sup>85</sup> Montgomery Advertiser, 31 March 1948; Mobile Press, 24 August 1948; Montgomery Advertiser, 15 May 1949; 1946 Annual Report, p. 21, and 1950 Annual Report, pp. 6-7, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>86</sup> 1954 Annual Report, p. 12, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>87</sup> 1953 Annual Report, p. 2, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.



that further weakened its effectiveness, especially its role within the state for the preservation of historical records. By the early 1950s Marie Bankhead Owen was well into her eighties and her health was declining. The senior staff of the state archives also had not changed for nearly three decades<sup>88</sup> and seemed not to have kept up with the changing theories and methodologies of the archival and library professions. In 1955, Mrs. Owen retired and the directorship of the archives passed to Peter A. Brannon who was in his early seventies and who had held a variety of positions within the institution for over four decades. Despite an immense knowledge of Alabama history, Brannon was not favorably disposed toward new practices and technologies - especially records management and microfilm - that were then emerging as important archival tools. This fact attracted some public attention and even fostered a brief struggle for his ouster.<sup>89</sup>

In the midst of the controversy concerning Brannon's appointment and as a result of it, legislation was passed that greatly expanded the responsibilities of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. In 1955 State and

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<sup>88</sup> The longevity of the staff was occasionally heralded as a positive attribute; see 1944 Annual Report, p. 14, and 1956 Annual Report, p. 1, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>89</sup> The publicity about this incident was extremely negative; see the Alabama Journal, 23 June 1955; Birmingham Post-Herald, 18 July 1955; Montgomery Advertiser, 28 July 1955; Montgomery Examiner, 6 July 1955; and Birmingham News, 22 June 1955.

County Records Commissions were established to assist in the microfilming of historical records, to identify those records that have historical value or to destroy those which have no long-term use, and to conduct and supervise records surveys in both state and local governments.<sup>90</sup> Although this was a brief and relatively simple piece of legislation, the act was essential to the establishment of a records management program and accurately reflected what was then going on in the archival profession. The Alabama Department of Archives and History had been given the legal mandate to develop a full-fledged and well-rounded program for the preservation of historical records in Alabama.

Because of his resistance to such concepts, however, Mr. Brannon fought the convening of either commission during his tenure as director. Brannon continued to emphasize museum functions, historical research, and publication as his main interests. He was an able collector of manuscripts and artifacts, and a prolific writer about all phases of Alabama history. However, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the state archives mounted no new programs for public or historical records, and the only government records activity of any kind was the occasional passage of records legislation, usually with no coordination or assistance from the state archives. In fact, some of this legislation was enacted because of the inactivity of the commissions and the Alabama

<sup>90</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1955, no. 565.

Department of Archives and History. Among the acts was one that established a local records commission in Madison County that would review the local public records and decide whether those records of historical significance would be given to the Huntsville Public Library, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the local historical Association, or the Huntsville Burritt Museum.<sup>91</sup> Another act, passed in 1963, established some specific retention periods for municipal records with review by the director of the state archives.<sup>92</sup>

With the growth in state government and the increasing volume of records that it produced, this lack of an effective coordinating mechanism for records management became a serious problem. The state agencies, desperately needing assistance in the management of their records, pressured the state archives to offer that assistance, and, failing that, hired an outside records management consulting firm.<sup>93</sup> Brannon at first resisted the work of this outside firm, complaining that it was "now assuming to tell us what is to

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<sup>91</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1959, no. 464.

<sup>92</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1963, no. 549.

<sup>93</sup> See Rucker Agee to Milo B. Howard, Jr., 9 February 1972; Milo B. Howard, Jr., to C. J. Coley, 6 March 1972; and C. J. Coley to Milo B. Howard, Jr., 9 March 1972, all in the 1972 Annual Report File, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar. This correspondence is about the events of the mid-1960s and Peter A. Brannon's role in them. The State legislature approved in 1965 the use of \$15,000 for a records consultant; Acts of Alabama, 1965, no. 770.

be saved and what is not be be saved," but eventually consented to the convening of the State Records Commission.<sup>94</sup> His general reluctance to provide assistance to meet the needs of the state agencies and his desire, at the same time, to protect what he conceived as the responsibilities of the state archives exasperated a number of state officials to the point of advocating the creation of an independent records management agency.<sup>95</sup> That prospect, however, was avoided with Brannon's retirement and the appointment in 1967 of a new director, Milo B. Howard, Jr., who promised to strengthen the work of the records commissions and the role of the Alabama Department of Archives and History in the preservation of the state's documentary heritage.

#### The Resurgence of Archival Professionalism in Alabama, 1967-1984

After the lean years of the 1930s through the early 1960s, the Alabama Department of Archives and History finally enjoyed new opportunities. This was a period of relative prosperity and a time in which the archival profession across the United States was making great strides. The

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<sup>94</sup> Peter A. Brannon to Rucker Agee, 28 June 1966 and 6 July 1966; Rucker Agee to Peter A. Brannon, 14 July 1966, all in the 1966 Annual Report File, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>95</sup> Milo B. Howard, Jr. to Marion Rushton, 19 December 1966, 1966 Annual Report File, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

State and County Records Commissions were reactivated during the late 1960s and by the early 1970s there was some momentum in the management of the public records. Individuals in the archives were assigned specific records responsibilities, records were surveyed and scheduled, and there were some preliminary efforts to inventory the records that filled the storage areas of the state archives.<sup>96</sup>

This momentum, however, was soon overshadowed by the intensity of the effort to acquire funding for the construction of a new wing to the state archives building. This effort extended well over five years, from 1968 through 1973, and required, as might be expected, an intensive level of sustained activity that diverted attention away from other functions and responsibilities of the Alabama Department of Archives and History.<sup>97</sup> Through these years, the energies of the new director were also absorbed by an enormous increase in responsibility for the state's historic preservation program. Although this work, along with the historical research and publication, fell within the broad mandate of the state archives, the time and resources required limited efforts in the management and preservation

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<sup>96</sup> See especially the 1971-72 Annual Report, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, A-Ar.

<sup>97</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1969, no. 761; Montgomery Advertiser, 6 January 1970; Montgomery Advertiser, 23 July 1970; Auburn Bulletin, 3 September 1970; Birmingham News, 10 October 1971; and Birmingham Post-Herald, 2 October 1972.

of Alabama's historical records.<sup>98</sup>

During the same years, archival repositories of all varieties, functions, and purposes proliferated across the state of Alabama. Local historical societies, public libraries, patriotic and genealogical associations, and even business corporations and community groups began to establish programs either for the management of their own records or for collecting the records of the localities.<sup>99</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s a number of significant records programs emerged including those of the Birmingham Public Library, Tuskegee Institute (now University), Auburn University, and the University of Alabama. Even within state government there began some comprehensive and energetic programs such as that of the Administrative Office of Courts, an ongoing program of records management and microfilming for the state court system.<sup>100</sup>

As these records programs developed and the number of archivists increased within the state, an increasing sense of professionalism also started to emerge. At first this

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<sup>98</sup> For example, much of Mr. Howard's time went to his work as chairman of the Alabama Historical Commission, organized in 1967, and the preservation of historical sites within the state.

<sup>99</sup> Nearly two-thirds of the historical organizations currently active in Alabama were founded after 1960. See Tracey Linton Craig, comp. and ed., Directory: Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada, 12th ed. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982).

<sup>100</sup> Access, Newsletter of the Society of Alabama Archivists, February 1981, pp. 6-7.

came in the form of archival training programs. Auburn University, which had established its archives in 1964, also created in 1973 an archival training program within the graduate history school and a few years later set up a records management course.<sup>101</sup> In the years following nearly every other major school in Alabama added archival administration courses. There were enough archivists and others committed to the preservation and management of historical records that in 1978 the Society of Alabama Archivists was born. Over the last few years this organization has held regular professional meetings in the state, lobbied in behalf of archival issues, and sought, albeit unsuccessfully thus far, some funds for statewide projects.<sup>102</sup> With the society as a pipeline of information and catalyst, archival professionalism has begun to flourish within Alabama, although the challenges facing historical records preservation seemed to be increasing at a faster rate than archival resources. Vast and increasing quantities of records, less durable paper, and new forms of records such as photographs, architectural drawings, film, and magnetic tapes make the challenges of identifying and preserving records of histori-

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<sup>101</sup> Access, Newsletter of the Society of Alabama Archivists, June 1980, pp. 2-7.

<sup>102</sup> This organization has attempted to acquire funding for a union catalog of manuscripts, supported efforts to create a law for library theft, and tried to encourage businesses to better manage their historical records. See Access, March 1979, p. 1; October 1979, p. 2; June 1980, p. 5; September 1981, p. 4; and Fall 1982, p. 4.

cal value an even more formidable one than was faced by Owen when he began the archival movement in Alabama at the turn of the century. If these challenges are to be met, new techniques, new strategies, new exertions will be required. The analysis of these challenges, in four different areas, is the subject of the report of the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board.

committed to the preservation of the state's historical records that in 1978 the Society for the Preservation of Alabama History. Over the last few years this organization has had a regular professional meeting in the western part of the state. In 1979, some of the speakers for the meeting were: 102

although the challenges facing historical records archivists in Alabama do not differ from those of other states, the archival profession in Alabama has been particularly active in the development of new techniques and strategies for the preservation of records. 101

architectural drawings, film, and magnetic tapes make the know it to new with a few of our, please for 89

changes of technology and preservation methods, history- the ability to maintain records for the long term. 101

Access, New York: The Society of American Archivists, 1980, p. 25. 101

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law for library theft, and tried to encourage libraries to better manage their historical records. See Access, March 1981, p. 4; and Fall 1981, p. 4. 101



**THE REPORT**

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THE REPORT

STATE GOVERNMENT RECORDS

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## STATE GOVERNMENT RECORDS

### Introduction

Government is part of the life of each person. The citizen votes to change it, pays taxes to support it, and is affected by its regulations, decisions, and actions. The records of government document this relationship and, in a democratic society, protect the rights of each individual. The management and care of government records should be of vital concern.

## STATE GOVERNMENT RECORDS

The importance of state government records has been recognized for a long time in this country, from the formation of the states to the beginning of the establishment of publicly-supported state archival institutions in the early twentieth century. Out of these state institutions evolved the American archival profession, spurred by the formation of the National Archives and the Society of American Archivists.<sup>1</sup> In all of this Alabama has special reason for pride. The Alabama Department of Archives and History, founded in 1901, was the first state archives and remained a model and leader in the archival profession for many years.

But all is not well with historically valuable state government records. Twenty years ago, a major evaluation of the state archival institutions found that the legal authority to support their programs was waning, their status and support

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Puzosy, American State Archives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 1-16.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Posner, American State Archives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 1-36.

was extremely uneven, their physical facilities were lacking, the preservation of records was poor, and the management of current records was generally inadequate to ensure the identification and care of the public record having historical value.<sup>2</sup> In a similar analysis, completed only two years ago, there was little improvement. This study concluded that "American state records agencies are in an impoverished condition and are currently unable to provide adequate care for their records."<sup>3</sup>

Alabama's administration of state government records is hindered by the same poverty faced by other state records programs and, in fact, is well below the standards which prevail in most other southern states. In Alabama an effective records management program does not exist, and the growing volume and complexity of the records and inadequate records legislation is exacerbating the problems created by this void. Many of the records that have been identified as historically valuable are not being properly preserved and have not been properly arranged or described to enable their use. Although information is essential to the operation of democratic institutions, the information produced by Alabama's state government is often inaccessible to itself and to its citizens.

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<sup>2</sup> Posner, American State Archives, especially pp. 308-48.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin C. Bridges, "State Government Records Programs," in Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States, ed. Lisa B. Weber ([Albany]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators in cooperation with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, [1984]), pp. 1-18 (quote, p. 1).

Nearly every state archives except Alabama has produced finding aids to its records, and it is one of only a few that does not have a facility for the storage of its current records.

There are bright spots to the current bleak condition of Alabama's state government records. The administrative independence and flexibility of the Alabama Department of Archives and History remains a model for the archival profession, and the state archives is working on establishing a more effective management program for state government records. The officials of Alabama's government also recognize the need and advantages of such a program. The interest and support of the state's public administrators and the renewed commitment of the state archives should result in significant improvement in the management of state government records. The records program has, however, been undernourished for so many years that it will take a long steady increase in its support before it can play the role it should in the identification and preservation of the state's historical records.

#### **FINDINGS**

**The program for managing state government records is ineffective.**

Although there has been a mechanism for the management of the state's records for thirty years (the State Records Commission) and a repository for the preservation and use of those records possessing permanent administrative and historical values for even longer (the Alabama Department of Archives and

History),<sup>4</sup> there does not exist an effective administrative program for Alabama's state government records. Most state agencies are aware of the records services of the state archives and the responsibility of the commission for the disposition of the public records,<sup>5</sup> but virtually no record program presently exists. There is little systematic scheduling, proper storage, or microfilming of records. Only one in ten agencies uses the state archives' services frequently, and, more important, the majority of state agencies and institutions

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<sup>4</sup> The State Records Commission was established in 1955 and "charged with the responsibility of determining which state records shall be permanently preserved because of historical value, which state records may be destroyed or otherwise disposed of after they have been microfilmed and which state records may be destroyed or otherwise disposed of without microfilming." The commission consists of the Director of the Department of Archives and History, who serves as chairperson; the Chief Examiner of the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts; the Attorney General; the Secretary of State; the Commissioner of the Department of Revenue; and one member each of the history departments of Auburn University and University of Alabama (Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-13-20-21). The Alabama Department of Archives and History was founded in 1901 and included among its objectives "the care and custody of official archives, the collection of materials bearing upon the history of the state, and of the territory included therein from the earliest times" (Code of Alabama 1907, section 794).

<sup>5</sup> Of the agencies responding to the questionnaire, 70.8 percent stated that they are familiar with the records services of the state archives and 62.2 percent are aware of the State Records Commission's responsibility for the maintenance and disposition of state government records. Even accounting for those agencies that did not respond, a sizeable portion - over a third - of the agencies are aware of the department and commission.

rarely or never use them.<sup>6</sup>

Indicative of the weakness of the state's handling of its records is the absence of published technical guidelines or standards for records maintenance and disposal. Many states possess manuals for public records management,<sup>7</sup> but the one produced in Alabama is out-of-print and severely limited in its scope. Little information has been provided on the definition of public records; the rationale for the management of records; principles for surveying, appraising, and scheduling records; the identification and preservation of historical records; micrographics standards; filing and storage procedures; disaster-preparedness and security; forms design and control; or sources for additional assistance.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most revealing aspects of the state's weak records program is the records retention scheduling that has been accomplished over the past two decades. The appraisal of records is the most basic and important component of any records

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<sup>6</sup> Of the agencies responding to the questionnaire only 12.6 percent have used the state archives' services frequently, while 57.7 percent have rarely or never used these services. It is very likely that many of the agencies that did not answer the questionnaire probably do not use the department's records services.

<sup>7</sup> One of Alabama's neighbors, Florida, for example, has a records manual that consists of a general explanation of records management; its legal aspects; procedures for establishing schedules; the storage of records in the records center or transfer to the archives; the use of microfilm; the management of forms, mail, and files; and published schedules.

<sup>8</sup> Records Retention Manual for State Agencies State of Alabama ([Montgomery]: Alabama Department of Archives and History, June 1973).

system, requiring an evaluation of the nature of the records and the value of their informational content.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, only a small portion of the state agencies even know if their records have been evaluated while most of the state-supported colleges and universities could not determine if this has been done.<sup>10</sup> A very minor portion of the state's present departments have retention schedules, and most of the records of Alabama's colleges and universities have not been appraised except for a general schedule for certain common financial and administrative records.<sup>11</sup> Most of the schedules that do exist are older than ten years, and there has been little systematic effort to revise or update them.<sup>12</sup> Even those retention schedules in existence are suspect, having been formulated mainly by an analysis of records already stored in the state archives with little inspection of records in state offices, consultation with agency personnel, or consideration of usage pat-

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<sup>9</sup> See Maynard J. Brichford, Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Only 60.3 percent of the agencies responded to the question of the portion of their records covered by current retention schedules and a small percentage (26 percent) believed that the majority (90 percent or over) of their records had been scheduled.

<sup>11</sup> Forty-eight percent of the state agencies have retention schedules and many of these do not appear to be complete or current.

<sup>12</sup> Fully a third (37 percent) are between ten and sixteen years old and another third (33 percent) are between five to ten years old. The general retention schedule is now fifteen years old and considerably outmoded. Of the agencies who have retention schedules, a small portion (30.7 percent) have any revisions and even these revisions seem to be spotty.

terns; there also seems to have been a greater dependence on the legal considerations of the Code of Alabama for the determination of permanent records than any evaluation of historical or other values.<sup>13</sup> The accumulated effect of these problems is that the informational content of most records in the state archives is inaccessible to public officials and citizens, and the many records possessing historical value that are not in the archives are in constant danger of being lost.

Despite the fact that records are an essential resource for any agency, most state departments are unable to estimate the percentage of their budget and total funds currently assigned to records maintenance. Cost of clerical staff, filing and office equipment, and office space-rental or off-site storage were unavailable to most agencies and state colleges and universities despite the fact that most identified one or more individuals with records administration responsibilities.<sup>14</sup>

Records are not generally viewed as vitally important for the functioning of state government or the documentation of governmental activities. The Alabama Department of Archives and

<sup>13</sup> The most important consideration in the development of retention schedules, according to Alabama's Records Retention Manual, is a reading of the Code of Alabama "to determine what records it [the agency] is required by law to maintain, any limitations of action, legal retention requirements of records, and what records are considered privileged information" (p. 4). There is no discussion of determining historical value.

<sup>14</sup> Less than twenty respondents to the questionnaire endeavored to answer the questions of the percentage of their agency's budget assigned to records maintenance or the annual cost of storing records off-site, and these responses reflected a difficulty in either understanding the question or formulating the answers.

History, the repository for the protection of the state's historical records, has received few or no major accessions from some of the state's largest and most important agencies.<sup>15</sup> Even much of what is in the state archives at present is of questionable value since requests for assistance occur only when departments wish to dispose of records they deem unimportant.<sup>16</sup> Lacking schedules and other technical guidelines, the state agencies are as likely to allow records problems to be resolved through neglect as to endeavor to build internal programs on their own. There have even been instances of the destruction of valuable public records.<sup>17</sup> And the growing tendency among the larger agencies to develop their own records programs is bound to repeat such destruction without the development of a centralized, comprehensive records program. State agencies left on their own are prone to define solutions to

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the state archives possesses few permanent records from the State Highway Department, State Department of Education, and the Department of Agriculture and Industries. Although the state archives has important holdings of nineteenth century public records, it has serious gaps for the twentieth century when government expanded rapidly.

<sup>16</sup> The Alabama Department of Archives and History has been recently reevaluating its records holdings and found that there are many records listed as historical, with documents of temporary value mixed and filed together, and inadequately identified. This is at least partly the result of the state archives being viewed as a dumping ground for useless records rather than as a useful, administrative arm of state government.

<sup>17</sup> In a recent transition of gubernatorial administrations about sixty boxes of governor's records were destroyed without formal evaluation by the State Records Commission and Alabama Department of Archives and History; Montgomery Advertiser, 9 March and 12 March 1983.



records problems completely in terms of reduction, lacking the balance of a "total" archives approach that combines the management of current records with the preservation and use of historical records.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, the Alabama Department of Archives and History has not been able to develop and maintain an effective state records program. As originally conceived the state archives possessed a broad mandate that made it the state's history museum, library, and manuscript repository as well as public archives.<sup>19</sup> Its resources have always been inadequate to support all of these functions, albeit important, and from the 1920s through the 1970s the program for the administration of the state's public records never received the support and

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<sup>18</sup> This is not to discount the notion that the larger state agencies should not have internal records programs, but this can only work with a method of central control and final authority. The Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) established a records program partly because of the inability or lack of interest of the Alabama Department of Archives and History to resolve their problems. Although the AOC has continued to work with the State Records Commission, there still has not developed an adequate method of the state archives and AOC identifying, preserving, and providing access to the state court records having historical value. For a description of AOC's origins and methods, see C. C. Torbert, Jr., "The Politics and Management of Alabama's Court System", Public Sector (Winter/Spring 1984): [1-8].

<sup>19</sup> The state archives was to care for the public records and private papers, publish the state's official records, provide reference on the history of the state, encourage historical research, encourage the creation of public school libraries and provide technical assistance to the library community, and administer a system of travelling libraries. The state archives also became responsible for the preservation of historical sites and the operation of a history museum. See Code of Alabama 1907, section 794 and Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage," in this publication.

resources that were needed for the ever increasing quantity of state records.<sup>20</sup> The unfortunate consequence of these program inadequacies is that many important state records of the twentieth century have already been lost and many more will continue to disappear unless action is taken soon.

The lack of an effective records program has become more serious due to the increasing volume and complexity of state government records. Over the past half-century the records of government have proliferated at a rapid rate, typified by the growth at the federal level. During the Great Depression of the 1930s twice as many federal records were created as had been from the establishment of the government until then and the Second World War doubled that accumulation. Since then the pace of records creation on the federal, state, and local levels has quickened considerably.<sup>21</sup>

Alabama's state government is not immune to the problem; from its creation the state's functions have grown incredibly fast with each new function in

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<sup>20</sup> Not only did the state archives spread its resources thinly to cover these duties but the growth of activity in the major areas of responsibility, involving museum and library functions, genealogy, historical research, and historic preservation have created increased demands on these inadequate resources. See Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage."

<sup>21</sup> T. R. Schellenberg, The Management of Archives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 29. For more on the growth of federal records see H. G. Jones, The Records of a Nation: Their Management, Preservation, and Use (New York: Atheneum, 1969) and Donald R. McCoy, The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents 1934-1968 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

turn creating more records.<sup>22</sup> State agencies and state colleges and universities report that there are vast quantities of records stored in offices or spilled over into other storage sites, not all of which are suitable for such purposes. Many smaller agencies hold more than several hundred cubic feet of records, and the larger departments report totals running into the thousands of cubic feet. Even though many state agencies and colleges and universities could not even estimate the size of their holdings, those that did supply figures reported over a million cubic feet of records, evenly split between offices and makeshift storage areas.<sup>23</sup> Records are being improperly stored in various sized containers, often with poor identification labels, and often under dangerous and insecure circumstances. As a result, these government records are not only inaccessible for administrative use but are in danger of being lost before a determination of whether they possess historical value.

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<sup>22</sup> William H. Stewart, Jr., The Growth of State Administration in Alabama: A Contemporary Reassessment (University: Bureau of Public Administration, University of Alabama, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> These figures, although crude at best, were totalled from the state agencies that attempted to provide estimates of the volume of their records. Figures ranged from less than ten cubic feet to more than 400,000 cubic feet. Estimates for needs for storage within the next year ranged from zero to 50,000 cubic feet. Although these statistics again reflect the inability of many agencies to effectively identify records needs, they certainly show the immense want for improved records control. Among the state-supported colleges and universities the estimates of records stored in offices ranged from 500 to 45,000 cubic feet.

The lack of a modern state records center in Alabama is a significant reason for the uncontrolled proliferation of public documents. Such facilities can be used for the storage of records for short periods of time, for storage pending micro-filming, for evaluation in determining retention periods, and for security. Most important, a records center provides an efficient and safe means for state agencies to store records, removing them from more expensive office space but still maintaining a means to consult them for management purposes. The only "records center" is the Alabama Department of Archives and History building which should be reserved for the storage of permanent historical records and which is severely limited in its capacity. Even its storage areas are poorly designed, minimizing its effectiveness for the keeping of current records.<sup>24</sup> The problem of the voluminous quantities of records in state offices and provisional storage areas, coupled with the inability of the state archives to provide systematic appraising and scheduling of the records, creates the specter of state agencies resorting to their own solutions and inadvertently destroying records possessing administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical values.

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<sup>24</sup> The state archives building has a capacity of only 70,000 cubic feet and is about eighty percent filled at present, mostly with historical records. Its capacity is only equal to that which many other states possess for the storage of current records only, such as Florida (70,000), Georgia (85,000), South Carolina and Kentucky (both over 100,000). Compounding the problem is the poor design of the archives building with low ceilings (slightly less than seven feet when fourteen is desired) and library shelving that does not accommodate standard records containers.

The records of government have not only increased dramatically since the Second World War but have grown more complex in nature. Government has steadily changed its record creation from the pen to the typewriter and telephone to the word processor and computer. New technological methods of maintaining and using information are constantly introduced, experimented with, and changed in quest of greater cost-efficiency and improved access to information. Futurist John Naisbitt has identified the change from an industrial to information society as one of the ten major transformations affecting us, and this is certainly reflected in all levels of government,<sup>25</sup> including Alabama's. Probably over a third of Alabama's state agencies are currently creating records in a computerized format and another third are planning the conversion of paper records to such systems.<sup>26</sup> The situation is even more dramatic among the state-supported colleges and universities with three-quarters currently creating computerized records and two out of three

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<sup>25</sup> Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming our Lives (New York: Warner Books, 1982), pp. 1-33.

<sup>26</sup> Of the state agencies responding to the questionnaire, 30.7 percent are currently creating computerized records and another 33.3 percent are planning to convert to technological systems. Well over half (57.3 percent) predict an impact of technology upon their agency's records. The actual figures, however, are probably much higher.

planning to increase the use of such technology.<sup>27</sup> Although the appearance of "paperless" offices are unlikely in Alabama's state government in the near future, it is inevitable that the proportion of records in traditional paper forms will be greatly reduced.

Unfortunately, none of these new computerized records are being properly evaluated for historical or long-term administrative values. State records policies and procedures continue to resemble those that were established before the advent of the Second World War despite the rapidly changing circumstances of records creation, storage, and use. One leading archivist has characterized the increasing new use of records technology as a change from a "custodial" to "post-custodial era." During the custodial era the "mass of records...was relatively small; the technology of records creation, storage and retrieval was fairly simple; and [the archival profession] assumed a passive role in shaping the documentary records." In the post-custodial era, the "current revolution in information processing is inexorably changing [the] world and . . . work" of the archivist. "Our effectiveness as archivists in this new era depends on our ability to alter our past behavior and to fashion strategies to cope with both the opportunities and

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<sup>27</sup> Seventy-six percent of the colleges and universities are presently creating records in a machine-readable format and 62 percent are planning conversion of paper records to computer systems. Nearly all (94 percent) predict an impact of some sort on their records by technology.

the problems created by this revolution."<sup>28</sup> The state archives has not scheduled one record in a computerized form or made any effort to identify the continuing transference of information from paper to computer. It has also ignored other records media such as motion pictures and videotape. Unless provisions are made to identify and preserve computerized information of long-term value and other records media, researchers of the future will inevitably discover vast gaps in the historical documentation of the 1970s and beyond, and state government will lose essential information.

Adding to the complexity that characterizes the nature of the records of state government is the proliferation of micrographics programs within state agencies. Many state agencies administer their own microfilming operation, with one as large as twenty-five staff, eight cameras, two processors, and the production of two thousand reels annually.<sup>29</sup> These agencies are primarily microfilming their records as a means to reduce storage space requirements and to provide easier retrieval to the information in the records rather than for the preservation of historical records. Many agencies are interested in this technology only as a solution to records problems that are not being resolved by other means - systematic storage in a records

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<sup>28</sup> F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," American Archivist 44 (Summer 1981): 207-16 (quote p. 207).

<sup>29</sup> Of the agencies reporting, 27.1 percent currently have an in-house micrographics program.

center or orderly destruction through a retention scheduling system.<sup>30</sup>

What is especially disturbing about the development of these micrographics programs is the general lack of quality control in the production of film that results from the absence of centralized monitoring of standards and guidelines. Although the State Records Commission should approve records for microfilming and the Alabama Department of Archives and History is supposed to maintain a "centralized" micrographics facility for the use by state government,<sup>31</sup> it is obvious that neither system has worked very well. Nearly three-quarters of the state agencies that are producing microfilm are doing so in conformity with approved records retention schedules,<sup>32</sup> but the general quality of these schedules are so poor and the portion of state records covered so minor that following such procedures has little real impact.

Even the state archives' micrographics program has been very poor and offered little leadership or guidance to the state government. For many years the state archives resisted

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<sup>30</sup> While the use of microfilming is advisable in the context of a full records administration program, it has certain disadvantages such as its costs, the necessity of having additional equipment to view the records, obtaining legible copies, and revising and updating. See Carolyn Hoover Sung, Archives & Manuscripts: Reprography, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-13-21 and 41-13-41-42.

<sup>32</sup> Of the state agencies, 69.5 percent say they are aware of their microfilming program being in conformity with an approved records retention schedule.



the introduction of microfilm as a viable alternative for record storage and paid little attention to standards of any kind. Until recently the state archives had no inspection system to check the quality of microfilm and used scotch-tape to repair microfilm. Even what it was filming, mostly newspapers and isolated historical materials requested by researchers, was of little relevance to state agencies concerned with the management of their records, and state agencies sought the development of their own programs, some making mistakes in purchasing equipment and in selecting records to be microfilmed. Few of the state agencies have personnel that are aware of the standards for producing quality microfilm, such as those of the American National Standards Institute.<sup>33</sup> Adding to the problem is the poor storage of the film negatives with most state agencies not placing them in environmentally sound or secure storage.<sup>34</sup> Considering the high cost of producing microfilm,<sup>35</sup> state funds are certainly being wasted in the misapplication of this technology. More important, valuable and irreplaceable records are in danger of destruction because the original records are destroyed after microfilming and the microfilm itself is not of permanent quality.

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<sup>33</sup> A total of 72.7 percent of the state agencies are not aware of ANSI standards. Among the state-supported colleges and universities, with 50 percent operating such programs, the situation is little better with 61 percent unaware of the standards and technical guidelines.

<sup>34</sup> Only 48.1 percent of the state agencies have an environmentally sound and secure storage area.

<sup>35</sup> The technical services section of the Alabama Department of Archives and History is currently producing microfilm at a cost of about \$48.00 per 16mm film reel (1200 images).

The historical records of Alabama's state government are endangered because of the lack of resources for conservation and preservation.

Identification of state government records having historical value is a problem requiring serious attention. The matter of how best to care for these records is equally as serious. All information exists on non-permanent media. Some media, such as highly acidic paper or magnetic tapes, are more fragile than others, such as high content rag paper or silver based microfilm stock. All records that capture information of permanent value require maintenance in an environment suitable for the media and one that will guarantee the longest possible life for that record.

The preservation of archival materials continues to be a problem everywhere because of the specialized services and treatment needed and their high costs. Alabama's documentary-heritage is especially endangered because of the lack of preservation facilities. There is no conservation center, such as exists in New England or the Mid-Atlantic states, that archival institutions can contract with to evaluate holdings, recommend procedures, or perform professional conservation and preservation practices.<sup>36</sup> Because the costs of creating adequate conservation programs within each archival repository is prohibi-

<sup>36</sup> The Northeast Document Conservation Center is the best known regional conservation center and the best model for such programs. See Ann Russell, "Northeast Document Conservation Center: A Case Study in Cooperative Conservation," American Archivist 45 (Winter 1982): 45-52.

tive, Alabama's historical records are simply not being cared for properly. This is especially the case with the state's public records since the Alabama Department of Archives and History has been forced to close its small conservation operation because of inadequate resources. This situation with Alabama's largest archival repository is only symbolic of the total neglect of conservation in the state.

There are certain basic actions that can be followed for the conservation of historical records in lieu of an expensive and sophisticated program. Records can be cleaned; simple repairs can be made; climate can be controlled or at least stabilized as best as possible; and proper storage containers and handling procedures can be utilized.<sup>37</sup> Because the archives has not had the resources to process collections, however, even these simple procedures have not been employed. Despite an impressive facade, the state archives' building has storage areas beset by widely fluctuating temperature and humidity, occasional sieges by vermin, and water leaks. Current standards for climate control call for a temperature of  $67^{\circ}\text{F} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{F}$  and a relative humidity at 47 percent  $\pm$  2 percent; typical fluctuations in the stacks of the state archives included 16 degree temperature ranges and 31 percent humidity spans. The state archives has recently installed security and fire detection systems, but these will remain handicapped because of the

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<sup>37</sup> For the clearest presentation of such procedures, see Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Archives & Manuscripts: Conservation, A Manual on Physical Care and Management, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983).

poor design of the building and inadequate resources. Equally serious is the problem of care for special format records. Photographs, of a variety of decaying chemical bases, such as nitrate, are stored in acidic folders. Oversized items, such as maps and architectural and engineering drawings, are folded or rolled with little regard to their historical value or use. No distinctions have been made between various levels of value of records to determine when a record is microfilmed and destroyed or conserved and retained in its original form. Because of the accumulation of the problems and the insufficient resources, the archives building has been filled with masses of unevaluated, unprocessed, and rapidly deteriorating records.

Although the transfer of a state agency's historical records to the state archives is not a complete guarantee of their preservation, conditions in the archives are, nevertheless, generally better than in the government's offices. Although the state archives is still unable to provide more elaborate methods of preserving the state government's documentary heritage because of its limited resources, developments like the Southeastern Library Network's recent acquisition of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to study the establishment of a cooperative conservation program in the region bring the hope of improvement. Such a regional program could support the preservation of Alabama's state government

The Northeast Document Conservation Center is the first of its kind in the United States. It is a non-profit organization that provides a wide range of services to its members, including the digitization of documents, the repair of damaged documents, and the conservation of rare books and manuscripts. The Center is located in Amherst, Massachusetts, and is a member of the Society of American Archivists.

records at more modest costs and with greater assurance of quality work.<sup>38</sup>

Alabama's state-supported colleges and universities have inadequate programs to administer their records and to preserve their documentation of enduring value.

If the historical records of Alabama's state agencies are inadequately administered, the circumstances of the records of many of the state-supported colleges and universities are even more unsatisfactory. Two universities - Auburn and University of Alabama - have established active records programs managed by full-time records administrators. Two other universities, University of Alabama at Birmingham and Troy State University, are now beginning such programs. For most other schools, however, there has been no systematic program to identify and preserve the institution's historically valuable records. One community college official summed up the situation by expressing her frustration with being unable to cope with the growing volume of records, causing her to hope for hungry mice or a disaster.

Ironically, over the past two decades the fastest expanding segment of the American archival profession has been among colleges and universities, making these institutions the larg-

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<sup>38</sup> With \$168,401 in funding from NEH, SOLINET plans to assist libraries and archives to develop, strengthen, and coordinate their local conservation and preservation programs. The project will serve the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

est employer of archivists in this country.<sup>39</sup> Some of the momentum for this growth has been the desire of the schools to acquire holdings for research use by their faculties, causing the archival operations to have extended far beyond a concern only for their own institutional records to special collections and private manuscripts.<sup>40</sup> An equally important consideration has been their efforts to manage the proliferation of records as their educational programs have expanded in size and diversity, especially in regard to federal and state regulations about the documentation of students and awareness of their own institutional identities.<sup>41</sup> The college or university archives is among the most vital and active of all archival elements in the profession.

If these archival operations have shown such growth and activity, why has there been so little evidence of this in Alabama? University and college archives have often prospered in those states where there has been strong regional repository

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<sup>39</sup> Nicholas C. Burckel and J. Frank Cook, "A Profile of College and University Archives in the United States," American Archivist 45 (Fall 1982): 410-28.

<sup>40</sup> Alabama's state schools have also played an important role in the development of special collections of historical materials and this will be more fully evaluated in the section on historical records repositories.

<sup>41</sup> Maynard Brichford, "Academic Archives: Uberlieferungsbildung," American Archivist 43 (Fall 1980): 449-60.

systems and strong professional archival associations.<sup>42</sup> In Alabama there has been neither. The Alabama Department of Archives and History has been unable to address the needs of the state schools despite a logical interpretation that the State Records Commission could assist these institutions because of their being part of the state government system.<sup>43</sup> There are no uniform retention schedules that the universities and colleges could use, and only one failed effort to bring the schools together to share information about or to pool resources to resolve their records needs. The programs that have developed, such as at the University of Alabama and Auburn University, have done so despite the inadequacy of state assistance and coordination, and even these successful programs lack the resources they need to fulfill all of their missions.<sup>44</sup> Most encouraging have been the new efforts of the University of

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<sup>42</sup> Consider Wisconsin's experience, for example, that has a strong state archives, a regional network system, and participates in the Midwest Archives Conference, probably the strongest of the regional archival associations; College and University Archives: An Assessment and Planning Report to the Wisconsin Historical Records Advisory Board (n.p.: College and University Archives Committee, State Historical Assessment and Planning Project, 1982).

<sup>43</sup> The State Records Commission's responsibility is limited only to "state" records which should include those records of any state-supported institution; Code of Alabama 1975, section 41-13-21.

<sup>44</sup> Although these staffs are among the larger of Alabama's archival repositories they have been inadequate for all of their responsibilities. The University of Alabama program has a staff of only four full-time positions but they are responsible for university records management, special collections, and reference. Both programs are severely limited in their space to properly store their records holdings.

Alabama at Birmingham, and more recently Troy State University, to establish a records administration operation and to begin to bring some of the schools together to coordinate activities.<sup>45</sup> Both of these new programs are developing strong connections with the two older university records programs and with the state archives to help ensure improved cooperation and mutual assistance between institutions.

Although information is essential to the operation of democratic institutions, much of the historically valuable information produced by Alabama's state government is inaccessible to itself and to its citizens.

In a democratic society access to the information of government is essential. Information is needed for the formulation of public policy and by the citizens about government activities. Records are needed for protecting the legal rights of citizens, organizations, and institutions; formulating policy and ensuring the continuity of organizations; dealing with environmental, economic, social, and political concerns; and maintaining the physical infrastructure of a society.

Those records having historical value are essential for understanding the origins and development of contemporary trends and systems. In a society that rests upon the informed decision-making of its citizens, access to information is a basic need

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<sup>45</sup> This effort began with a "best practices" conference at the UAB in mid-1983 and has expanded to include cooperation from the records administrators of the University of Alabama and Auburn University.



and right.<sup>46</sup>

Much of the information produced by Alabama's state government appears to be inaccessible to itself and its citizens. The records of many state agencies have never been evaluated by the State Records Commission or the Alabama Department of Archives and History to ensure that valuable information is properly maintained or is available when needed. Even when records have been transferred to the state archives, it has been unable to produce or to disseminate comprehensive guides that will allow their full use by state government, historians, the general public, and other researchers. At one time the state archives was considered to be the essential information center for state government,<sup>47</sup> but this is a role that has largely slipped away over the years.

Typical of the difficulties faced by the state archives has been the management of state government publications. Such publications are among the most important of all information sources to the process of government. One librarian-historian has stated that these publications "provide necessary insights and perspectives and the most thorough or only access to gov-

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<sup>46</sup> For one of the best, most concise explanations of this, see Toward a Usable Past: Historical Records in the Empire State; A Report to the Governor and Citizens of New York by the State Historical Records Advisory Board ([Albany]: New York Historical Records Advisory Board, January 1984), pp. 19-24 (quote, p. 23).

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Hastings H. Hart, Social Problems of Alabama: A Study of the Social Institutions and Agencies of the State of Alabama as Related to Its War Activities (Montgomery: [State Government], 1918), p. 21.

ernmental activities, state, regional, and local."<sup>48</sup> The state archives stressed the collecting of these documents from its earliest years and acquired an impressive array of state government publications, but it was not until the early 1970s that resources were available to arrange and describe these publications in a manner useful to the management of state government or to the public. Despite considerable labor, the state archives succeeded in producing only one annual checklist and a quarterly checklist for only three quarters of one year.<sup>49</sup> Even in the early 1980s, the state government publications collection remains insufficiently catalogued.

One long-time publication of the state archives, the Alabama Official and Statistical Register, has been published since 1903. This volume was originally intended as a timely "practical statistical compilation" with biographical sketches of state government officials, information on state agencies, and election statistics. As first conceived and produced by Thomas M. Owen, the Register was a model for its day but it has continued to be published into the 1980s despite the proliferation of other manuals and informational aides and it now needs to be reevaluated in light of these changes. Many other legis-

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Hernon, "State 'Documents to the People'," Government Publications Review 3 (1976): 255. Such publications have legislative, administrative, reportorial, service, research, and information functions; see Terry L. Weech, "The Characteristics of State Government Publications, 1910-1969," Government Publications Review 1 (1973): 32-33.

<sup>49</sup> The checklist for 1973 publications appeared in 1977 and the quarterly checklist ran for the first three quarters of 1981.

lative manuals and data books are far more current (the 1979 Register was not published until 1983) and valuable for assisting the public to understand the nature and structure of state government.<sup>50</sup>

The need for improved information services extends far beyond the Alabama Department of Archives and History. There is a need for better information regarding the holdings of other state-supported archival repositories. There has been little effort to exchange finding aids between university records programs to share information about the holdings of state records or to participate in cooperative programs. Research and information offices in the agencies operate virtually autonomously despite the fact that there are few such institutions and despite the relative benefits that could be realized by improved cooperation.

Even though the archives does not house many of the state records that need to be there and even though many of the records in the archives are inadequately processed and described, nevertheless, there is additional potential usage value in the

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<sup>50</sup> Such as Richard A. Thigpen and Coleman B. Ransone, Jr., ed., Alabama Government Manual, 6th ed., (University: Alabama Law Institute, 1982); Senate Manual State of Alabama 1983-1986, Senate Document no. 2; and Alabama County Data Book 1983 (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Office of State Planning and Federal Programs, December 1983).

records that has not been adequately realized.<sup>51</sup> Relatively few state agencies even endeavor to use their records after transfer to the state archives.<sup>52</sup> Such usage is also reflected in source citations in published historical research. In the Alabama Review, the most important journal for the publication of Alabama historical research, less than one in ten citations of primary records are to state public records, and most of these are published varieties.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, most Alabama historical research has concerned political and economic matters, subjects in which state government records should be of great value.<sup>54</sup>

The inability of the Alabama Department of Archives and History to play a more vital service role in the administration of state government, a role Thomas M. Owen envisioned and

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<sup>51</sup> While there are over twenty thousand cubic feet of state government records extending from the early nineteenth century, there are less than five thousand cubic feet of private papers having historical value. Yet, during the first quarter of 1984, the state government records and publications constituted only 16.9 percent of the usage of archival materials (397 of 2348 retrievals).

<sup>52</sup> Out of 4401 researchers at the state archives during the first quarter of 1984, less than one percent were from state agencies seeking use of their own records.

<sup>53</sup> Of citations to 745 primary sources in articles in the Alabama Review in 1948, 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1973, and 1978 only fifty (6.7 percent) are state records and of these, forty-eight are published state records.

<sup>54</sup> In the years 1948, 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1973 and 1978 thirty-four of eighty-nine (38.2 percent) articles concerned political and economic subjects, by far the largest category.

labored for,<sup>55</sup> has perpetuated the general public's lack of understanding of the nature and role of an archives.<sup>56</sup> To much of the public the state archives is the museum, an antiquarian's dream of interesting, diverse, and largely uninterpreted objects concerning the state's past. Because of this image, people do not see it supporting the modern information needs of state government and the citizenry. The informational use of archival resources has become display of the unusual, the intriguing, and the unique, and many of the modern actions and functions of state government remain undocumented.<sup>57</sup>

Major portions of the existing records legislation are inadequate for the maintenance of an effective administration program for state government records.

Since the earliest days of their profession, archivists have been vitally concerned with laws that support their programs and preserve historical records. One of the earliest presidential addresses to the Society of American Archivists urged the need for uniform state archival legislation and noted its requirements:

<sup>55</sup> For more information about this see Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage," earlier in this publication.

<sup>56</sup> This is a common problem to the archival profession, but it is certainly more serious in Alabama than in many states possessing large and well-established state archival institutions. See David B. Gracy II, "Archives and Society: The First Archival Revolution," American Archivist 47 (Winter 1984): 7-10.

<sup>57</sup> This not meant to imply that a museum is inappropriate in a state archives setting. However, the museum of Alabama's state archives is also short of professional standards of museology.

State law, or the absence of it, determines in large degree the location, care and availability of state and local archives. It imperiously directs investigators to the places where their source materials may be found and determines in large measure the conditions attending them and their use of them. It is indispensable to, though not a guarantee of, effective archival administration.<sup>58</sup>

Such sentiments have not changed, but subsequent analyses by archivists have revealed that records legislation has been enacted with mixed success. In the early 1960s Ernst Posner's masterful study of American state archives showed some model laws, but still lamented the tremendous variations from state to state.<sup>59</sup> George Bain's recent and careful evaluation of state archival law concluded that the "majority of states can stand improvement in their law, some in a radical fashion,"<sup>60</sup> a conclusion supported by the results of the state assessment

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<sup>58</sup> Albert Ray Newsome, "Uniform State Archival Legislation," American Archivist 2 (January 1939): 2.

<sup>59</sup> American State Archives, pp. 308-14, 351-53.

<sup>60</sup> "State Archival Law: A Content Analysis," American Archivist 46 (Spring 1983): 158-74 (quote, p. 173).

projects of 1982 and 1984.<sup>61</sup>

Alabama's records legislation contains serious weaknesses. Of eighteen aspects of state archival law, Bain found Alabama's wanting in eight and ranked only above twelve other states in its overall comprehensiveness and clarity. Consider, for example, one of the most basic elements of such law, the definition of public records. Alabama's definition is limited to "written, typed or printed" records.<sup>62</sup> How are we to proceed with the increasing quantity of machine-readable records? Such a definition could relegate the state archives to a museum of old papers and antiquated records forms. The legislation also places the state archives in an extremely passive role - "the Department of Archives and History may examine into the condition of public records and shall at the request of the custodian thereof give advice and assistance to any public official in the solution of his problems of preserving, filing, and making available the public records in his custody."<sup>63</sup> The authority of the state archives and State Records Commission to compel the creation of records retention schedules, to establish records liaisons in state agencies, or to foster communication within state government about records matters may not be fully

<sup>61</sup> Bridges, "State Government Records Programs," Documenting America, pp. 1-5.

<sup>62</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, section 41-13-1.

<sup>63</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, section 41-13-4 (italics added).

adequate for the modern needs of government.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, what exists in the legislation - especially the administrative independence of the Alabama Department of Archives and History - could be used much better and even be quite effective in the development of a state records administration program. One of the basic principles of the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators for the operation of a state records program is a placement within state government that

prevents the submersion of the agency beneath competing interests; eliminates blurring of functions with other professional agencies and disciplines; protects against interference with agency program responsibilities under the color of coordination of authority; and eliminates hampering supervision and control by those having little or no professional knowledge of its program responsibilities and operations.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The power of replevin of public records has been repealed, and what remains is a simple provision that "no state officer or agency head shall cause any state records to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of without first obtaining approval of the state records commission"; Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-13-3 and 41-13-21. Such unauthorized destructions have taken place.

<sup>65</sup> "Principles for State Archival and Records Management Agencies," adopted at that organization's 1977 annual meeting.



Alabama's state archives has none of these problems except that it has lacked the resources to take advantage of its opportunities. As a result of the generally weak legislation and the resource deficiencies of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, there has been an increasing array of confusing and contradictory legislation that weakens the development of an effective government-wide administrative program for the public records. Legislation is repeatedly passed that does little more than schedule records, a task that could be more easily accomplished (with better guarantees that the historical record is safeguarded) through the State Records Commission. For example, one state agency has the authority to destroy all "general correspondence files over three years old," when such files can often be among the most important of historical records of an agency.<sup>66</sup> Another state agency recently had legislation passed that did nothing more than give it the authority to destroy certain records after they had been microfilmed, with the dangerous provision that it would "not be required to obtain the permission, approval or consent of any state officer, agency or commission to destroy such records, the provisions of any other law to the contrary notwithstanding."<sup>67</sup> There are other examples of legislation that permit

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<sup>66</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, section 27-2-14.

<sup>67</sup> Alabama Act no. 84-473, passed May 29, 1984.

not include any guarantee that these microfilmed records would be of archival-quality.<sup>68</sup> Such a situation is dangerous to the preservation of the state's historical records and to the integrity of those records having administrative, legal, or fiscal significance.

The inability of the State Records Commission and the state archives to mount a vigorous records management program has caused a significant problem in the identification of state government records to which accessibility should be limited, if only for a time. Although state law required public officers to allow access to records at no cost and provides the right of citizens "to inspect and take a copy of any public writing," except for library circulation records and any other records of a confidential nature,<sup>69</sup> there is no mechanism for ensuring that such documents are adequately identified. Records of a potential confidential nature have been transferred to the state archives without regard to privacy restrictions and maintained in areas where open access would be relatively easy. At a time of great concern for the privacy and rights of individuals, not enough attention has been devoted to this issue.

Despite the present lack of an effective administration program for state government records, there is a general awareness of the need for such a program among state government

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<sup>68</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, section 38-2-11.

<sup>69</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 36-12-40-42.

agencies and the framework in which such a program can be developed.

The evidence is overwhelming that the program for the administration of state government records has not been adequate and needs to be strengthened and upgraded. Fortunately, there is an awareness of the need for an improved program among the staff of the state agencies. Many state officials are cognizant of the State Records Commission and legislation that affects their records, although it is unclear just how well understood these laws are.<sup>70</sup> More important, state agencies and state colleges and universities recognize the need for assistance and technical advice. State agency officials have expressed a strong desire that the state archives have a greater capacity for records storage, offer records administration training workshops and seminars, and publish technical advice

70 Of the respondents, 62.6 percent of the state agencies and 65 percent of the state colleges and universities claim they are aware of the State Records Commission's responsibility for the maintenance and disposition of their records. There is also knowledge of the impact of other legislation. Of the state agencies 68.6 percent have other federal and state legislation applying to their records; among the schools the figure is 94 percent!

on records management.<sup>71</sup> A significant majority of the departments would like advice on improving their microfilm programs, favor the Alabama Department of Archives and History working to establish minimum standards for the purchase and use of microfilm supplies and equipment, and support the state archives providing storage for security copies of their film.<sup>72</sup> The production of a comprehensive state records administration manual should be a tool welcomed by state agencies for the better control of their records.

<sup>71</sup> The following figures represent the rate of interest by the respondents in using the various services of the state archives:

<u>Service</u>	<u>State Agencies (percentage)</u>	<u>State Colleges and Universities (percentage)</u>
Increased records storage	76.6	67
Records administration training workshops and seminars	68.9	94
Published technical advice on records administration	74.1	93
Increased microfilming	58.3	79

<sup>72</sup> Among the state agencies 65.9 percent want advice on improving their microfilming program, 77 percent favor the establishment of minimum standards for the purchase and use of microfilm supplies and equipment, and 63.6 percent would be willing to store security copies of film. Among the state colleges and universities 87 percent would welcome advice on improving their program and 75 percent favor minimum standards; there were insufficient responses to the matter of the storage of security copies.

The desire by state agencies for assistance in the management of their records is strong enough to include a willingness to contribute or match resources. Nearly all state agencies and state colleges and universities are willing to at least assign an individual to serve as a records liaison to work with the state archives.<sup>73</sup> Slightly over half of the state departments and educational institutions are willing to offset the costs of records administration training programs by paying for publications, registration and attendance, and other training materials.<sup>74</sup> There is even an inclination to defray the costs of agency personnel attending records administration courses at local universities and colleges.<sup>75</sup> Most surprising, given the weaknesses of the Alabama Department of Archives and History's record program, a majority of the state agencies and colleges and universities are willing to cover some costs for the state archives' records services.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The figures of support for this are 88.5 percent of the responding state agencies and 86 percent of colleges and universities.

<sup>74</sup> The figures of support for this are 57 percent of state agencies and 53.7 percent of state agencies.

<sup>75</sup> Among the state agencies 47.5 percent are willing to do this while 60 percent of the schools support it. The support is less for attendance at out-of-state schools - 34.4 percent by state agencies and only 8 percent of the colleges and universities.

<sup>76</sup> Of the state agencies 60.3 percent would be willing to cover costs. Only 40 percent of the schools are inclined to do this at this time, but another portion (27 percent) are interested in exploring this further.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The state government records administration program must be improved to efficiently manage the state's active records and to identify and preserve those having historical value.

For the state to properly manage its records - in a manner that is cost-effective, guarantees access to information, and preserves historical documents - it must create and support a centralized records administration program concerned with the full "life-cycle" (from creation to final disposition) of records.<sup>77</sup> The preservation of the documentary heritage is, of course, an important cultural resource and also guarantees the saving of information that is essential for government policy formulation, the protection of rights of citizens, and the documenting of government processes. Such a program requires considerable resources, but the proper management of current records can also be cost-effective and more than pay for itself in savings to the state. A well-run records program frees costly office space and equipment, avoids additional expenditures for the uncontrolled accumulation of records, and assists in the correct decisions for the use of office automation and microfilm technology. In a joint program of records man-

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<sup>77</sup> The best description of the relationship between archivists and records managers is Frank B. Evans, "Archivists and Records Managers: Variations on a Theme," American Archivist 30 (January 1967): 45-58. For case studies of the effects of unbalanced programs see Richard J. Cox, "The Need for Comprehensive Records Management Programs in Local Government: Learning by Mistakes in Baltimore, 1947-1982," Provenance 1 (Fall 1983): 14-34 and Ian Wilson, "'A Noble Dream': The Origins of the Public Archives in Canada," Archivaria 15 (Winter 1982-83): 16-35.

agement and archival administration, the money saved in the management of current records can greatly assist in the support of the preservation, management, and use of historical records.<sup>78</sup>

Within Alabama state government the key to the development of an effective records administration program is the state's support of the Alabama Department of Archives and History both in resources and in a transformation from a passive repository of historic relics to an active service agency of state government. In recent years the state archives has found some increased support for the records program and has completed a reorganization to unite records management and archival functions and support the development of a state records management operation.<sup>79</sup> The archives has also begun strengthening its professional records staff through recruitment and retraining, using this new staff to begin to plan for and work

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<sup>78</sup> For example, the federal government estimates the cost of storing records in a records center at less than one-tenth that of maintaining them in office facilities (\$0.80 versus \$10.61 per cubic foot). Considering the volume of records produced by state government, the cost-savings in just this one area can be immense. Although the costs of processing and preserving historical records can be very great, the percentage of public records deemed to have historical value is very small, usually far less than five percent. For an example of such costs, see William J. Maher, "Measurement and Analysis of Processing Costs in Academic Archives," College & Research Libraries 43 (January 1982): 59-67.

<sup>79</sup> The former divisions were records management, civil archives, military records, maps and manuscripts, and state government publications. The state has supported this reorganization with a major increase in the state archives' budget for fiscal year 1984/85 that allowed the recruitment of additional professional staff and the purchase of additional equipment and supplies.

toward the implementation of a comprehensive records operation for state government.

Despite these positive steps, however, it is obvious that the Alabama Department of Archives and History will require further substantial increases in resources and support from state government. The program is bogged down with the resolution of pressing internal problems before it can mount an effective records administration program. The state archives is filled with tons of state records that are unprocessed, unevaluated, and undescribed - records accumulated over many years without adequate resources for their management. Control must be established over these records at an early point in the rebuilding of a state records system.<sup>80</sup> Also, there are virtually no records retention schedules in force that do not require reevaluation, adding to the problem that most state agencies are not covered by any schedules at all. For the state archives to resolve these problems and begin to work in meeting the records needs of state agencies, it must have more funds for additional staff and the continued professional development of its present staff. The Archives and Records Division consists of only nine professional archivists (in 1984), and these individuals are also responsible for state and local government records and the administration of the private his-

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<sup>80</sup> Not only are many of these records of historical value, but it is necessary to know what the state archives already holds of an agency's records before it endeavors to survey and evaluate those records the agency still is storing in its offices.



torical collections.<sup>81</sup> There is also a need for the addition of professional staff with different types of knowledge and experience, to be able to work with computerized information and the legal aspects of records management and use. The effective determination of a record's value and management can only be assured by professionally trained and knowledgeable staff who understand the nature of information, the process of government, and historical research. This is not an inexpensive program, especially when one considers that Alabama's state archives is and has been one of the least supported of all state archives in the Southeast.<sup>82</sup>

What should be in a records administration program for Alabama's state government? First, there must be carefully composed and published policies, procedures, and standards that state agencies can use. A published state records manual should be comprehensive in approach, covering records from their creation to final disposition, and should be designed to resolve the common needs of state agencies rather than endeavor to deal with each and every specific or special need of indi-

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<sup>81</sup> Although it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of professional archivists needed to effectively support this variety of functions, it is safe to say that the number could be doubled.

<sup>82</sup> Consider the 1984/85 budgets of the following southern states archives: Alabama, \$1,106,900; Georgia, \$3,616,711; Mississippi, \$2,720,171; North Carolina, \$3,226,336; and South Carolina, \$2,625,609. While the Alabama allocation per capita to the state archives is 28¢, for the other states it ranges from 55¢ to \$1.08.

vidual state departments.<sup>83</sup> This manual should be designed to be the core of a continuing educational program on state records management that will equip the various agencies to be able to identify their own needs and to know where and how to seek help. Workshops, seminars, and other educational efforts should include both basic orientation meetings as well as sessions on more advanced records concerns and needs. There should be some effort to extend these educational programs through existing public administration and extension courses currently administered by the state colleges and universities.<sup>84</sup> In addition to this educational outreach, the state agencies also should be provided a complete general retention schedule that covers all commonly held administrative, fiscal, and legal records. This schedule, which could be a part of the state records manual, would be an important tool in helping the state agencies to manage their current records, especially in the reduction of records of short-term value and in the removal of records of limited administrative use to other storage areas.

One of the most important elements to be considered in the development of a comprehensive state records program is the nature of the relationship between the state agencies, the

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<sup>83</sup> This is not to say that such special needs are not important. However, the vast majority of what seems to be unique problems to an agency's records operation are in fact shared problems. Most problems relate to storage, accessibility, and length of retention.

<sup>84</sup> For example, the basic sessions could consist of workshops on the rudiments of scheduling records and their proper disposition. More advanced topics could include files maintenance, forms and reports control, and the ramifications of privacy and freedom of information legislation.

State Records Commission, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The State Records Commission is responsible for the final approval of records retention schedules. The role of the state archives should be one of leadership in the coordination of a public records program, especially providing for the identification and care of the state's historical records and operating a centralized, cost-effective records center as a holding area for short-lived administrative documents. But each state agency must have some flexibility and share of the responsibility in the operation of a records program. At the least each agency must designate an individual as records officer to serve as a liaison with the state archives and State Records Commission. For the larger agencies, however, there needs to be additional study about the development of their own records programs. Should these agencies hire professional records managers to supervise their administration of records and to work with the state archives and the State Records Commission? How much flexibility should or can the larger agencies have for the care of their records that still guarantees the preservation of historical records and the protection of those records important for legal and fiscal reasons?<sup>85</sup>

The building of the Alabama Department of Archives and History is one of the distinctive landmarks in the state's government complex in Montgomery. On a high point of land

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<sup>85</sup> The Administrative Office of Courts has had in its employ a certified records manager responsible for the preliminary recommendations of retention schedules and the operation of a micrographics program. The program could serve as a model for other large agencies, provided it makes some basic changes. The AOC system developed out of a reaction to a lack of support and interest by the state archives in working with the court system's records needs.

overlooking the state's historic Capitol, the building reflects an essential and important role for the state archives in state government and Alabama's society. The development of a comprehensive records administration program for state government records fulfills such a role. Without it, the state archives building becomes merely a museum of dead, if interesting and quaint, records, and the state and its citizens remain deprived of the benefits of a full archival program.

The administration of state government records should be promoted by the Alabama Department of Archives and History as an information source for the operation of state government and for the citizens of Alabama.

An essential element of a state records administration program should be an emphasis upon records as information and the state archives as an information center. Increasingly, archivists are grappling with this issue, as one recently chided his colleagues that they are in the "information business" and are "ideally situated to develop systems of records control that provide degrees of precision over a wide array of information bearing records on various media."<sup>86</sup> The Alabama Department of Archives and History is certainly in an ideal position to be an information resource for state government and the citizens of the state. All state archives possess a potentially significant role in promoting the preservation and use of information by government, the knowledge of state government by citizens, the protection of citizens' rights and

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<sup>86</sup> W. Theodore Durr, "Commentary," Society of American Archivists Newsletter, July 1985, p. 4.

property, and the encouragement of an understanding of the past.

The state archives should seek to improve its performance in its traditional role as preserver of the state government's memory. It must produce an adequate guide to the historical records of state government in a manner that makes such information readily and widely accessible. The development of an automated, on-line system that can be part of or the nucleus of an informational network among state agencies, archival repositories, and libraries is certainly desirable.<sup>87</sup> The state archives should also emphasize the production of more traditional finding aids as well, such as the publication of general brochures and introductory packets explaining its mission and programs. The state archives should also place a greater emphasis upon documenting its work with state government records such as its appraisal decisions and its knowledge of the administrative histories of state government programs and policies.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> The state archives has been exploring the acquisition of such a system and should have it operational by late 1985 or early 1986.

<sup>88</sup> Public records programs have always been important to understanding and documenting the administrative history of an organization, a role that has been expanded upon in the more recent public history discipline. For the classic essay on administrative history, see Karl L. Trever, "Administrative History in Federal Archives," American Archivist 4 (July 1941): 159-69; see also Arthur D. Larson, "Administrative History: A Proposal for a Re-evaluation of its Contributions to the Archival Profession," Midwestern Archivist 7 (No. 1, 1982): 34-55. For the possibilities of public history, see Richard J. Cox, "Archivists and Public History," Institute News: Newsletter of the North Carolina Institute of Applied History 3 (March 1984): 3-6.

A major focus of the state archives should be its control over the content of its large collection of state government publications. The publications of state government are especially significant because they are convenient summaries of state agency programs, past and present, and document the full range of state programs and functions. Of all of the state archives' holdings these publications may be the most valuable for the active use by state government in administrative and policy activities. The state archives should pursue the establishment of a working relationship with the Alabama Public Library Service that guarantees the state archives' role as the archival facility for those publications possessing historical value and, at the same time, provides a system for their state-wide distribution and use.<sup>89</sup>

The Alabama Department of Archives and History should also seek to develop a close working relationship with other state agencies that are in the information business. Among state agencies there are programs to promote tourism, to plan for economic growth, to consider and evaluate needed and proposed legislation, to protect consumers' rights, to study and plan for a quality education system, to foster library cooperation, and to encourage the practice and

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<sup>89</sup> While the state archives maintains an archival collection of these publications, the Alabama Public Library Service could provide microfiche copies of current publications through its statewide distribution system. This is an arrangement similar to that already existing in a number of other states.

enjoyment of the arts - to name only a few - that are all concerned with the use and dissemination of information.<sup>90</sup> Only one program, the state archives, is concerned with the preservation and use of historical information. Despite the wide array of state agencies stressing information, there has been no effort to coordinate these programs. The state archives, because of its commitment to preserve and encourage the use of the historical information of all state agencies, should play a catalytic role in the coordination of state government information operations.

For the Alabama Department of Archives and History to promote the use of information will require a major reorientation from its past programs. For its holdings of information to be used, whether by public administrators or private researchers, they must be promoted and not left to chance discovery. The state government and the public must be helped to understand the role and nature of an archives, and the state archives needs to identify and seek out every opportunity or means to promote its holdings as information necessary to the operation of state government and the

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<sup>90</sup> For information on such agencies, refer to the Alabama Government Manual.

maintenance of a democratic society.<sup>91</sup>

There must be a comprehensive program for the preservation of the state government's historical records including the acquisition of additional high quality storage space.

The preservation of historical records has always been a challenge for archivists. At a national conference for setting priorities for historical records, conservation and preservation was ranked as one of the greatest needs. One eminent conservator summarized the situation as follows:

The great majority of the written records of our heritage, after having been gathered in historical societies, offices of town and county clerks, court record repositories, state archives, and private collections, have been deteriorating at an ever increasing rate. We have reached the point at which if some positive steps are not taken, much of the information in these

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<sup>91</sup> The state archives has already started to move in this direction with its establishment of an education division in late 1984. This division will be responsible for, among other things, publicizing the work of the state archives. The state archives should carefully consider the future validity of the Official and Statistical Register, whether to expand it into a manual for state government or cease its publication.



records will be lost.<sup>92</sup>

Some positive steps have been taken in other states and regions, but there has been little progress made in Alabama for the preservation of its state government records. No matter how successful the Alabama Department of Archives and History is in the identification of state government records possessing historical value or in promoting them as relevant information sources, its labors will be of little significance if the records and their information are not preserved.

The first requirement for the proper care of the state government records is the acquisition by the state archives of a climate-controlled and secure storage facility. There is some question about the suitability of the state archives' current facility being adapted in this manner, and an indepth study should be done of this matter. Such a study also should consider two other issues. Should a west wing of the state archives building be constructed that will provide the proper storage for historical records?<sup>93</sup> Or,

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<sup>92</sup> George M. Cunha, et al, "The Conservation and Preservation of Historical Records," American Archivist 40 (July 1977): 321 and Walter Rundell, Jr. and C. Herbert Finch, "The State of Historical Records: A Summary," ibid., pp. 345-46.

<sup>93</sup> The original building was designed to have two wings; the east wing was constructed in the early 1970s.

maintenance of current records?<sup>94</sup> Regardless of what these studies might reveal, it is painfully clear that there is the need for more and better records storage. If the state archives continues with its present structure, the development of a records administration program only will enhance the chances of records being stored off-site at greater expense and risk to their preservation and integrity.

Beyond the questions of the storage facility, the Alabama Department of Archives and History needs to develop a program for the preservation of the state's historical records and their informational content. The state archives is already removing records to acid-free storage materials. It also needs to continue to develop its micrographics operation so that the state's historical records, at least those that lack intrinsic value and are in a deteriorating condition, could be microfilmed to preserve their informational content. The expansion of the micrographics program could assist in the control of the proliferation of microfilming operations in state agencies that threatens the historical records. Although a more costly option, the state archives must expand into a conservation program that

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<sup>94</sup> Most state records management programs have records centers. For Alabama such a facility could consist of a warehouse variety of structure with adequate security and fire protection located outside of Montgomery. The records center would require at least a few staff to operate, primarily for the receiving, disposing, and reference of records.

cleans and encapsulates certain selected items requiring further care or, at the least, is able to identify conservation needs and priorities. None of these activities really require further study; unless something is not done soon much of Alabama's documentary heritage will be lost.<sup>95</sup> What will require further evaluation is the state archives' role in the development of a state or regional conservation center whose services and specialities may be contracted for, especially for work with records such as photographs, maps, and architectural and engineering drawings. Such a center could give the state archives the flexibility it needs, at a more reasonable cost, to effectively respond to the range of conservation options it requires.<sup>96</sup>

One of the state archives' greatest conservation needs is in the area of computer generated records. Since the state government is increasingly transferring information from traditional records forms to that of an electronic environment, there must be a program to ensure that such

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<sup>95</sup> Again, according to George Cunha, "archivists must start in a small way, pooling their resources to provide the space, tools, and equipment even if they must be operated by only a skeleton force. There is much that can be done at the basic level by trainees working under the direction of only one skilled conservator or technician even without thinking of attempting slightly more sophisticated work. We must begin before it is too late"; "Conservation and Preservation," p. 321. The Society of American Archivists' new manual on conservation is oriented to precisely such an operation; Ritzenthaler, Archives and Manuscripts: Conservation.

<sup>96</sup> For an analysis of the role of such conservation centers, see Conservation Treatment Facilities in the United States (Washington: National Conservation Advisory Council, 1980).

records appraised to have historical value will be preserved and their information accessible. The neglect of such a program will guarantee the loss of a vast quantity of historical information, a problem that a number of other archival institutions have recognized and are beginning to study and establish programs to combat.<sup>97</sup> The Alabama state archives must also study these programs and either train staff to deal with these records or recruit professionals with the required experience and training.

The Alabama Department of Archives and History must remember that it has a responsibility for statewide assistance to other archival repositories because of its size and resources. There is no other archival repository in Alabama that possesses the resources that can support the adequate preservation of historical records or mobilize the archival community in the state into appropriate action. One example is the need for the composition of a statewide disaster-preparedness plan that will enable archivists,

librarians, and other records custodians to respond effectively to any emergency to ensure the preservation of his-

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Martin David, F. Gerald Ham, et al, Archival Preservation of Machine-Readable Public Records (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1981).

torical records.<sup>98</sup> Although professional associations, such as the Society of Alabama Archivists and the Alabama Library Association, could provide the necessary leadership in developing such a plan, the state archives nevertheless has the essential role to play and, in regard to the records of state government, the clearest responsibility.

Alabama's state-supported colleges and universities must develop records administration programs that efficiently manage their active records and identify and preserve their historical sources.

The state colleges and universities have assumed an important role in Alabama's archival community with their development of records programs and special collections, but these programs have come about without central state assistance and coordination. As a result, one school may have an excellent administration program for their institutional records while another, similar in size and structure, may have none. The greatest need for the development of college and university records programs is a statewide organization to provide coordination and planning, a role best suited for the Alabama Department of Archives and History in tandem with the State Records Commission and the

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<sup>98</sup> A recent issue of the newsletter of the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators reports that four states are in the process of completing disaster-preparedness plans; Clearinghouse 6 (June 1984): 6-7, 10-11. A number of other states have already completed such plans.

Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the latter a state agency responsible for long-range planning for post-secondary education.

Because of the size, complexity, and geographic spread of Alabama's colleges and universities, these institutions should be encouraged to develop their own records programs under the guidance of the State Records Commission and Commission on Higher Education and with the assistance of the state archives.<sup>99</sup> The state archives should make technical literature on such programs available to the schools and should eventually have at least one staff member as a resource person to provide technical advice and assistance. Most important, however, there needs to be the creation of a general retention schedule covering college and university records and a general procedures manual. Such a manual should be easily within grasp if it is built upon the two programs that already exist<sup>100</sup> and if a working coalition of the colleges and universities can be formed and supported. Such a coalition should promote the practices of good records administration and serve as an information network on this behalf.

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<sup>99</sup> This also should include any networks already established among the schools, such as the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

<sup>100</sup> Both the University of Alabama and Auburn University have done extensive work in the creation of records retention schedules and internal operational manuals.

The state colleges and universities should also be encouraged to report their holdings of institutional records possessing historical value to some centralized source. If a few of the larger programs have made information about their records available through national guides,<sup>101</sup> generally there has been no effort to share information about this within the state. Researchers find it difficult to gather such information, and colleges and universities know little about other records programs. The Alabama Department of Archives and History needs to establish a system for gathering the information about university and college records even if this only consists of collecting copies of internal finding aids and making them available in the reference room at the state archives.<sup>102</sup>

Staff of the state college and university records programs should be encouraged to participate more actively in professional records conferences and meetings. The staff of a few of these institutions have been leaders in the organization of the Society of Alabama Archivists, but others have not participated as fully as desired in such professional

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<sup>101</sup> See, for example, the Directory of Archives and Manuscripts Repositories in the United States (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1978), pp. 13-17.

<sup>102</sup> If the state archives succeeds in developing an automated system, then such information should be placed into it. Ideally, the information that should be available should concern the retention schedules, the quantity and nature of records created by the schools, and the holdings of historical records.

organizations. Greater activity could stimulate interest by other schools that do not have records programs. The staff of these records programs often teach archival and records courses at their schools and these should be expanded to include opportunities for training records custodians of Alabama's colleges and universities. If nothing else, the programs of the Society of Alabama Archivists, Alabama Library Association, and other similar organizations regularly should include sessions on the issues of college and university records administration because of the importance of these records programs to the preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage.<sup>103</sup>

**Legislation must be strengthened to support an effective administration program for state government records clarifying the role and authority of the state archives and State Records Commission.**

The records legislation that now exists is inadequate, although it does not preclude the development of a broader, more aggressive program for state government records. Much can be done within the parameters of the present law simply by providing more professional archivists to work upon appraisal, scheduling, arrangement and description, and preservation of the state's records. For this reason, legislation should be a secondary rather than primary focus

<sup>103</sup> This is especially a need because of the unique factors related to the management of college and university records, such as the privacy needs of student records. Charles B. Elston, "University Student Records: Research Use, Privacy Rights and the Buckley Law," Midwestern Archivist 1 (no. 1, 1976): 16-32.



by the state in its operation of a records administration program, at least in the immediate future.<sup>104</sup>

Legislation should be studied within the near future with several areas requiring close analysis. Should there be changes in the legislation that corrects the passive stance of the Alabama Department of Archives and History or will that occur through other programatic changes? What needs to be changed to strengthen the authority of the State Records Commission over the records of state agencies, especially to avoid the recurring passage of legislative bills that circumvent the commission's responsibility for scheduling and appraisal? What impact has the recent trend of privacy and freedom of information legislation had upon the records of Alabama's state government records? And what is the relationship between local, state, and federal requirements for record keeping in state government? The preparation of a full study of the present records legislation and the practical needs of a records program - with advice from the Attorney General's office, professional archivists and records administrators, and the state agencies - is a need that will become greater as a new and more

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<sup>104</sup> Even the best legislation is useless if there are inadequate resources to support it. Moreover, it makes sense to start a records program that will assist in the identification of specific needs in improving the state laws regarding the public records.

active state records administration program is developed.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the need for such study, there are certain aspects of the legislation that should be changed as quickly as possible. There should be an expansion in the definition of what constitutes a "public" record to include computerized records and to emphasize governmentally produced information instead of only records formats. Without this change the nature of an effective records administration program is tied to what the records environment was three or four decades ago rather than what it is now or will become over the next generation.<sup>106</sup> There also needs to be revisions made in the law supporting the work of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, legislation that has been changed little since the state archives' creation and early development. For example, the state archives still has the responsibility "to designate and describe historic spots in Alabama for monumental purposes," when this is closely related to the responsibilities of the more recently organized Alabama Historical Commission.<sup>107</sup> Another example is the state archives' present responsibility to provide a statewide distribution system of state government publications, something it has never successfully done and which is

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<sup>105</sup> George Bain's analysis of state archival legislation provides a framework for such a study with his eighteen categories of legislative elements; "State Archival Law."

<sup>106</sup> Again, see Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era."

<sup>107</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-6-8 and 41-9-242.

more logically a part of the work of the Alabama Public Library Service.<sup>108</sup>

The Alabama Department of Archives and History must cooperate with other state archival institutions and professional records associations to develop strategies for administering state government records.

The Alabama Department of Archives and History is the key to the development of an administration program for state government records. One reason why such a program has not developed in Alabama has been the isolation of the state archives from professional trends in archives and records management. In the early part of this century Alabama's state archives was the model for the archival profession, yet it has steadily fallen behind the rest of the profession since the 1920s. Many of the areas where it needs help have been more fully developed by other state archives; examples are appraisal and scheduling programs, the appraisal and preservation of computerized records, the design and construction of records centers, and the composition and use of records manuals and training programs. For the immediate future the Alabama state archives would stand to gain more from than it could contribute to the archival profession.

Another reason for the state archives to seek the formation of closer ties to other archival institutions is the

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<sup>108</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-6-12 and 41-8-5.

general need for the archival community to pool resources in the resolution of significant problems in the identification and preservation of historical records. One prominent archivist has identified such cooperation as the major need for this profession's growth. Cooperation would be an asset in the collecting of historical records, the describing of such records for research use, preserving these documents, and archival planning and strategy.<sup>109</sup> The Alabama Department of Archives and History will be moving where the archival profession is heading in the future.

Alabama's cooperation with other state archival institutions could also benefit the archival profession. The state archives has always possessed an administrative placement that should be a model for other programs, namely its independence.<sup>110</sup> It is one of the few state archives responsible for state government publications and a survey of these institutions reveals that most are missing opportunities for increased service to researchers by not considering such documents in appraisal or arrangement and description.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Frank G. Burke, "Archival Cooperation," American Archivist 46 (Summer 1983): 293-305. Such cooperation also extends beyond professions; see Margaret S. Child, "Reflections on Cooperation Among Professions," ibid., pp. 286-292.

<sup>110</sup> See Bridges, "State Government Records Programs," pp. 1-5.

<sup>111</sup> Richard J. Cox, "State Government Publications and State Archival Institutions," NASARA Clearinghouse 7 (December 1984): 4-5, 16.

For the Alabama Department of Archives and History once again to emerge as a leader in the archival profession will require significant state support for staff development and professional education. The state's professional archivists will need to participate in professional research, development, and educational activities in order to keep pace with a profession that is undergoing considerable change.<sup>112</sup> They need to attend special seminars and workshops and to visit other archival institutions to examine first-hand successful programs and procedures. The costs expended will be fully recovered from the development of more effective and efficient strategies for the management and use of state government records.

### Conclusion

If society values the records and the information of state government, then it must begin to take action as soon as possible. The essential requirement for improving the management of state records must be the strengthening of the programs of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Fortunately, this is already beginning to occur, but the state archives needs some greater support by the state. Alabama's elected public officials and civil servants need to understand the importance and responsibility of maintaining the public records. And the citizens of Alabama need to

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<sup>112</sup> The more important meetings are those of the Society of American Archivists, National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, Association of Records Managers and Administrators, and the American Association for State and Local History.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

For the Alabama Department of Archives and History once support a records administration program for the protection of their rights, the maintenance of a democratic society, and the understanding of their society's past.

... and educational activities in order to keep pace with a profession that is undergoing considerable change. They need to attend special seminars and workshops and visit other archival institutions to examine first-hand the work being done in this field. The costs expended will be fully recovered from the development of more effective and efficient strategies for the management and use of state government records. The professional archivists and archivists could maintain an increased eye on the state's records.

Conclusion

If society values the records and the information of its government, then it must begin to take action to work for a more efficient and economical management of its records. The essential requirement for improving the management of state records must be the strengthening of the program of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Fortunately, this is already beginning to occur, but the state archives needs some greater support by the state.

Alabama's elected public officials and civil servants need to understand the importance and responsibility of maintaining the public records. The Alabama Department of Archives and History is the only state agency that is responsible for the preservation of the state's records. The more important meetings are those of the Society of American Archivists, National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators, Association of Records Managers and Administrators, and the American Association of State and Local Records Administrators. For more information, contact the Alabama Department of Archives and History, 100 North University, Montgomery, Alabama 36103. Telephone: (205) 261-1111.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

**ГОСУД. СОЛЛЕКЦИОН. РЕКОРДС**

support a research administration program for the protection  
of their rights, the maintenance of a democratic society,  
and the understanding of their society's past.



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

### Introduction

A few years ago a leading archivist declared that the "archival profession is almost entirely unprepared to meet the needs of the local government." This statement is still valid today. Similar statements have been made over the past eight decades. There has been a succession of national efforts to secure better the records of local governments - the Public Records Commission of the American Historical Association, the Historical Records Survey, the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, the American Association for State and Local History, and the recent state assessment and reporting projects sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The results have been inconsequential relative to the needs of the country. While some state and local governments have made some progress, the vast majority of local governments are still in a state of neglect. The growth in the size and complexity of local government has created a situation where the maintenance of local government records is

<sup>1</sup> Phillip R. Mason, "Archives in the Provinces: Promises and Fulfillment," American Archivist 34 (Summer 1972): 204.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

### Introduction

A few years ago a leading archivist declared that the "archival preservation of public records of local units of government. . . ranks high on the list of unfinished projects" of the archival profession.<sup>1</sup> Similar statements have been made over the past eight decades. There has been a succession of national efforts to manage better the records of local governments - the Public Records Commission of the American Historical Association, the Historical Records Survey, the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, the American Association for State and Local History, and the recent state assessment and reporting projects sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission - yet progress has been insubstantial relative to the degree of the problem. While some state and local governments have succeeded in creating model local records administration programs, these successes are minor when compared to the needs. The continuing growth in the size and complexity of government at all levels has created a situation where the administration of local public records is

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip R. Mason, "Archives in the Seventies: Promises and Fulfillment," American Archivist 44 (Summer 1981): 204.

worse than it was even a generation ago.<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, of all governments, it is the government of the locality that most affects the average citizen. The records of local government are extremely important, not just for political or public administration, but for documenting the history of states, cities, towns, neighborhoods, families, and individuals.<sup>3</sup> We live, interact, and establish our identities on the local scene, whether that be a street block, neighborhood, town, or county. As a consequence, local public records are the documents that most protect our personal, political, and property rights. There are few aspects of our lives not touched by these records. The importance of the locality in our lives is something that has been increasingly recognized by political and social scientists seeking to understand the American way of life; in fact, the largest area of growth of activity and interest by the historical profession over the past

<sup>2</sup> For the most recent evaluation of the condition of these records and a brief review of the efforts to manage them, see Richard J. Cox, "Local Government Records Program," in Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States ed. Lisa B. Weber ([Albany, New York]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, [1984]), pp. 19-36.

<sup>3</sup> For a description of the nature of local government records, see H. G. Jones, Local Government Records: An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980).

two decades has been in local history.<sup>4</sup>

If local government records play such a crucial role in the lives of America's inhabitants, how do we account for their deplorable condition in the 1980s? The first level of responsibility, of course, rests with the local public officials and civil servants who create and manage the records.<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, local governments have not allocated the resources necessary for the maintenance of records because of a lack of understanding of both their importance and the principles of records administration. Since these officials are elected and since government is a servant of the citizenry, the responsibility for the care of local public records - or any governmental function - is one that is shared by all. In most states many of the activities of local government are regulated by state government and the responsibility for the management of these records rests with the state archival agency.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, most state archives have simply never had the proper resources

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Community Studies, Urban History, and American Local History," in The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 270-91. See also James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams, eds., Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Bruce W. Dearstyne, "State Programs for Local Government Records: Agents for Change," paper presented at the 1983 meeting of the Society of American Archivists.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce W. Dearstyne, "Principles for Local Government Records: A Statement of the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators," American Archivist 46 (Fall 1983): 452-57. In recognition of this responsibility, NASARA agreed at its 1984 meeting to allow in local government records officials and custodians and to change its name to NAGARA - the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators.

to allow them to provide any substantial form of assistance to the political subdivisions or the inclination to work in this area. A large portion of the blame for the condition of local government records rests with the archival profession because this profession wants and assumes the responsibility of managing and preserving the nation's documentary heritage, and yet has failed to address adequately this responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

Alabama's local government records are affected by all of these problems. Many of these records are in atrocious condition because of the inability of the local officials to properly care for them and because the Alabama Department of Archives and History has not been able to provide suitable assistance. Although some local governments have made special efforts to care for these records, these efforts have not been enough. Records are deteriorating and disappearing in inadequate and insecure storage areas, threatening the rights of Alabama's citizenry, and jeopardizing our ability to document and understand the state's history. No other area of Alabama's documentary heritage has been so neglected as that of the local governments. Fortunately, however, there is not only significant interest on the part of the local governments to rectify this situation, but also the state archival community has expressed a stronger interest in addressing their problem. Conditions are extremely bleak now, but prospects are bright for the fu-

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<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Cox, "Leadership and Local Government Records: The Opportunity of the Joint Committee on the Management, Preservation, and Use of Local Government Records," Midwestern Archivist 10 (no. 1, 1985): 33-41.

ture if the Alabama Department of Archives and History and local public officials acquire the resources they are seeking.

#### FINDINGS

Many of Alabama's local government records are in deplorable condition - threatening the destruction of this element of the documentary heritage, limiting the use of their informational content for the administration of local government, and jeopardizing the rights of the state's citizenry - and there is no program at present for rectifying this situation.

The condition of many of Alabama's local records is appalling. Records of value to the administration of government and to the history of the locality and state are deteriorating and disappearing at a rapid pace in courthouses, city halls, and other government offices all across the state. Records are both accidentally and purposefully destroyed without regard to their informational content or value. The information captured in these records is not used, considered, or even remembered in the ongoing administration of local governments. One concerned resident and amateur historian wrote in desperation to the state archives declaring that the records in the state's courthouses in north Alabama were literally being carried off: "Researchers and genealogists are simply stealing everything they can walk out with, which is considerable! Within a very short time there will be nothing of value left in courthouses to search." Records of another Alabama county recently showed up at a flea market in New Jersey, the result of a county em-

ployee having removed and sold them. Yet another county, in an effort to raise money to purchase band uniforms, even considered auctioning off the old public records for this purpose.<sup>8</sup> All of these incidents occurred in 1984 and are, perhaps, minor when compared to the long-termed and widespread neglect of Alabama's local government records. Many Alabama attorneys, for example, report that accurate title searches are virtually impossible in some counties because the records are in such shambles.

Many elected officials and civil servants of Alabama's local governments are simply not aware of how to manage their records or even where to seek assistance for records management advice. Those local governments that have sought assistance have contacted a wide variety of organizations and institutions but have obviously acquired little help of substance;<sup>9</sup> one of the most helpful sources has been the Alabama League of Municipalities, but even its aid is dependent on an increasingly unwieldy and out-dated set of retention schedules for spe-

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<sup>8</sup> These incidents have been pulled from an "atrocities" file maintained by the director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

<sup>9</sup> They have consisted of local government and other professional associations, state agencies (including the state archives), planning commissions and councils, county commissions, libraries, local historical societies, federal agencies, commercial companies, individual lawyers and judges, provisions in the Alabama Code, genealogical societies, and academic institutions.



cific types of records.<sup>10</sup> After the creation of a unified judicial system in Alabama, the Administrative Office of Courts promised and established a central records program for the county circuit courts; however, the AOC's program has not yet been able to provide much direct assistance to the counties, especially in the area of the historical records of those courts. Indicative of the problem is the virtual anonymity of the County Records Commission, the body established in 1955 to provide statewide guidelines for the administration of county records. Nearly two-thirds of the local governments are simply not aware of the commission or the state archives and even more have never used the services of the state archives.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of an occasional workshop or training program offered through local universities, Alabama's local public officials have had little opportunity for learning about the importance and nature of good records programs.

Local government officials and civil servants are responsible for the adequate management of their records, but most

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<sup>10</sup> Municipalities have been helped by the Alabama League of Municipalities which has produced a technical leaflet based upon a twenty year old law that authorizes the destruction of certain forms of municipal records; this law is more fully discussed below in the section on records legislation. A significant majority (77.7 percent) of the municipalities responding to the questionnaire were aware of the municipal records law.

<sup>11</sup> Of the local government records respondents, 64.9 percent were not aware of the County Records Commission and 65.6 percent were unaware of the services of the state archives. Fully 78 percent of the local governments had never used any of the records services of the state archives and could not even begin to rate them for their value or effectiveness.

have no records managers<sup>12</sup> or have allocated few funds for this purpose.<sup>13</sup> Relatively few local government officials have any awareness of the significance of privacy and open access laws or state or federal regulations relative to their own records, information essential to the operation of a local government records program.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, many local governments also have endeavored to resolve records problems without sufficient knowledge or guidance; for example, there have been numerous local laws enacted that provide for the microfilming of records, but do not include provision for the creation of archival-quality microfilm or evaluations of the suitability of the records for filming - a procedure destined to waste public funds and to jeopardize the preserving of the information con-

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<sup>12</sup> Only 44 percent indicated that there were individuals responsible for these records.

<sup>13</sup> More indicative of the problems with the administration of local government records is the matter of public funds used to support such programs. Out of 141 respondents to the questionnaire only fifty-one (36.1 percent) could even estimate how much money they were using for their records. Of those that did estimate, fifteen (29.4 percent) stated that there was no money for such purposes; of the remainder the estimates ranged from \$200 to \$100,000.

<sup>14</sup> Of the respondents 45.7 percent are not aware of privacy or open access legislation and 46.1 percent are not aware of federal regulations, extremely large portions given the tremendous influence and publicity of these areas.

tent of the records.<sup>15</sup> And despite an increasing public interest in the research potential of the records of local government,<sup>16</sup> few of the political subdivisions have established secure or adequate research areas in the courthouses or other offices<sup>17</sup> or have endeavored to gain any sort of control over the records that would assist these researchers. In a state as old as Alabama it is remarkable that there are virtually no adequate guides to the records of local governments, including those stored in the state archives.<sup>18</sup> All of these problems, however, are dwarfed by the widespread continuing carelessness in the physical storage of the records.

A major reason for the continuing poor conditions of the local government records is the lack of adequate state level support and assistance. The state archives is responsible for

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Acts of Alabama, 1973, no. 691; 1984, no. 513; 1957, no. 427; and 1975, no. 284. These laws usually contain such a statement as "after such records have been processed and checked for clarity" they are eligible for destruction; but such a phrase does not include any provision for ensuring that the records have been filmed or processed in a manner that guarantees the long-term preservation of those images.

<sup>16</sup> Of the respondents 74.4 percent indicate their records are being used by researchers and 61.4 percent that the research is increasing.

<sup>17</sup> Only 14 percent have a special facility designed for researchers, only 8.5 percent maintain any kind of record of research use, and 48.7 percent believe that they have adequate security. Fortunately, only 10 percent believe that they have suffered theft or mutilation of their records, although 22.4 percent simply don't know.

<sup>18</sup> The only published guides are those produced by the Historical Records Survey of four decades ago! See the discussion of the HRS in Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage," earlier in this publication.

a wide range of programs and has not had the resources to offer assistance to the local governments. The reason that the County Records Commission is unknown to the local officials is because it has met only twice in its thirty-year existence, although it is required by law to hold quarterly meetings!<sup>19</sup>

What the state archives has been able to do with the one or two people who have been assigned to local government records has been very spotty. The archives' accessioning of original local government records has been based largely upon what local governments have wanted to dispose of rather than the result of records selected because of their historical significance.<sup>20</sup>

The state archives has not been able to assist and monitor the microfilming of local government records to ensure the production of archival-quality film or to accession copies of local historical records; in fact, the majority of microfilm of local government records in the state archives was acquired in 1983 from the genealogical division of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. And, perhaps most seriously, the state archives has not produced an adequate general manual for the administration

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<sup>19</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-13-22-25. The sufficiency of this legislation will be discussed below in the legislation section of this chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Not only that but the state archives even has failed to produce an adequate finding aid to its relatively small holdings or to coordinate with the Administrative Office of Courts to acquire inventories of the circuit court records or copies of its microfilm. Until 1974 the courts were under local jurisdiction but now are part of a unified state judicial system, although the court records remain obviously of great local interest; see C. C. Torbert, Jr., "The Politics and Management of Alabama's Court System," Public Sector 7 (Winter/Spring 1984): [1-8].

of local public records or a general retention schedule for these records. The manual that it did produce, although an improvement over its counterpart for state government records, restricted itself to the scheduling of records, antiquated procedures for the inventory and storage of records, and a concern for only traditional paper forms of records, and it included as an appendix a general schedule with suspicious retention periods and poor series descriptions that could not help local records custodians.<sup>21</sup> More important, the manual never addressed itself to the more fundamental question of whether these records should be transferred to the state archives (could it really store all of these records?) or maintained in the localities, and it managed to exclude completely the question of Alabama's municipal records.<sup>22</sup> In short, Alabama has lacked an effective state program to support the administration of local government records.

Underlying all of these problems has been the general lack of public awareness of local government records issues. This is true not only in Alabama but nationally, primarily because of the poor public understanding of the nature and work of the

<sup>21</sup> County Records Retention Manual, State of Alabama ([Montgomery]: Alabama Department of Archives and History, n.d.). Ironically, the greatest improvement in the past decade in the archival profession has been the composition and publication of local government records manuals.

<sup>22</sup> In fairness, very few state archives have been able to successfully grapple with the problem of the municipalities because of the size and breadth of their problems; see Richard J. Cox, "A Reappraisal of Municipal Records in the United States," Public Historian 3 (Winter 1981): 49-63.

archives and records professions.<sup>23</sup> In Alabama this has been a particularly severe problem because there has been no concerted statewide effort to identify or resolve the problems of local government records administration. Local government professional associations have devoted some attention to these concerns in their meetings and publications but have never been able to forge a partnership with the state archives in the development of an effective program. Alabama's associations of archivists, historians, and genealogists are small, informal organizations that generally exist for annual or more frequent meetings and have never been especially interested in or adept at lobbying for the funding of public programs.<sup>24</sup> Since the officials responsible for the maintenance of Alabama's public records are elected, it stands to reason that there must be a greater involvement of the public urging that these records be properly managed. This is not only the most effective means to improve the condition of the records, but, perhaps, the only means at this time.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> David B. Gracy, II "Archives and Society: The First Archival Revolution," American Archivist 47 (Winter 1984): 7-10.

<sup>24</sup> For example, until recently the Society of Alabama Archivists consisted of less than fifty members and restricted its activities to meetings twice a year. The genealogists, a potentially potent force for support, have no effective statewide organization.

<sup>25</sup> It was precisely such activity that led to the establishment of North Carolina's local records system; see H. G. Jones, "North Carolina's Local Records Programs," American Archivist 24 (January 1961): 25-41.

Edwin C. Bridges, in a national study describing the condition of state government records programs, identified a "cycle of poverty":

The trap in which underdeveloped nations are caught is usually characterized as one in which poverty creates conditions that prevent economic growth. The lack of economic growth along with increasing population creates more poverty, and the cycle continues in endless repetition. The picture of public records programs is one of inadequate resources which prevent state archives from mounting effective programs while the lack of effective programs renders the archives' vulnerable to disregard by departmental administrators and state budget officials. This cycle, too, seems to continue in endless repetition.<sup>26</sup>

The "cycle of poverty" analogy perfectly fits Alabama's local government records environment. The state archives, strapped by inadequate resources, is unable to provide leadership and technical assistance to the local governments. The local governments, also hindered by lack of resources, do not understand the advantages and needs for managing their records and have

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<sup>26</sup> "State Government Records Programs," in Documenting America, p. 8.

nowhere to turn for leadership or advice. Only a broad concerted effort, that enables resources to be allocated to local public records programs, can cause this cycle to be broken.

Existing legislation is inadequate for the proper administration of Alabama's local government records, especially the preservation of those having historical value.

Legislation should not be the primary focus in endeavoring to build an effective statewide program for the management of local government records, but the legislative basis of Alabama's program is so weak as to merit serious attention at an early point. This is especially valid since local governments are legal and administrative creatures of state government. The recent statement by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators is an excellent means by which to compare Alabama's local records legislation. It affirms that "state legal authority should extend to all the records of all local governments," defining such records in a broad manner, and that "state law should recognize the responsibility of state archival or records management agencies" in the disposition of records, their preservation and protection, microfilming, the accessibility of records, and the acquisition of alienated records. State archives "should work in partnership with local officials in establishing strong records management and archival programs."<sup>27</sup> The provision of Alabama's

<sup>27</sup> Dearstyne, "Principles for Local Government Records."



legislation is not sufficiently developed or clear to serve as the basis for a program of this level of effectiveness.

What is a local government record? Under state law public records are specifically defined as:

all written, typed or printed books, papers, letters, documents and maps made or received in pursuance of law by the public officers of the state, counties, municipalities and other subdivisions of government in the transactions of public business and shall also include any record authorized to be made by any law of this state belonging or pertaining to any court of record or any other public record authorized by law or any paper, pleading, exhibit or other writing filed with, in or by any such court, office, or officer.<sup>28</sup>

As such, the definition has not changed since its adoption forty years ago (in 1945) and is inadequate to cope with the increasing electronic records environment.

Alabama state law has also defined its parameters of what is a local government record in a curious way, by making provisions for the better management of county records than for

<sup>28</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, section 41-13-1.

nowhere to turn for leadership or advice. Only a broad  
those of municipalities and towns. The County Records Commis-  
sion has the responsibility of determining through surveys and  
the creation of retention schedules, which records have histor-  
ical value and which may be microfilmed; in this authority,  
along with the ability of the state archives to "examine into  
the condition of public records" and to "give advice and assis-  
tance" on records matters, is at least the seed of a statewide  
coordinated local government records program. There is also  
some provision for the protection of records for unauthorized  
destruction or sale, the use of microfilm as evidence in court,  
and the public inspection of all public records.<sup>29</sup> Some of  
these latter areas extend to the records of municipalities, but  
the legislation covering such records is more narrowly focused.  
In the case of municipal records, the law is completely orient-  
ed to the destruction of eighteen series of records - ranging  
from check stubs and cancelled checks to contracts and bonds -  
and the procedures for destroying such records.<sup>30</sup> Not only do  
the records so enumerated cover only a small portion of the

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<sup>29</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-13-25, 40-44, and 36-12-40-42.

<sup>30</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 11-47-150-55. Even some of these records could possess historical value; for example, "general correspondence" is a fairly vague series title that is often used by administrators to cover their general administrative files that are important for documenting the functions, development, and history of the agencies.

records generated by municipal government,<sup>31</sup> but there is absolutely no provision for how records of a permanent administrative or historical nature should be maintained. The public records of Alabama's largest local government units have been virtually ignored, at least in providing any mechanism for the ongoing administration of the records.

The question of what should be done with the historical records of Alabama's local governments is, for all practical means, ignored in Alabama's records legislation. Alabama law provides that "any state, county or other official may, in his discretion, turn over to the [state archives] for permanent preservation therein any official books, records, documents, original papers, newspaper files and printed books not in current use in his offices."<sup>32</sup> The primary problems with such legislation is that it places the responsibility for such decisions upon local officials who are often unaware of what constitutes adequate records management and who are usually not aware of what records should be preserved for historical value.<sup>33</sup> Local public officials desirous of developing a records

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<sup>31</sup> Compare, for example, to the numerous series of municipal records identified in Michael J. Fox and Kathleen A. McDonough, Wisconsin Municipal Records Manual (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Department of Development, 1980), and David Levine, ed., Ohio Municipal Records Manual (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1981).

<sup>32</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, sections 41-6-10-11.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, local officials should be much more aware of the administrative, legal, and fiscal values of such records; even here, however, the variety of local, state, and federal guidelines relative to records necessitates the existence of at least centrally-administered guidelines.

administration program that provides for the preservation of their historical records are hard-pressed to determine how to proceed. Until there is a fully articulated plan for the structure of what local records programs should be in the localities and the nature of their relationship to the state archives, there is little chance of effectively managing these records and their information.

Because of the weakness of the state law and the inactivity of the County Records Commission, many counties and municipalities have proceeded to enact their own legislation, leading to a conflicting mass of authorized approaches in the care of the local public records. One result that was mentioned earlier is the increasing number of political subdivisions that have begun to microfilm records without any provision for the archival-quality of the film or the proper selection of records for filming.<sup>34</sup> Other local governments have succeeded in acquiring legislation about the disposition of certain varieties of documentation that could have been handled easily and more expeditiously by the County Records Commission.<sup>35</sup> There is

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<sup>34</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1957, no. 427; 1961, no. 269; 1973, no. 591; 1975, no. 284; 1979, no. 384; and 1984, no. 513. Some of these acts do provide for the offering of the original records to the state archives after microfilming; however, unless these records possess some intrinsic value, why would the state archives desire the original over the microfilm copies?

<sup>35</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1953, no. 273; 1962, no. 85; 1965, no. 494; 1971, no. 2140; 1975, no. 525; and 1979, nos. 382, 398. A number of these relate to circuit court records, a problem which has been partially resolved by the creation of a unified state court system and the establishment of the Administrative Office of Courts.

even a series of laws that describes, in great detail, new manual or automated indexing systems. Again, these procedures would be better determined and regulated by a regular local government records system.<sup>36</sup> More indicative of the problems with the records legislation is the passage of acts that establish virtually autonomous records programs. In the late 1960s one municipality gained the authority to pass its own ordinances for records disposition. A few years prior to that a county established its own records commission "with the responsibility of determining which county records shall be permanently preserved because of their historical value, and which records may be destroyed or otherwise disposed of after they have been microfilmed . . . ." Although both provided for some activity and reviews by the director of the state archives, these acts were nevertheless establishing dangerous precedents because of that institution's inability to examine the records or to provide appropriate technical assistance to Alabama's local governments. In the context of a statewide local public records program, however, both legislative acts could serve as models.<sup>37</sup>

Local government officials and civil servants are greatly interested in acquiring assistance to improve the administration of their records, although they favor the maintenance of

<sup>36</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1959, no. 514; 1965, no. 591; 1973, no. 693; and 1980, no. 340.

<sup>37</sup> Acts of Alabama, 1967, no. 450; and 1959, no. 464.

the records in the localities and are not sufficiently aware of the needs of records conservation.

Despite the legacy of neglect of Alabama's local government records, the elected officials and civil servants of the state's political subdivisions are extremely interested in acquiring assistance and information about how to improve the condition of their records. At present, much of this interest is directed towards their ability to clear out courthouses and offices of older records and files of short-lived usefulness. But there is much to suggest the receptivity of these individuals to comprehensive programs that provide the ongoing maintenance of their records, both current and historical.

There is great interest in records training and education. When asked in a recent questionnaire if they would use records administration training workshops and seminars, published technical advice, or consultations at their offices, an overwhelming majority of local government officials responded favorably.<sup>38</sup> A majority of the local governments would even be willing to offset the costs of such training programs by paying for publications, registration, and training materials<sup>39</sup> or defraying the costs of personnel attending records administration

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<sup>38</sup> Of the respondents, 77.8 percent favored workshops and seminars, 90.6 percent published technical advice, and 81.5 percent consultations.

<sup>39</sup> Slightly over half (52.6 percent) were willing to do this.

courses.<sup>40</sup> What makes this willingness so surprising is that local governments rate their major problems for the care of their records as lack of financial resources, insufficient staff, and then the lack of training opportunities or guidelines in records administration policies.<sup>41</sup>

Supporting this general desire for records training is the local governments' willingness to establish a closer working relationship with the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Despite their lack of familiarity with the state archives or the County Records Commission, the local public officials view both as potential aids for the better management of their records. There is very strong recognition of the potential usefulness of the following services of the state archives: training workshops and seminars, published technical advice, consultations at their offices, increased advisory assistance in microfilming service, improved storage for historical and permanent records, and increased assistance in the identification of records for destruction or preservation.<sup>42</sup> Most of the local governments are also receptive to obtaining assistance

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<sup>40</sup> Of the respondents 60.8 percent would provide such funds, although the preference is great (78.1 percent) for programs at local universities, colleges, and other state institutions.

<sup>41</sup> Receiving far less weight were poor state policies and guidelines on records administration, lack of support by local government administration, and space.

<sup>42</sup> The following services were ranked very useful or useful by the local governments: workshops and seminars, 91.1 percent; published technical advice, 92.3 percent; consultation at local offices and sites, 87 percent; increased advice in micrographics, 81.6 percent; records storage, 88.5 percent; and appraisal of records, 83.9 percent.

from the state archives to improve the quality of their microfilm and are willing to place security copies of their microfilm of historical records in the state archives.<sup>43</sup> In recognition of these needs, the majority of the local governments are willing to assign an individual to serve as a records liaison with the state archives and support the expansion of the County Records Commission to a program that would provide standards and guidelines for the operation of all local government records.<sup>44</sup>

That Alabama's local governments wish to improve the care of their records is revealed in a variety of other ways. The leading local government professional organizations in the state have made records issues a priority in their publications and annual meetings and are very interested in expanding considerably this area of their work.<sup>45</sup> More encouraging have been the initiatives of some local governments to establish comprehensive records programs that include improved storage and the hiring and support of professional records staffs. Such efforts have been most noticeable among the state's larger municipalities; in 1983 Mobile established a municipal ar-

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<sup>43</sup> Of the respondents, 75.2 percent were interested in technical advice and assistance on microfilming from the state archives and 80.9 percent would be willing to deposit security copies of their film there.

<sup>44</sup> Of the local governments responding, 68.2 percent are willing to assign a records liaison and 68.4 percent favor the expansion of the County Records Commission.

<sup>45</sup> Most notable among these are the Alabama League of Municipalities and the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.



chives with four staff and is presently seeking a permanent facility, and a year later Birmingham acquired a large grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission with a commitment by the city to carry-on the records programs after the expiration of the grant.<sup>46</sup> Progress has been much less noticeable among the counties, although some (like Blount County) have made considerable efforts for improvement.

Another aspect of the interest of local governments in administering records was their strong preference for the maintenance of the records in the localities. When asked about where they believed their records should be maintained - in a centralized state-run repository, or another local repository such as a public library or historical society - the vast majority preferred the local government option.<sup>47</sup> This may be attributable to the traditional suspicion between state and local government evident in most states,<sup>48</sup> but it is just as likely a recognition of the value and use of such records in the locality. Apart from the practicality of such a system and

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<sup>46</sup> In both instances the Alabama Department of Archives and History has been a consultant to the process, indicative of its new efforts to provide greater assistance to the local governments. This will be discussed more fully in the later sections of this chapter.

<sup>47</sup> The order of preference was two to one for the local government-operated repository with the other options about equal in weight.

<sup>48</sup> Many of the first-round state assessment reports reveal that the local governments are distrustful of state interference regarding their records; Cox, "Local Government Records Programs," Documenting America, p. 22.

the archival profession's increasing acceptance of it as a proper means of preserving these records,<sup>49</sup> the development of any statewide local government records program must seriously consider such feelings and concerns of the local public officials.

There is one major weakness in the local governments' concern for their records, and that is the lack of understanding of the need to allocate funds for the conservation of their records. Some of this has already been discussed earlier - the poor physical storage of the records and the inadequate quality control in the production of microfilm. It is further understood when we note that the great majority of local governments are unwilling to provide funds for a regional center or to the state archives for the conservation of their historical records.<sup>50</sup> With Alabama lacking such a facility and none in the Southeast and the general apathy of the local public officials about this subject, the preservation of Alabama's local government records will remain a risky business at best.

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<sup>49</sup> The important Canadian Archives: Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada by the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives (Ottawa: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1980), p. 16 affirms this as a basic archival principle, which is being increasingly recognized in the United States. This will be considered in more detail in the discussion of recommendations.

<sup>50</sup> Only 19.7 percent would be willing to provide funds for this purpose.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Alabama Department of Archives and History should assist Alabama's local governments to develop adequate records administration programs.

The consensus developed by the archival profession over the past two decades is that the state archival institution should provide leadership in the management of local government records.<sup>51</sup> This should be the first major area of effort in developing better care of the local government records in Alabama. In this state the Alabama Department of Archives and History is the institution that has the legal status, a statewide focus and, as well, the resources (at least potentially) to assist adequately with the records of sixty-seven counties and hundreds of local government offices. Without a statewide focus the records of the political subdivisions will remain in jeopardy, prey to the uninformed actions of officials and records custodians unaware of professional practices or, and just as bad, neglected by local authorities who are unaware of the nature of the problem or its solution. Without statewide coordination how will we know what records of what political subdivisions to save?; or, how to proceed in understanding the interrelationship of local, state, and federal records?; or, how to assist state auditors and other state officials in as-

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Ernst Posner, American State Archives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 335-37, 340-41, 363-64; Jones, Local Government Records; "Assault on Paper Mountain," History News 38 (April 1983): 21-33; and Dearstyne, "Principles for Local Government Records."

certaining how best to find, use, and preserve the information essential to running state and local government?<sup>52</sup>

The nature of a state archives-directed local government records program should be one that stresses the continuing education of the local officials, or as the statement of the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators puts it, it should be one that will "encourage a working partnership between state and local officials to ensure sound records management."<sup>53</sup> Making the local governments aware of how records should be administered should be the first priority, since if this is successful the chances are much higher that the records and their information will be properly preserved and used.

To achieve this, the Alabama Department of Archives and History must follow the lead of other state archives in producing and publishing a comprehensive records manual for the local governments. This manual should follow the proposed make-up of a manual for state government records and include information on the nature of records and documentation; the rationale for the management of records; guidelines for surveying, appraising, and scheduling of records; the identification and preservation of historical records; micrographics standards; filing and storage procedures; disaster-preparedness and security; forms design and control; and sources for additional assis-

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<sup>52</sup> For the best articulation of such functions, see Dearstyne, "State Programs for Local Government Records."

<sup>53</sup> Dearstyne, "Principles for Local Government Records."

tance.<sup>54</sup> The manual should be clearly written and easy to use, published in a loose-leaf format so as to be easily revised and updated, and include a general retention schedule for all forms of local government that covers commonly held and important series of records.<sup>55</sup>

The publication of a local government records manual cannot be expected to stand on its own, but must be part of a comprehensive records education program for local government officials and records custodians. The Alabama state archives must develop training programs, based upon the records manual, that cover every aspect of records administration and must be prepared to offer these to the local governments, at the meetings of local government professional associations, and in cooperation with college and university extension programs.<sup>56</sup>

In tandem with this the state archives must develop and operate a clearinghouse of information about local government records

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<sup>54</sup> The best local government records manual is that produced by the New York State Archives, published in 1985. However, the Alabama state archives could also use the manual being prepared by the Joint Committee on the Management, Preservation, and Use of Local Government Records which is also being published in early 1986; this manual will be of a general nature, designed to provide introductory information on the elements of records programs to any local government.

<sup>55</sup> There need to be general schedules for probate judges, county commissions, tax assessors, superintendents of education, and municipalities and towns.

<sup>56</sup> The state archives could make use of the general audio-visual and other training materials being produced by the Joint Committee on the Management, Preservation, and Use of Local Government Records. These programs are being designed so that state archives might insert their own identifying information. Most of these training programs will be ready by late 1985.

matters and other archival concerns that local public officials can use. The state archives staff should prepare articles about records for the journals and newsletters of the local government professional organizations and should utilize a more widely distributed newsletter of the Society of Alabama Archivists to disseminate information to the local governments.<sup>57</sup>

The Alabama Department of Archives and History also should enter into other networks and consortia that will enhance or improve its role as a channel of information to the local governments.<sup>58</sup>

The greater activity of the state archives in the administration of Alabama's local government records will, of course, require staffing and resources that it currently does not possess. To develop an effective program the Alabama Department of Archives and History requires at least four additional positions for working with local governments. These positions, all professional archivists/records managers, are necessary for producing and maintaining the records manual, running an education and training program, responding to and assisting local

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<sup>57</sup> The Alabama Department of Archives and History has already become a co-sponsor of the SALA newsletter, Access, and is using its resources to distribute it to public libraries, archival repositories, and state and local government offices. Access should include information of use for and interest to the local public officials.

<sup>58</sup> Such as the National Information Center for Local Government Records located at the headquarters of the American Association for State and Local History and other information channels run by organizations such as the Society of American Archivists and the National Association for Government Archives and Records Administrators.

officials in specific requests, and analyzing and developing general records retention schedules for all levels of Alabama's local governments. Without such additional resources, the Alabama state archives, regardless of its professional leadership, will be unable to mount or sustain any substantial form of aid to the local governments. At present, calls from the local governments for assistance with their records can only be answered with encouraging words but not with substantive assistance. Without state support and coordination there can be little progress made in the preservation and management of Alabama's local public records; this fact has been proved from the experience of the last several generations.

**Alabama's records legislation should be strengthened to provide for a statewide, unified administrative program for all local government records.**

A necessity for the development of a statewide, unified administrative program for local government records is a change in the legislation for the work of the County Records Commission. As it stands this commission is authorized only to work with county records, and there is no provision for the management of Alabama's municipal records except for the list of certain forms of records and minimum retention periods. The present legislation for the municipal records should be replaced by a broader, more flexible law which expands the County Records Commission to a Local Government Records Commission and

adds representatives of Alabama's municipalities and towns.<sup>59</sup> This simple revision would provide, along with the reactivation of the commission, the foundation for a statewide records program for Alabama's political subdivisions. The commission is already empowered to determine the retention periods of records, to conduct surveys of the records, and to issue regulations for the administration of these records.

Another basic change in Alabama's records legislation should be the expansion of the definition of "public records" to include the full range of information forms now being created by the rapidly increasing records technology of the information age. As the current legislation now exists, there is a serious question whether electronically produced or machine-readable records fall under the provisions of the public records act or the authority of the County Records Commission. Certainly, all records, regardless of format, should be included in a unified state system of records administration. Moreover, there should also be some consideration given to strengthening the ability of the state archives and County Records Commission to preserve computer-generated records

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<sup>59</sup> There probably needs to be at least two such representatives based upon the size of the municipality. For example, the law could be amended to provide for the mayor or his representative from a town under 25,000 in population and a city larger than 100,000 in population. Such representation is necessary because the records problems of various-sized municipalities can be considerably different. A town of less than 5000 may have records of only a hundred cubic feet, while those of a larger one may number into the thousands of cubic feet.



possessing historical value.<sup>60</sup>

One of the most serious problems needed to be corrected by legislation is the question of microphotography of local government records. As required by law, any record is eligible for filming and subsequent destruction provided the microform has been "duly authenticated." The law should be considerably strengthened to ensure both that the film is archivally sound, meeting the guidelines of the American National Standards Institute, and that local governments be required to provide security and reference copies of any records placed on microfilm that are determined by the expanded County Records Commission to have historical value. One method of insuring compliance with this would be establishing, through a change in legislation, that any local government desiring to place its records in microform would be required to have their micrographics laboratory, or that of a commercial vendor it might wish to use, certified by the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The Public Records Division of the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives has established such a program with excellent results, certifying microfilm laboratories that use division standards for film formatting, requiring the placement of a silver security master copy of all film in the division, and forcing compliance with appropriate proce-

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<sup>60</sup> This is a need because of the rapidly changing nature of the equipment, the ease of erasing and reusing the tapes and discs, and the state archives current inability to preserve or make available such records. This is a subject that certainly merits considerable study and thought.

dures to insure microfilm quality evaluation (proper film density and resolution, testing for thiosulfate residue, and following proper procedures for the evaluation and destruction of public records).<sup>61</sup> Only if the law is strengthened in this area will Alabama's local public records be able to be considered properly administered and protected.

Alabama's public records law should also be more specific in the manner in which the historical records of the political subdivisions are maintained. Presently, the records are scattered about in local government offices, local public libraries and historical societies, universities and colleges, and the state archives with little regard for the integrity or care of the records. Public records, created for the public's benefit and with public funds, should not be transferred to private institutions or other public agencies without specific guidelines for the maintenance of these records and their accessibility by the public. There should be clear regulations established for the transfer of any public record from its creating agency to another repository, and the public records law should give the authority for creating and monitoring such regulations to the expanded County Records Commission. Such regulations should include proper storage of records, the maintenance of the records according to professional archival standards, the employ of a professional archivist, suitable hours and facili-

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<sup>61</sup> Richard N. Belding and Susan Dean, Standards for the Certification of Micrographics Laboratories (Frankfort: Public Records Division, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, 1983).

ties for easy access by the public, and description of these records according to the standards used by the state archives.<sup>62</sup>

If we expect better general administration of the records of Alabama's local governments, then the legislation must also be tightened to govern abuses inflicted upon these records. From 1945 to 1980 there was a law that made it a felony for any public official "to destroy, sell, loan or otherwise dispose" of any records without authority or for anyone who "willfully, maliciously, unlawfully or fraudulently loans or removes any public records" or "alters, defaces, mutilates or destroys" such documents. However, effective January 1, 1980, such actions were reduced to a misdemeanor.<sup>63</sup> More important, this same law repealed the authority of the director of the state archives to replevin any public records from individuals "having illegal or unlawful possession" of them.<sup>64</sup> The weakening of these laws occurs at a time when the archival profession is increasingly concerned with security and exercising replevin

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<sup>62</sup> A model for this purpose could be the SAA Task Force on Institutional Evaluation, Evaluation of Archival Institutions: Services, Principles, and Guide to Self-Study (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, n.d.).

<sup>63</sup> Compare Acts of Alabama 1977, no. 607, section 4555 to Code of Alabama 1975, section 41-13-2.

<sup>64</sup> Code of Alabama 1975, section 41-13-3.

actions.<sup>65</sup> These are certainly subjects that require greater study and that need to be strengthened to support the better administration of the records of Alabama's local governments.

There needs to be a fully developed statewide plan for the administration, identification, preservation, and use of Alabama's local government records having historical value that emphasizes the responsibility of the local public officials.

Although the Alabama Department of Archives and History should be more responsible for providing technical assistance to the local governments, and the authority of the County Records Commission should be expanded and strengthened, the elected officials and records custodians of the political subdivisions still possess the greatest responsibility for the preservation of their historical records. The problem is simply too great for a single institution, such as the state archives, that already possesses other responsibilities, or for a legalized commission to resolve. One leading authority who has argued vigorously for state leadership even admits that in the realm of local public records even the best of state laws or state archives will not succeed without the energetic desire of local officials to resolve the problems of poor record keeping:

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<sup>65</sup> For the general problem of security, see Timothy Walch, Archives & Manuscripts: Security, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977). The use of replevin has increased because of the increasing problems brought about by the large monetary values assigned to certain types of manuscripts and the ready market for them; see James E. O'Neill, "Replevin: A Public Archivist's Perspective," College & Research Libraries 40 (January 1979): 26-30 and Thornton W. Mitchell, "Another View of the West Case," Carolina Comments 29 (November 1981): 126-31.

The best written statutes . . . offer little assurance that their objectives will be attained. Indeed, even strong state leadership cannot alone solve the records problems of the nation's counties and municipalities, for local initiative is essential. If that initiative is vigorous enough, an effective records management program can be established and administered even without the encouragement of a state-level agency. The absence of state action is no justification for inertia in the county seats and municipal buildings of the country.<sup>66</sup>

Another prominent archivist has stated the case for local responsibility even more strongly:

The first line of responsibility lies with local governments themselves. Local officials have just as much responsibility for their records as they do for other resources under their charge. Local records programs are no less a responsibility than

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<sup>66</sup> Jones, Local Government Records, p. 25.

highway, police, or social services programs. Outsiders can help, inspire, educate, and regulate, but local officials must be held accountable for their own records.<sup>67</sup>

There are even some professional records administrators willing to argue that supporting the notion of preserving the integrity of records requires that they be maintained in the locale in which they were created.<sup>68</sup>

If local public records are to be maintained by the local officials in their localities, there still needs to be a comprehensive statewide plan that heals the ills that currently exist with Alabama's local government records, determines what records should be priorities for preservation, creates a system in which the records may be properly maintained in the locali-

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<sup>67</sup> Dearstyne, "State Programs for Local Government Records," p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> The Canadian archivists, for example, hold to the following, that "records should be retained and preserved by those responsible for creating them."

In actual fact, of course, it is impractical to adhere rigidly to this principle, applying it to the great breadth of archival material which ideally should be preserved. Thus it is necessary to emphasize the long-standing archival principle of provenance, namely, that records originating from the same source should be kept together and not interfiled with records from other sources. We would like to add to this old principle a new corollary to the effect that any particular set of records should remain, as far as possible, in the locale or milieu in which it was generated.

Canadian Archives, pp. 15-16.

ties, makes the records as accessible as possible to the public and research community, and establishes a way in which the more important records can be properly preserved. Underlying all of this is the necessary work of the state archives and the County Records Commission that has already been discussed.

At some point the state archives and expanded records commission must begin to work with the political subdivisions in improving the care of their records. Since there are sixty-seven counties and hundreds of local government offices, there needs to be a definition of priorities and an agenda for action.<sup>69</sup> The creation of a "documentation strategy," as the archival professional has recently described such plans, could include, at the minimum, three elements. First, counties and other local governments could be assigned a hierarchy of values (such as historical significance or demographic and socio-economic characteristics) that would enable their ranking for order of work in the preservation of their records.<sup>70</sup> Second, there could be careful consideration of the full documentation of public administration in Alabama. The records of the local governments could be carefully related to those of state government, especially in those functions - such as education and

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<sup>69</sup> This does not, of course, mean that those local governments not targeted as priorities would not be assisted. The education program, for example, needs to be designed in a general manner and offered to all the officials of Alabama's local governments.

<sup>70</sup> At present, the elements of such documentation strategies are vague at best, since there have been no adequate models yet developed by the archival profession.

social services - where there is significant overlap between the two.<sup>71</sup> And third, there could be careful consideration of the importance and completeness of specific series of records, a part of what has been the traditional system of creating records retention schedules.<sup>72</sup> Regardless of whether such an approach would or could be adopted for Alabama, it at least should be given serious consideration.

If nothing else is done, there should be developed some sort of mechanism for guaranteeing that local government records of historical value are placed in the right repository. It was discussed earlier that part of this should be accomplished by legislation giving the County Records Commission greater authority to establish guidelines and standards. Although this is certainly essential, other actions can be taken even before this could be done. There should be sufficient information in a local government records manual and supporting educational programs to enable local public officials to establish modern records centers for the safe storage and use of the records. There needs to be a method of assisting local offi-

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<sup>71</sup> In certain areas it would even be wise to consider the records generated by federal agencies and programs. One area that especially comes to mind is the tremendous amount of resources poured into the nation's larger municipalities, creating documentation often at all three levels - federal, state and local.

<sup>72</sup> Although this is certainly the best developed area in the work with local governments, we require significantly more work in better developing our appraisal criteria. Generally, the appraisal of all records has been identified as the weakest part of archival theory. Richard C. Berner, Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), pp. 6-7.



cially to transfer their records to a repository if they are unable to care for them. Such a system could either consist of a set of standards that must be followed for a repository to accept such records, or there could be developed in Alabama a regional depository system similar to those established in other states. Of the former there are several models that might be satisfactorily adopted for Alabama.<sup>73</sup> Of the latter, much more thought and planning needs to be done to see if it is feasible for this state.

Regional depository systems have been around since the 1960s and have been the subject of considerable evaluation and debate. Such systems have been especially important for the administration of local government records, in most cases providing far better care for the public records than the governments themselves were able or willing to give. However, such networks are loaded with problems as well, requiring a strong central authority, significant expenditures of funds for support, and considerable support and compromises by the participating institutions.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, such a system should be

<sup>73</sup> Again, see the Evaluation of Archival Institutions, published by the Society of American Archivists.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, the following: Frank R. Levstik, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Network System for the Administration of Local Government Records," Georgia Archive 7 (Fall 1979): 1-5; David Levine, "Regional Depository Systems: The Complications of Compromise," ibid. 7 (Fall 1979): 6-9; the issue of the Midwestern Archivist (volume 6, no. 2, 1982) devoted to archival networks; and Richard A. Cameron, Timothy Ericson, and Anne R. Kenney, "Archival Cooperation: A Critical Look at Statewide Archival Networks," American Archivist 46 (Fall 1983): 414-32.

considered in Alabama, but only after significant progress is made with the management of its local government records.

Regardless of what system is adopted for the gathering and care of Alabama's local government records, there must be the establishment of some type of union catalog of the historical records. Presently, researchers cannot conveniently find out what records of the local governments are available, including even many of those in the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The state archives, along with an expanded County Records Commission, should adopt some sort of standard reporting form for those repositories holding local government records or for the political subdivisions, such as the cities of Mobile and Birmingham, that have established their own comprehensive records programs. Most of these programs would probably welcome the assistance and the state archives could begin to develop a central finding aid to the records of local government for the use of researchers. In addition, those repositories holding such records or the local government maintaining them should be encouraged to publish guides to these records.

Finally, there must be developed a system for the preservation of Alabama's local government records having historical value. Without question, archival preservation remains one of the most pressing needs of the archival profession, but it is particularly true for the vastly neglected records of local government. In Alabama there needs to be some further analysis of what sort of local government records possess intrinsic value and require more elaborate conservation work than the

mere preservation of the image via some medium like micro-film.<sup>75</sup> There needs to be the establishment of some sort of regional or state conservation service that local governments can seek the advice of and secure professional services.<sup>76</sup> No matter how well we manage the records of local government, there must still be a better means of preserving those having historical value.

### Conclusion

There can be no delay in providing better care of Alabama's local government records. The present condition of these records is already extremely severe and will certainly only get worse unless action is taken. The state, through the Alabama Department of Archives and History, must provide support and assistance in the development of a program and technical assistance to the local governments. The local governments, on the other hand, must recognize and fulfill their responsibility to the public in the maintenance of their records. The care and management of public records must be recognized as one of the highest responsibilities of government.

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<sup>75</sup> Intrinsic value is defined as the "inherent value and . . . the worth . . . of a document dependent upon some unique factors, such as its age, the circumstances regarding its creation, a signature, or an attached seal"; Frank B. Evans, et al, "A Basic Glossary for the Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers, American Archivist 37 (July 1974): 424.

<sup>76</sup> For a model of the kind of center desirable, see Ann Russell, "Northeast Document Conservation Center: A Case Study in Cooperative Conservation," American Archivist 45 (Winter 1982): 45-52. There is some hope for such a center with the SOLINET grant to study the feasibility of developing an assistance program to libraries and archives in the Southeast.

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# HISTORICAL RECORDS REPOSITORIES

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The following is a list of historical records repositories in the United States. This list is intended to provide a general overview of the types of records held by these repositories and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all such repositories. For more information on these repositories, please contact the appropriate agency or organization.

**1. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)**  
The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the primary repository for the records of the federal government. It holds records from all executive departments, independent agencies, and commissions. NARA also holds records from state and local governments, as well as records from private organizations and individuals.

**2. State Archives and Records Administrations**  
Each state has its own archives and records administration. These agencies hold records from state government agencies, as well as records from private organizations and individuals. Some state archives also hold records from the federal government.

**3. Local Government Archives and Records Administrations**  
Many local governments, including cities, counties, and municipalities, have their own archives and records administrations. These agencies hold records from local government agencies, as well as records from private organizations and individuals.

**4. University and Research Archives**  
Many universities and research institutions have archives and records administrations. These agencies hold records from the university or research institution, as well as records from private organizations and individuals. Some university archives also hold records from the federal government.

**5. Private Archives and Records Administrations**  
There are many private archives and records administrations. These agencies hold records from private organizations and individuals. Some private archives also hold records from the federal government.

## HISTORICAL RECORDS REPOSITORIES

### Introduction

Historical records repositories - such as historical societies, libraries, and universities and colleges - have been a mainstay of the efforts to preserve this country's documentary heritage. The first systematic work to collect and preserve historical records started in the late eighteenth century with the founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society, an event predating the professionalization of the historical profession by well over a century. By the early years of the nineteenth century there existed a historical society movement, buttressed by an intense nationalism and a popular fascination with old manuscripts and records. Historical societies were formed, circulars were issued requesting the donation of old papers, documentary editions poured from the presses, and even state governments supported national and international searches for the records of the past.<sup>1</sup> This interest was not limited to the last century but continued into the twentieth and has been especially strong during the past three decades and the Bicentennial era. One half of all the historical agencies in existence today were founded between 1960 and 1981.<sup>2</sup> Today

<sup>1</sup> Leslie W. Dunlap, American Historical Societies 1790-1860 (Madison, Wisconsin: Privately printed, 1944) and David D. Van Tassell, Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America 1607-1884 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan, "Who Cares for America's Heritage?" History News 39 (September 1984): 8.

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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there are thousands of institutions that collect and preserve America's historical records, constituting a network second to none in its importance for the preservation of information about our past.<sup>3</sup>

These historical records repositories have traditionally been underfunded, undersupported, and always in a perilous condition. Twenty years ago Walter Muir Whitehill wrote a passionate essay about the history and future of America's private historical societies that lamented their funding and staffing problems. Whitehill's assessment of their difficulties, however, was buried under an avalanche of detail about the rich and intriguing past of the historical societies and little attention was paid to his warnings.<sup>4</sup> Today we are far more blunt about the problems of these institutions. William L. Joyce, in a summary of the results of the state self-studies supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, reflected that most private historical records repositories are "barely capable of providing even the most rudimentary and basic maintenance" of their historical collec-

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<sup>3</sup> Tracey Linton Craig, comp. and ed., Directory: Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada, 12th ed. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982) and Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1962).

tions.<sup>5</sup> In a study just completed by the American Association for State and Local History, the situation appears even more bleak:

Historical agencies and museums occupy a crucial position in American society. They are in the vanguard of collecting and preserving our cultural heritage, yet they are doing it without the money, people, and technical know-how they need. Because they are doing it without these resources, the physical remains of the American past are in peril... the question is: If the small, community-based historical organization cannot care for an essential part of America's heritage, who will?<sup>6</sup>

This is a question being repeatedly asked in the 1980s.

Alabama's historical records repositories are in no better condition than these national studies would suggest. Although there has been tremendous growth in the establishment of such

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<sup>5</sup> "Historical Records Repositories," Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States, ed. Lisa B. Weber ([Albany, New York]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators in cooperation with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, [1984]), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips and Hogan, "Who Cares for America's Heritage?," p. 12.

institutions in this state, nearly half having been founded since 1961,<sup>7</sup> this expansion does not appear to have brought with it a sufficient increase in funds to fully support all the new programs. Alabama's historical records repositories remain underfunded; they lack the staff, adequate storage facilities, and the support resources necessary to collect, preserve, and make accessible the full range of historical records of this state. Furthermore, these institutions represent a generally uncoordinated group of repositories. Collecting is often individualistic and competitive, information about repository holdings is meager and discourages cooperative efforts, and significant parts of the state's documentary heritage are neglected. Alabama's documentary heritage remains endangered despite the development of some strong institutions and innovative archival projects.

Despite the problems confronting the state's historical records repositories, the state's manuscript repositories and their staff must also be credited for their substantial work on behalf of Alabama's documentary heritage. These individuals are committed to preserving the records and papers of Alabama's rich history, and the findings and recommendations made in the following pages are not intended to question either their commitment or their contributions to date. Without Alabama's

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<sup>7</sup> Of the institutions responding to this survey, 48.4 percent have been founded since 1961 and 60.3 percent since 1951. These figures correspond to the national trends and are certainly a reflection of the upsurge of interest in genealogy and local history.

historical records repositories and their staff and volunteers, it is probable that a greater portion of the state's historical records would have been lost. However, records problems seem to be growing as quickly, and perhaps even more quickly, than the resources and capability of the records custodians. In a time of revolutionary changes in the creation and use of records, revolutionary changes are being called for in the conduct of archival work.

**FINDINGS: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ALABAMA'S HISTORICAL RECORDS REPOSITORIES**

Although there are important collections of historical sources in Alabama's local repositories, institutional acquisition programs are uncoordinated and leave numerous gaps in the documentation of the state's history.

Alabama's historical records repositories generally focus upon the history of their immediate geographical context. Their primary collecting priorities are their locality's history and their own institutional history.<sup>8</sup> There is a healthy interest among the historical societies and public libraries for a regional repository system,<sup>9</sup> but at present most collect without

<sup>8</sup> Nearly all, 94 percent, concentrate primarily upon local history or their institution (51.4 percent emphasize the local area and 42.6 percent the institution).

<sup>9</sup> A total of 63.1 percent of the historical societies and 52.7 percent of the public libraries are interested in such a system.

concern about the interests and holdings of other archival institutions in the state. Most repositories do not have clearly defined statements of authority and mission for their records or for their acquisition policies.<sup>10</sup> They often collect wide varieties of records on many different subjects but make no effort to coordinate their activities with other institutions in order to understand what aspects of Alabama's past might be undocumented or even over documented.

Contrasting to the locally-oriented repositories are those institutions with a statewide focus. Even these institutions have not realistically clarified their collecting policies. The Alabama Department of Archives and History, with one of the largest private papers collections in the state, has, since its beginning in 1901, accepted virtually any manuscript concerning any phase of the state's history. Many other repositories appear to be collecting manuscripts on every and any subject or field, leaving little that could not be collected. Only in very recent years has there been any indication that some repositories might concentrate on specific topical areas. The University of Alabama has started the "Archive of American Minority Cultures" for ethnic, folk, minority, and women's history and culture primarily by collecting sound recordings and other non-print media formats. Auburn University, with the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, administered a statewide

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<sup>10</sup> Of all the institutions responding, 73.4 percent do not have a written statement of authority and mission for their records programs, and 75.8 percent lack a written acquisition policy.

effort to collect agricultural records. Talledega College has emphasized the acquisition of records of Black religious organizations. And the University of Alabama at Birmingham is considering the establishment of an archives that would have an emphasis on the health-sciences, building upon the strength of its own school and correcting a serious omission of historical records collecting. Unfortunately such efforts are too few and communication between repositories is not sufficient to produce an effective overall state collecting strategy.

The clearest evidence of the uncoordinated efforts of Alabama's historical records repositories is the extent of the gaps in the documentation of the state's past. Two-thirds of the institutions are not actively collecting records of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Although most of the repositories indicate that they are involved with preserving the records of their own institutions, very few have records management programs that can systematically appraise and identify records of permanent value.<sup>12</sup> Just as important, the majority of archival repositories do not maintain formal information on research usage that could aid in identifying their needs or aspects of the state's history that might be undocumented.<sup>13</sup> In a recent poll, Alabama histo-

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<sup>11</sup> Of the institutions responding, 66.3 percent indicate that this is not an activity.

<sup>12</sup> Eighty-three percent do not possess records management programs and the figure is probably much higher than that because of the large number of institutions contacted in this survey that are predominantly archival repositories and not just records creators.

<sup>13</sup> This is 76.8 percent of the institutions reporting.

rians indicated that for nearly every period of the state's history, especially after the Civil War, the record sources in the state's repositories are inadequate, and the finding aids to these records are not satisfactory.<sup>14</sup>

Alabama's historical records repositories are underfunded and understaffed, jeopardizing the preservation of the state's documentary heritage.

"Poverty" has become a common word in describing the condition of historical records programs in this country, and Alabama is no exception. Many institutions that support records programs attach only moderate or low importance to them, although this varies among the types of repositories.<sup>15</sup> Over a third of Alabama's archival repositories have no funds for operation and nearly three-quarters have less than five hundred dollars.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> This is based upon a brief questionnaire sent to members of the Alabama Association of Historians. Following are the percentages, based upon the valid responses, that believe these periods of Alabama's history to be inadequately studied: Colonial and Territorial (to 1819), 66.6 percent; Ante-bellum (1819-1861), 42.2 percent; Civil War and Reconstruction (1861-1877), 57.8 percent; Industrialism and the Gilded Age (1865-1896), 80 percent; New Deal and the Second World War (1932-1945), 90 percent; since 1945, 90 percent.

<sup>15</sup> Of all the institutions responding, 76.3 percent assign moderate or low importance to the records program; 26 percent give low importance. However, 65.2 percent of the historical societies give a high importance to the program.

<sup>16</sup> Funding is especially bleak with 38 percent of the responding institutions having no money for the records, 53.2 percent having less than \$100, and 72.2 percent having less than \$500. Nearly all of the institutions (85.3 percent) provide less than 10 percent of their overall budget to the care of records.



Less than one in five institutions have one or more full-time personnel and over half of this small number have only one staff member.<sup>17</sup> Many of the staff are not professionally trained and do not have sufficient opportunities to acquire the training they need for the proper care of the records in their custody.<sup>18</sup>

Prospects for improvement among Alabama's historical records repositories are also not as promising as they could be. The funding of many of these institutions is poorly mixed and provides little opportunity for growth.<sup>19</sup> Although a significant percentage of the repositories report that their budgets have grown over the past five years, their meager staffing reveal that these increases are still inadequate for the proper management of their collections. Nearly half of the institutions claim budget increases over this period, but almost three-quarters also indicate that there have been no increases in

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<sup>17</sup> Of the institutions contacted only 19.3 percent have one or more staff members and 51.8 percent have only one.

<sup>18</sup> Over half (58.4 percent) of the responding institutions do not have specialized training or education in archives or records administration. Of those that do have training, 24.8 percent have had graduate coursework, 23.3 percent trained through workshops, and 24.8 percent have attended professional meetings. Very few (only 16.4 percent) have had prior archival experience before their present position.

<sup>19</sup> Most of the institutions receive their financial support from their sponsoring institutions, donations, or local government. What is especially revealing, however, is that only 2.1 percent of the institutions receive any support from special grants, which is a reflection of professional involvement.

staff size.<sup>20</sup>

The result of such support is reflected in poor control and care of the collections. The majority of Alabama's repositories hold relatively small quantities of historical documents,<sup>21</sup> but these collections are often uncontrolled and inadequately maintained. Very few of the repositories have published finding aids, and the system of bibliographic control seems weak. There is a diversity of card catalogues, container or folder lists, and registers or inventories, all widely different in quality or completeness.<sup>22</sup> Although the majority of the repositories state that they have adequate control of their collections,<sup>23</sup> most of the institutions do not report their holdings to such standard national guides as the National Union Catalog of Manuscript

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<sup>20</sup> Of the institutions reporting, 43.5 percent state that their budgets have increased over the past five years and 51.4 percent have remained the same. However, 73.4 percent of the institutions have had no increase in staff for a similar period.

<sup>21</sup> Only 10 percent of the institutions reporting hold more than 500 cubic feet and 67.4 percent hold less than fifty cubic feet.

<sup>22</sup> Of the repositories in the state only 12.9 percent have published guides, 17.2 percent have no finding aids at all, and the remainder rely upon card catalogues (32 percent), container or folder lists (18.1 percent), and registers and inventories (14.8 percent).

<sup>23</sup> Over half (56.9 percent) of the responding repositories report that they have 90 percent or more of their holdings under control.

Collections.<sup>24</sup> Researchers face great difficulties in expeditiously locating Alabama's historical records.

More disheartening is the inadequacy of physical care for the state's historical records. Alabama's repositories exercise most conservation techniques, but close to half perform no conservation at all and the procedures most follow are the simplest - cleaning and mending.<sup>25</sup> Adding to this problem is the generally poor storage conditions within the repositories. Few have humidity control or use acid-free folders or boxes and nearly none possess a disaster-preparedness plan.<sup>26</sup> Although there are occasional bright spots, such as support for the concept of a cooperative conservation center,<sup>27</sup> Alabama's historical records are endangered by the inadequate storage conditions in which they are maintained.

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<sup>24</sup> Only 23 percent report their holdings to professional journals or some other source. What is most discouraging is that only 3.6 percent report to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, one of the most important sources for publicizing holdings.

<sup>25</sup> Of the repositories reporting, 40.2 percent do not perform any conservation practices at all. Cleaning and mending is the most common procedure with 17.7 percent of the repositories using it.

<sup>26</sup> Of the institutions reporting, the following is the percentage of storage procedures used by Alabama's repositories: temperature control, 57.1 percent; humidity control, 30.7 percent; security, 59.5 percent; fire detection, 55.2 percent; pest control, 76.9 percent; and acid-free boxes and folders, 17.1 percent. Most, 88.8 percent, do not have a disaster-preparedness plan.

<sup>27</sup> There is support for a center among Alabama's historical societies (68.4 percent) and public libraries (68 percent).

It is necessary, however, to temper this critical assessment by noting that many of the concepts being considered here have only recently been developed by the archival profession and that other states also share many of these same problems. Greater opportunities for professional archival training, regional conservation centers, and disaster-preparedness plans are all developments of the past decade or less. Even the practices for cataloguing historical records, despite the quarter-century existence of the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, are currently undergoing rapid change and considerable improvement. The point is that Alabama archivists must be able to avail themselves of the new opportunities for improving the preservation and management of their historical records.

The staffs of Alabama's historical records repositories are interested in improving their programs.

Not surprisingly, considering the serious problems confronting them, the staffs of Alabama's historical records repositories are interested in improving their programs. The responding state's archivists are very interested in participating in educational workshops and seminars, using published technical literature, and supporting the establishment of a central data bank of the holdings of the repositories in the state.<sup>28</sup> There is some interest in using consultants and in the

<sup>28</sup> The degree of support for such activities is as follows: workshops and seminars, 73.5 percent; published technical advice, 76.4 percent; and a central data bank of information on archival holdings, 69.7 percent.

storage of security microfilm of their holdings.<sup>29</sup> And the more important of Alabama's repositories are inclined to coordinate collecting activities to avoid the duplication of such efforts.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, the modern tools that archivists need are not sufficiently accessible to all Alabama archivists. The majority of individuals seek help from their professional colleagues or the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Assistance from the state archives, however, has been spotty at best, because it shares many of the same problems that these repositories are facing.<sup>31</sup> Professional publications are also heavily relied upon as a source by Alabama's archival community, although it is difficult to evaluate just what publications are used and what impact they have had in the management of the state's historical records. It is difficult to believe that the right publications are being used because there are few connections to the primary professional associations that publish such

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<sup>29</sup> Support for both of these is shared by 51.3 percent of the institutions.

<sup>30</sup> Interest in this is shared by 77.2 percent of the historical societies and 81 percent of the libraries.

<sup>31</sup> Most of the institutions (40 percent) seek help from other professionals and 37 percent go to the state archives. However, very few of the institutions that used the state archives could even rate its service.

literature.<sup>32</sup> Alabama's archivists desire help, but also need assistance in learning where to seek that help.

#### **FINDINGS: CHARACTERISTICS OF REPOSITORY TYPES IN ALABAMA**

There are many institutions that create records or that serve as repositories for the records of our society. Some are exclusively repositories for the historical record, others are creators that also serve as repositories, and still others are creators that do not possess the resources or interest in preserving the historical records. Some of these institutions - such as historical societies, colleges and universities, public libraries, and religious archives - are essential to the preservation of the state's documentary heritage. Others, like businesses and museums, could play a more prominent role. This project attempted to identify major groups of these repositories and to collect information about their conditions.

#### **The Historical Society**

The historical society has been the traditional means of collecting and preserving historical records in this country.

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<sup>32</sup> A third (33.6 percent) of the institutions seek out professional publications for help. But where are they getting this help? In 1983 there were only sixteen Alabamians that were members of the Society of American Archivists, the foremost publisher of archival literature; 1983 Directory of Individual Members (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983). Very few institutions even use the major professional associations such as SAA (10.7 percent) and the American Association for State and Local History (15 percent).

In Alabama there was a state historical society formed prior to the Civil War, but it failed to do much more than issue some scattered publications. Its chief value was its use by Thomas M. Owen as a base for creating the state-supported Alabama Department of Archives and History. The state archives served as a surrogate state historical society, emphasizing from an early date the collecting of private documents, supporting a museum, and the publishing of a quarterly historical journal.<sup>33</sup> In the collecting and preservation of historical records the state archives has not been as successful as was needed, partly because the task is much greater than its resources have supported.

Neither Alabama's state nor local historical societies have given sufficient attention to the collection and preservation of historical documents. A survey of the majority of historical societies in the state<sup>34</sup> revealed that most respondents have unfocused collecting agendas despite their attribution of a higher importance to the gathering of historical records.<sup>35</sup> Most are severely underfunded and understaffed for the support

<sup>33</sup> See Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage," earlier in this publication for a fuller description of this.

<sup>34</sup> Questionnaires were sent to all 138 local historical societies on the mailing list of the Alabama Historical Commission, excluding historic sites and genealogical societies which normally do not collect manuscripts. Twenty-four historical societies (17.3 percent) responded, reflecting the full-range of institutions that exist in Alabama.

<sup>35</sup> A high portion of the responding institutions (80.9 percent) do not have written acquisition policies, although nearly all (95.6 percent) place high or moderate importance on their records programs.

of such programs.<sup>36</sup> Despite the strong national tradition of such societies in the preservation of America's documentary heritage, these institutions in Alabama lack well-focused and well-funded manuscript programs.<sup>37</sup>

There is also strong interest in improving their historical records programs. Alabama's societies are certainly not inclined to want to give up this function as a collector of the past. They are interested in improving their conservation practices by participating in a conservation center, receiving training in workshops and seminars, having greater access to published technical literature, incorporating information about their collections in a centralized statewide data bank, and storing security copies of microfilm of their collections.<sup>38</sup> Such interest is a positive sign and if greater cooperation is fostered, the historical societies in Alabama could play one of the most important roles in the preservation of the state's documentary heritage.

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<sup>36</sup> Most (75 percent) of the respondents have less than \$1000 to provide for their historical records with a largely untrained staff (57.1 percent have staff with no formal archival training).

<sup>37</sup> Nearly a quarter (25.9 percent) have no finding aids whatsoever and 73.9 percent do not even report to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. The majority (78.2 percent) do not maintain information on researchers. And, most disturbing, the majority of the societies employ no conservation practices (78.5 percent), do not use acid-free materials (87.5 percent), have no humidity control (71.4 percent), or are not prepared for disaster (90.9 percent).

<sup>38</sup> The percentage of responding historical societies supporting such programs were as follows: conservation center, 68.4 percent; workshops and seminars, 68.7 percent; published technical literature, 75 percent; consultants, 56.2 percent; central data bank, 95 percent; and security storage of microfilm, 60 percent.



### The Local Public Library

There are public libraries in nearly every community in Alabama, supported by the Alabama Public Library Service and revealing an ever increasing sense of professionalism. Nearly all of the regional libraries possess a local history room or space that attracts manuscripts collections, photographs and prints, and maps and drawings. These institutions range in size from small, one-room operations to the large and impressive operations of urban programs such as the Birmingham Public Library. Because of the diversity of such institutions, their importance to the documentation of Alabama's past is still difficult to ascertain.

A survey of all the public and regional libraries in the state<sup>39</sup> provides substantial evidence that the historical records programs of many of these institutions are undersupported and undeveloped. Most of the libraries do not have clearly defined collecting policies<sup>40</sup> and lack adequate funds or staff,<sup>41</sup> an environment which has discouraged published finding

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<sup>39</sup> These libraries, based upon the directory published by the Alabama Public Library Service, total 219. Valid responses were received from forty-three (or 19.6 percent).

<sup>40</sup> Only 28.3 percent of the respondents possess acquisitions policies.

<sup>41</sup> Nearly a third (32.5 percent) have no funds for their historical records and another 37.5 percent have less than \$500. Most of the staff (65.7 percent) in these institutions have no formal archival training.

aids to the records and their proper storage.<sup>42</sup>

Still, the staff of Alabama's public libraries reflect positive attitudes for the future improvement of their programs. Most of the public libraries which responded are interested in studying the feasibility of a regional repository system, support the concept of a regional conservation center, and especially are interested in coordinating their collecting programs with other repositories.<sup>43</sup> Some of the most important manuscript collections in the state are housed by public libraries. The Birmingham and Mobile Public Libraries both have built impressive collections related to their cities, published guides to their collections, and had significant influence upon the development of municipal records programs in their respective cities, the only two in the state.<sup>44</sup> Can other public libraries develop such leadership in the preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage?

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<sup>42</sup> Although four of the libraries report that they have published guides, the vast majority (81.5 percent) do not report their holdings and acquisitions; not one library acknowledges that they have reported their manuscript collections to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. Most of the libraries have no humidity control (73.6 percent), security systems (54.2 percent), disaster-preparedness plans (89.4 percent), or even use acid-free storage materials (86.1 percent).

<sup>43</sup> The degrees of support vary, of course, with more supporting coordinated collecting (86.1 percent) than a regional repository system (52.7 percent) or conservation center (68 percent).

<sup>44</sup> An example of a guide is A List of Nineteenth Century Maps of the State of Alabama (Birmingham: Birmingham Public Library, 1973).

### Colleges and Universities

Of all the records repositories in the state, colleges and universities have the most multi-faceted role. The state supported schools fall within the parameters of a state records program in their capacity as the custodians of their own institutional records. Many schools, both state supported and private, occasionally collect the records of local government, and most develop historical manuscript programs as a result of their special collections. For this reason, Alabama's colleges and universities are among the most important historical repositories in the state, characterized by the richness of the holdings of the University of Alabama, Auburn University, Tuskegee University, and the University of South Alabama.<sup>45</sup>

The potential of such manuscript repositories, viewed in the context of a larger statewide system for the preservation of the state's historical records, is still largely to be realized. Most have not developed coherent collecting policies, although these institutions possess better-trained staff, have better control over their collections, and take better care of their historical materials than most other types of manuscript repositories. There remain, however, numerous schools holding such materials that are doing little better than the private histori-

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<sup>45</sup> The 1978 descriptions of the first two of these repositories reveal extremely important holdings, with a combined total of over seven thousand linear feet. See Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1978), pp. 13, 17.

cal societies or public libraries.<sup>46</sup> The greatest problem seems to be the lack of communication and coordination that exists among these institutions. Still, it is these institutions along with the larger public libraries and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, that must ultimately provide the leadership for the preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage.

### Museums

The primary objective of museums is not the collecting of historical manuscripts. As the recently released report of the Commission of Museums for a New Century states, "the act of collecting and preserving objects is at the center of the museum domain."<sup>47</sup> Museums do gather manuscripts for a variety of reasons, including the documentation of other collections or their close relationship to artifacts. History museums often assume the role of local history archives simply because they are the most important or only available repository in a lo-

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<sup>46</sup> Consider some of the following mixed results from the survey: 65.2 percent have no written acquisitions policy; 41.6 percent place a low importance upon their historical records programs; 52 percent have staff with archival holdings although five colleges, the highest number, do report to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections; 37 percent practice no conservation procedures; and the majority do not have humidity controls (57.8 percent), fire security (55.5 percent), or use acid-free storage materials (74.3 percent). For more information about these repositories see the section on state government records.

<sup>47</sup> "The Growing Museum Movement: Chapter 1 of the Report of the Commission on Museums for a New Century," Museum News 62 (August 1984): 20.

cale.<sup>48</sup> Then there are also the records of the museum itself. As a recent publication by the Society of American Archivists suggests - "nearly all museums, in their role as repositories of artifactual knowledge of culture and cultures, keep some records. Those records are often of permanent value to the institution and should be preserved as archives."<sup>49</sup> For all of these reasons, the museum should be a vital part of any system for the preservation of the documentary heritage.

In Alabama, the museums have thus far played a very minor role in the collection and preservation of historical records. There are few such institutions<sup>50</sup> and most are not actively collecting papers except for their own records. Although these institutions suffer from many of the same problems as the other repositories in the state, such as inadequate funding and poor storage conditions,<sup>51</sup> there appears to be a greater interest

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<sup>48</sup> This is reflected in the variety of institutions that comprise the membership of the American Association for State and Local History. See Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan, "The Wages of History," History News 39 (August 1984): 6-10.

<sup>49</sup> William A. Deiss, Museum Archives: An Introduction, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1984), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> There are only forty-three independent and state-supported museums in Alabama according to the Alabama Historical Commission. Responses to this survey totalled seven or 16.2 percent.

<sup>51</sup> Four of the seven institutions responding have less than \$500 budgets and 85.7 percent (six of the seven) provide less than 10 percent of the budget to the records. Storage is generally poor with only half having temperature control and none humidity control and only two of seven using acid-free storage materials.

among these institutions for cooperation and resource sharing.<sup>52</sup> Even so, the emphasis for the foreseeable future should be upon encouraging these institutions to care for their own records. Any greater role, at this time, would seem to be premature except in areas where a museum is the only available repository.

Typical of the variety of problems encountered by such an organization is that of one county museum not far from Montgomery. The institution has, over a period of many years, gathered museum artifacts such as clothing, costumes, and textiles; printed materials such as books and magazines; archival collections such as photographs and private manuscripts; and the records of its own organization. Lacking paid staff or professional assistance, the museum has scattered and mixed these various collections, threatening their use and even existence. Unfortunately, even the larger and more professional museums in the populous urban areas, have done little to establish management programs for their own institutional records. The role of the Alabama museum in the preservation of the state's documentary heritage is in better caring for its own records.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Although none support a cooperative conservation center at this time, most (80 percent) are interested in a regional repository system or a system of cooperative collecting (75 percent).

<sup>53</sup> This is not an untypical occurrence for major museums and art institutes; see Carol Schwartz, "Keeping Our House in Order: The Importance of Museum Records," Museum News 61 (1983): 38-49.

## Business

Business archives are recent phenomenon and, relatively speaking, are limited in number. Only in the 1970s have such repositories grown in number and importance,<sup>54</sup> although the need for such records programs is very great. The business corporation played an extremely important role in the economic development of the United States and has had a tremendous impact on the social, political, and cultural life of American society.<sup>55</sup> Despite this importance, these institutions have been especially difficult to document adequately. Although it has proven relatively easy to save the small accumulations of documents of eighteenth and nineteenth century merchants and businesses, it seems nearly impossible to save the important records of the large corporate giants of this century.<sup>56</sup> It is generally not possible for manuscript repositories to accept such records, but rather it falls upon the archival profession to convince such businesses of the need to establish records programs with provision for access (where possible) by the research public - and, of course, for the better administration of the business it-

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<sup>54</sup> David R. Smith, "An Historical Look at Business Archives," American Archivist 45 (Summer 1982): 273-78.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977).

<sup>56</sup> Consider the voluminous nature of railroad records; see Duane P. Swanson and Hugh R. Gibb, The Historical Records of the Component of Conrail: A Survey and Inventory (Greenville, Wilmington, Delaware: Eleutherian Mills Historical Library, 1978).

self.<sup>57</sup>

In Alabama there has been little success with the documentation of its business history. In a survey sampling the state's major businesses, few responses were received and the majority had no records program at all.<sup>58</sup> Of the respondees, only Southern Natural Gas Company, located in Birmingham, has a full records administration program.<sup>59</sup> There must be a concerted effort by the state's archival profession to assist Alabama's corporations to develop adequate historical records programs.<sup>60</sup>

That such an external effort is required is evident when considering one of Alabama's most important businesses, newspaper publishers. In a survey of Alabama's most important county and city dailies, few responded and those that did indicated they had no program for the maintenance of their records or their newspaper holdings.<sup>61</sup> With the assistance of the Nation-

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<sup>57</sup> See Julia Niebuhr Eulenberg, "The Corporate Archives: Management Tool and Historical Resource," Public Historian 6 (Winter 1984): 21-37 and Edie Hedlin, Business Archives: An Introduction (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1978).

<sup>58</sup> The project surveyed fifty of Alabama's larger and older companies in its main industries of agriculture, forestry, mining, manufacturing, construction, utilities, and service. Only five responded, four of which indicated they had no program at all.

<sup>59</sup> This corporation has twenty-three full-time staff in records management.

<sup>60</sup> The Society of Alabama Archivists has made an effort to attract the staff of the state's businesses, but has had, so far, very limited success.

<sup>61</sup> Only five of fifty-four newspapers responded to the questionnaire, and those that did answer the questionnaire gave no indication of having programs for their records.



al Endowment for the Humanities, the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama Newspapers was formed in 1983 to resolve the problem of newspaper holdings.<sup>62</sup> This coalition has completed a bibliography of resources related to Alabama newspapers, a listing of Alabama newspaper titles, and a listing of repositories holding Alabama newspapers. The coalition is now beginning work on a comprehensive survey of newspapers. Although the project is not designed to identify and gather the business records of publishers, it will nevertheless preserve the important historical source of dailies and weeklies. With the exception of Auburn University's survey of agricultural records and the occasional accessioning of business records by Alabama repositories, the newspaper project has been the only statewide effort to preserve documentation related to Alabama's businesses. The work of the coalition reveals the nature of the effort required to preserve such records.

#### Churches and Religious Organizations

Nearly three decades ago Lester J. Cappon, a leading archivist, presented a paper to the American Theological Library Association in which he urged the better care and preservation

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<sup>62</sup> Membership in the coalition consists of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama Public Library Service, Council of Librarians of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, Association of County Commissioners, Alabama Press Association, Alabama Library Association, and the Society of Alabama Archivists.

of the records of American religious history.<sup>63</sup> More recently another archivist attempted to describe the importance of saving such records as part of documenting an important aspect of human activity - the spiritual: "Somewhere in our vast holdings of paper, film, tape, and other media, we must have material that helps the user understand not only the actions of institutions, but also the upheavals that occur within human hearts and minds that lead people to create institutions and to initiate their activities."<sup>64</sup> Surely such activity has been extremely important in Alabama and is worth documenting.

Alabama's interest in the historical records of its churches dates back almost to the beginning of the state's archival movement. Thomas M. Owen, Alabama's first director of the state archives, also organized and was secretary and curator of the Alabama Conference Historical Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>65</sup> Such activities did not cease with Owen's death in 1920, but have been taken up by other repositories. Samford University has gathered an impressive collection of materials on the history of the Baptist church in Alabama. Huntingdon College in Montgomery, a Methodist school, has established a program for its own school's history and the Alabama-West Florida

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<sup>63</sup> "Archival Good Works for Theologians," American Archivist 22 (July 1959): 297-307.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Shuster, "Documenting the Spirit," American Archivist 45 (Spring 1982): 137.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Thomas M. Owen, Handbook of the Alabama Conference Historical Society M.E. Church, South (Montgomery: Alabama Conference Historical Society, 1910).

Conference of the United Methodist Church. Talladega College collects records about the Black church in the state and Christian missions in Africa.<sup>66</sup> Still, such programs have been the exception rather than the rule.

The poverty often associated with the worldly existence of many of our churches characterizes the programs for their own records. In a sampling of Alabama churches and religious organizations,<sup>67</sup> it was found that few possess resources or staff to manage adequate records programs. Nearly all of these institutions have few funds for this purpose and lack the capability of caring for their historical records.<sup>68</sup> Few of the organizations are interested in cooperation of any variety except that of technical advice and support. Alabama's churches and religious organizations seem to exist completely outside of any system for

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<sup>66</sup> One of the few efforts to identify such records was Catalogue of the Records of Black Organizations in Alabama (Birmingham: Alabama Center for Higher Education, 1979), pp. 5-39.

<sup>67</sup> Questionnaires were sent to thirty-four religious organizations found on the lists of the Alabama Historical Commission and the American Association for State and Local History. Included among these organizations were churches from each of the major denominations found in the Montgomery area. A total of twelve (35.2 percent) responded.

<sup>68</sup> For example, most of the respondents have very modest budgets (totalling less than \$1000 [53.3 percent]), have no written acquisitions policy (80 percent), do not report their holdings (90.9 percent), and do not use acid-free storage materials (79 percent).

the preservation of the state's documentary heritage.<sup>69</sup> The voluminous and ubiquitous nature of these records contributes to this problem.

### Professional Associations

Little has been written, descriptive or prescriptive, about the record-keeping practices of professional associations. The closest the archivist comes to this is in considering the relationship of the archival profession to other professions and the interests of professional historical associations in the maintenance of historical records.<sup>70</sup> Considering the importance of these associations in the past century of this country, such neglect is surprising. In a survey of over a hundred selected associations, only eight responded.<sup>71</sup> In these responses the management of their records was given a low priority and the

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<sup>69</sup> The reporting organizations are not interested in a conservation center (70 percent), regional repository system (83.3 percent), or in trying to coordinate collecting activities (60 percent, with the remainder only moderately interested). Adding to this is the apparent lack of coordination with national denominational archival repositories.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Margaret S. Child, "Reflections on Cooperation Among Professions," American Archivist 46 (Summer 1983): 286-92 and Joan Hoff-Wilson, "Access to Restricted Collections: The Responsibility of Professional Historical Organizations," ibid. 46 (Fall 1983): 441-47.

<sup>71</sup> These associations were sampled from the major urban areas of Birmingham, Montgomery, Huntsville, and Mobile and included business and trade organizations, labor organizations, religious associations, and arts councils.

associations revealed little interest in improvement.<sup>72</sup> It is easy to conclude that this is a completely neglected aspect of Alabama's historical documentation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Alabama's historical records repositories require a centralized clearinghouse of information to assist them in improving the care and administration of their collections.

Alabama's historical records repositories need and want to be more effective in their work. Most need technical assistance in the storage and security of collections, the cataloguing of historical records, and the continued training of staff and volunteers. There are numerous sources for such aid. Professional associations like the Society of American Archivists, the American Association for State and Local History, and the Association of American Museums all have strong publication and training programs for such purposes. But in Alabama information about such professional associations has not been widely distributed to the local archival repositories, partly because no single institution or professional association has taken the responsibility for this.

What kind of centralized clearinghouse is needed in the state for helping its historical records repositories? First, and most important, the clearinghouse must be able to provide

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<sup>72</sup> Of the respondents 75 percent placed a low importance on the care of their records and all provided less than \$500 in funds to support their care. The rest of their responses conform to this lack of interest and resources.

information about professional standards and professional meetings and training opportunities, support a professional and technical library, act as a pipeline for associations like the Society of American Archivists and the American Association for State and Local History, and provide news about activities that have an impact upon the work of an archivist. The clearinghouse should be both proactive and reactive; it must be able to provide information on demand but should also support a network that generates timely information to Alabama's archivists, archival repositories, and other interested Alabamians. Second, the clearinghouse should foster cooperative projects and the pooling of resources. The clearinghouse's role as a communicator also includes being a facilitator, encouraging the better use of limited resources for grappling with the larger and more complicated problems of preserving the documentary heritage. The institution serving as a clearinghouse should be in a position to encourage organizations such as businesses and corporations and professional associations to better care for their historical records, either by establishing their own internal records programs or by making arrangement with another repository.

Perhaps the most important issue is the support of such a clearinghouse for Alabama's historical records repositories? There is no clear model in the profession. In some states the state or regional archival associations have assumed such a function, providing a forum for communication and cooperation on

the local level that simply does not exist elsewhere.<sup>73</sup> In California the Society of California Archivists co-sponsored, with the state's historical records advisory board, the California Historical Records Educational and Consultant Service to run an information center and workshops and to provide consultation and other support for the state's repositories.<sup>74</sup> In other states it is the state archives that has taken on such work. Both the North Carolina Division of Archives and History and the New York State Archives regularly publish extensive newsletters that cover a multiplicity of subjects related to the preservation and use of historical records.<sup>75</sup> In still other states it is a variety of programs - such as regional repository networks or the larger repositories - that provide such services.<sup>76</sup> In nearly every state or region there needs to be leadership in providing technical assistance and advice or the health of the historical records programs will undoubtedly suffer.

There is some movement in Alabama for developing such a program. In the late 1970s the Society of Alabama Archivists

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick M. Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists," American Archivist 45 (Fall 1983): 433-40.

<sup>74</sup> Society of California Archivists Newsletter no. 21 (September 1979): 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Carolina Comments, for example, consists of special features on significant historical activities in the state and regular features on meetings, publications, historic preservation and sites, museums, and the professional activities of the state's historians, archivists, and repositories.

<sup>76</sup> Timothy L. Ericson, "Presence, Perspective and Potential: A Conceptual Framework for Local Outreach," Midwestern Archivist 6 (no. 2, 1982): 149-69.

was formed to help support the expanded archival professionalism. Although SALA has remained a small organization, it has held two one-day meetings annually that have provided an opportunity for Alabama's archivists and others interested in the management of the state's documentary heritage to gather together, share concerns, and discuss professional issues. In 1984 the Alabama Department of Archives and History moved to assist SALA in its professional goals by providing a home and support for its quarterly newsletter, enabling its wider distribution. The newsletter is now being distributed to over a thousand institutions and individuals in the state. The content of the newsletter has also been expanded to include news of Alabama archival institutions and archivists, features on special archival projects within the state, information about upcoming professional meetings and educational opportunities, updates on Alabama legislation relevant to the archival community, information about archival projects of special national or professional significance, and occasional features addressed to records creators and users that will assist the state's archival profession in meeting its goals and objectives.<sup>77</sup>

These efforts are only a beginning point, however. If the state's records are to be preserved, Alabama's repositories and archivists must find new ways of cooperating and assisting each other in the development of an effective, professional, state-wide program of historical records preservation.

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<sup>77</sup> Access 7 (Spring/Summer 1984): 1.



Alabama's historical records repositories require the creation of a mechanism or mechanisms that will foster cooperation and planning for the improved care of the state's documentary heritage.

The resources of Alabama's historical records repositories are extremely limited. Although cooperation and coordination is probably the most effective means to use these resources, there is no mechanism to accomplish this. The Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board, other than this project and report, has only evaluated grant proposals to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The Alabama Department of Archives and History has provided some assistance, but it is burdened with many other problems in managing public records and arranging and describing its own historical collections. Other than the state archives, there is no other repository that appears to have a sufficient staff for mounting such a program. Still, there must be a statewide mechanism to guide such projects as a union list to historical records, the development of cooperative acquisition policies and documentation strategies, the creation of guidelines and standards for the care of historical records, and the study of issues such as regional networks, regional conservation center, and depository systems for microfilm of historical manuscripts. Before considering the nature of such a mechanism, these issues should be further clarified.

The historical researcher in Alabama is handicapped in effectively discovering the records that exist in the state's repositories because of the lack of institutional finding aids and the failure of many repositories to adequately report their holdings to such national guides as the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. Even many of the larger repositories, like the Alabama Department of Archives and History, have been unable to publish and distribute guides to its collections. There must be a way, first, for the repositories to distribute copies of what guides do exist among themselves for the benefit of researchers and, second, to encourage institutions that do not possess any finding aids at all to produce them, even if they are only preliminary. There should be some discussion and planning for the development of an automated system, such as through existing library networks that offer such programs, or an intensive project that will survey the holdings throughout the state's repositories and produce some sort of master guide. The latter project might be required because of the large number of repositories that lack trained or adequate staff able to do cataloging.<sup>78</sup>

Equally important as a union list is the development of acquisition policies that are cooperative in nature, fully documenting the state's history, and reflecting the willingness and interests of repositories cooperating in collecting projects

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<sup>78</sup> For such a project, see John F. Burns, "The NHPRC and the State of Washington's Historical Records," Prologue 11 (Spring 1979): 57-63.

and developing documentation strategies. The recent statement by one archivist that "sporadic, unplanned, competitive, and overlapping manuscripts collecting has led to the growth of poor collections of marginal value" seems to reflect a developing consensus within the archival profession.<sup>79</sup> It has even been stated that it is "ethical" that archivists and their institutions define their collecting policies in a manner that avoids "wasteful competition."<sup>80</sup> Until Alabama's archival repositories begin to work in this fashion, it will be impossible to say that the state's history is being adequately documented. This condition is true, of course, for most states.

Closely related to the ethical issue of developing cooperative acquisition policies is the matter of properly caring for the archival collections. It has already been described how Alabama's repositories generally are providing inadequate care for their holdings because of their limited resources. And yet few repositories are interested in restricting their collecting practices in order to improve care of holdings already on hand. One prominent manuscript curator has stated the problem very well:

It is apparent . . . that there are a great many repositories that do not have sufficient resources to manage a historical

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<sup>79</sup> Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," American Archivist 47 (Winter 1984): 31.

<sup>80</sup> "A Code of Ethics for Archivists," Society of American Archivists Newsletter, July 1979, pp. 11-15.

and developing documentation strategies. The recent statement  
The historical researcher in Alabama is handicapped in  
records program of any kind. For those  
archives that cannot afford an archivist,  
or any of the elements that would consti-  
tute a program, professional accountability  
requires all of us to urge that institution  
either to improve its care of its records  
or to deposit them in a repository that can  
appropriately manage them.<sup>81</sup>

As the archival profession continues to mature, it is develop-  
ing stronger standards that can be used for evaluating archival  
programs.<sup>82</sup> As these standards become established, historical  
records repositories and professional associations like the  
Society of Alabama Archivists must use them to assist institu-  
tions in making proper decisions about the collecting of his-  
torical records. Institutions that do not have the right  
facilities should be encouraged to upgrade their storage condi-  
tions or consider turning their holdings over to more suitable  
repositories. And the staff of these institutions need to be  
made aware of the ethical and technical implications of their  
practices and decisions.

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81 Joyce, "Historical Records Repositories," Documenting America, p. 44.

82 Such as Evaluation of Archival Institutions: Services, Principles, and Guide to Self-Study (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, n.d.) and Guidelines for Archives and Manuscript Repositories (n.p.: Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, 1983).

There is a whole host of decisions and practices that can be done only through cooperative study and pooling of resources. What usually comes to mind first is conservation. The conservation of historical collections requires large sources of financial support for the development of new and better practices and for the daily work of archival repositories. Short-term practices, like mending and cleaning, can only slow the deterioration of historical manuscripts, especially those being heavily used or in demand by researchers. In some regions cooperative conservation centers have developed to meet the needs of institutions holding historical records, and Alabama's repositories need to seriously consider such efforts.<sup>83</sup> There needs to be a better effort to develop and disseminate standards, such as for the production and storage of archival-quality microfilm, that encourages better conservation practices by Alabama's historical records repositories. Without serious attention to such concerns, the efforts of Alabama's archivists will be wasted.

An even more difficult area to work upon without cooperation is the development of documentation strategies for Alabama's history. At a recent Society of American Archivists meeting a documentation strategy was defined as a "plan formulated to assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity or area . . . carried out through the mutual efforts of many

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<sup>83</sup> The best model remains Ann Russell, "Northeast Document Conservation Center: A Case Study in Cooperative Conservation," American Archivist 45 (Winter 1982): 45-52.

institutions and individuals influencing both the creation of the records and the archival retention of some of them."<sup>84</sup> The idea is that many of the important aspects of our society that we need or wish documented are not controlled by or isolated to a single institution, corporation, association, or governmental agency. We need only reflect upon the civil rights movement in Alabama to realize that its full documentation would require the cooperation of many individuals and organizations: churches, civic organizations, and state and local government offices. If such important issues are haphazardly approached, their documentation for future historians and policymakers will be haphazard as well. The preservation of the memory of our past requires that there be active and energetic cooperation among repositories in their collecting.<sup>85</sup>

What kind of mechanism is required in Alabama that will foster cooperation and planning for the care of its documentary heritage? There needs to be a formal mechanism for archivists, librarians, records custodians, historians, genealogists, other researchers, and the curators of records to come together, communicate their concerns with each other, and devise

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<sup>84</sup> This definition, considered to be only a working draft, was developed by Patricia Aronsson, Larry J. Hackman, and Helen W. Samuels for the session, "Speculation of Documentation Strategies," at the 1984 Society of American Archivists meeting.

<sup>85</sup> For a model of such cooperation and strategy see Clark A. Elliott, ed., Understanding Progress as Process: Documentation of the History of Post-War Science and Technology in the United States (n.p.: Joint Committee on Archives of science and Technology, 1983).

workable means of preserving the historical records of this state. One possible step for this to occur would be to reconstitute Alabama's Historical Records Advisory Board into a consortium and to encourage it to emphasize planning, cooperation, and the sharing of resources and expertise, along with its other responsibilities of reviewing grant applications to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.<sup>86</sup> This will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter of this report.

Alabama's archivists must educate the public about the nature and importance of their work if they hope to preserve the state's documentary heritage.

After a stinging critique of the failure of state archivists to provide adequate leadership, H. G. Jones concluded with the following:

Your greatest contribution as an archivist may not be the quantity and quality of the work that you accomplish in the archives; rather, it may be the degree to which you are successful in persuading the public - and particularly public officials - of the

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<sup>86</sup> These boards were expected to develop such roles; see Larry J. Hackman, "The Historical Records Program: The States and the Nation," American Archivist 43 (Winter 1980): 17-32 and F. Gerald Ham, "NHPRC's Records Program and the Development of Statewide Archival Planning," ibid., pp. 33-42.

essentiality of your work in a civilized society.<sup>87</sup>

The veracity of Jones' comments are especially relevant in that the poor image of the archival profession has hindered its ability to adequately perform its tasks. David Gracy, a recent President of the Society of American Archivists, has reminded the profession that the

misconception by our publics and by those with the power to allocate resources to our repositories strikes at the heart of our existence and ability to function. With diminished resources, every activity of archives suffers. We lack people to arrange and describe holdings; we lack space to receive and maintain holdings; we lack resources for preservation work. Every one of us feels the effects.<sup>88</sup>

What the precise image of the archivist is in Alabama is difficult to determine. Certainly the poverty of the state's historical records repositories indicates that it

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<sup>87</sup> "The Pink Elephant Revisited," American Archivist 43 (Fall 1980): 483.

<sup>88</sup> "Archives and Society: The First Archival Revolution," American Archivist 47 (Winter 1984): 8.



is not very good and that it is not getting any better. Dr. Gracy endeavored to fully mobilize the Society of American Archivists in improving this image, and the same must occur in this state.

The question is how to improve the public's understanding of the value and uses of the state's documentary heritage and of the role of archives in this preservation effort. After it is realized that this is a continuous process, not a brief public relations effort, the archival profession must identify how to achieve it. The Society of Alabama Archivists must make this a priority and continue to strive toward reaching a larger audience. Although the wider distribution of its newsletter is a good start, it must move to have a stronger connection to national professional associations, like the Society of American Archivists and the American Association for State and Local History, to fully utilize their resources for achieving such a goal. It should be easy, and desirable, to build upon these efforts to educate the general public about what an archives does. Until the public is better aware of the value and importance of its historical records, the archivist's program or agenda will never be properly supported, and Alabama's documentary heritage will remain in jeopardy.

## Conclusion

Historical records repositories have been a mainstay of Alabama's effort to preserve its documentary heritage. The poor condition of these repositories, as outlined above, should reveal that this role may be endangered. However, it is difficult to imagine succeeding in the preservation of historical records without these programs. Alabama's archivists must work harder to explain their work to the society that supports them and must band together to cooperate and share the resources they possess. Alabama archivists must remind themselves that if they fail, it is the knowledge of their past and understanding of their present that suffers.

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87 "The Pink Elephant Revisited," American Archivist 43 (Fall 1980): 483.

88 "Archives and Society: The First Archival Revolution," American Archivist 47 (Winter 1984): 8.

# COMMON PROBLEMS, COORDINATED SOLUTIONS

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## COMMON PROBLEMS, COORDINATED SOLUTIONS

### Introduction

Alabama's records - whether public or private, state or local - share many similar conditions. The lack of adequate conservation, the neglect of the state's modern documentation, the relative impoverishment of state archival repositories, and a lack of awareness by the public of the value of a good records preservation program have all contributed to the present poor condition of Alabama's documentary heritage. One other common characteristic, the desire by the custodians of Alabama's public and private records to improve the care and management of these records, provides hope for the future of the state's documentary heritage.

### COMMON PROBLEMS, COORDINATED SOLUTIONS

The purpose of this section of the report is to identify the problems common to the administration of state and local government archives and historical records repositories. In one sense it is a summary of the three previous sections of Assessing Alabama's Archives. However, a focus upon such common problems or similar conditions is necessary for developing the most efficient strategies, ones that often employ multi-institutional cooperation and coordination, for preserving Alabama's documentary heritage. Hopefully, a strong interest in improvement by the state's public officials and archival community will foster such cooperation and coordination.

Cooperation, as an archival strategy, is only a recent development within the archival profession. For many years the

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methodology of the archivist was the individualistic, often spirited, pursuit of the historical record, a legacy of the humanistic scholar-collector of the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Jeremy

Belknap, a co-founder of the first American historical society, expressed this spirit in 1795. In describing one of his quests for some manuscripts, Belknap wrote that "there is nothing like having a good repository, and keeping a good lookout, not waiting at home for things to fall into the lap, but prowling about like a wolf for the prey."<sup>2</sup> Individual antiquarians, scholars,

collectors, and their institutions - both private and public archival repositories - led America's efforts in the preservation of its historical records from the eighteenth century to the middle of this century.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, such activity was appropriate as long as the historian-archivist was primarily concerned with collecting the older papers and records that preserve knowledge of the past.

The archival profession, continuing its own growth and maturation, has become increasingly interested in documenting

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lester J. Cappon, "Collectors and Keepers in the England of Elizabeth and James," Sibley's Heir: A Volume in Memory of Clifford Kenyon Shipton (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), pp. 145-71.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Leslie W. Dunlap, American Historical Societies 1790-1860 (Madison, Wisconsin: Privately printed, 1944), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Dunlap, American Historical Societies; David D. Van Tassel, Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); and Walter Muir Whitehill, Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Function and Their Financial Future (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1962).



contemporary society in order to preserve the records required by historians and other researchers. The origins of this interest dates back to the establishment of the archival profession. The formation and growth of this profession developed with the creation of public records programs - state archives and the National Archives - that brought with them a greater emphasis upon the administration of current records and evaluation of them for historical value. By the 1960s the interest of the public archivist in contemporary records was the dominant focus of the archival profession.<sup>4</sup> A decade later, starting with F. Gerald Ham's 1974 presidential address to the Society of American Archivists,<sup>5</sup> there came an effort to move beyond passive maintenance of old records to the documentation of contemporary society.

Since the early 1970s archivists increasingly have considered and debated the best means to achieve such an ambitious goal. What has emerged from this process is a realization that the limits of the archival profession's resources and the nature of contemporary information and documentation necessitate greater cooperation and coordination between archivists. In 1976 John A. Fleckner wrote one of the earliest calls for archival cooperation, focusing upon state repository networks

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<sup>4</sup> For a comparison and evaluation of the public archives and historical manuscripts traditions, see Richard C. Berner, Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> "The Archival Edge," American Archivist 38 (January 1975): 5-13.

that had developed in a number of states by then.<sup>6</sup> Not quite a decade later, the need for archival cooperation has been expanded to arrangement and description, automation, acquisition policies, appraisal, education, and working with other professions.<sup>7</sup> Even the report issued by the Society of American Archivists' Goals and Priorities Task Force made cooperation one of its basic planning assumptions, indeed the basis of its most important recommendation.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of the introduction to this section is to emphasize that while cooperation and coordination is a relatively recent concern by the archival profession, it will probably continue to be a major element in the profession's future development. Margaret Child, in evaluating the first round of state assessment reports completed in 1982 and 1983, lamented the profession's lack of development in this area and its tendency for its institutional members to go it alone. "At times," Child wrote, "the American archival profession seems to resemble nothing so much as Sisyphus endlessly rolling his rock

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<sup>6</sup> "Cooperation as a Strategy for Archival Institutions," American Archivist 39 (October 1976): 447-59.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret S. Child, "Reflections of Cooperation Among Professions," American Archivist 46 (Summer 1983): 286-92 and Frank G. Burke, "Archival Cooperation," ibid., pp. 293-305.

<sup>8</sup> The major recommendation of the task force is the creation of a national committee for archival planning and development; Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities, issued as a draft for discussion in 1984.

up the mountainside."<sup>9</sup> What is important to remember about the following findings and recommendations is that the lack of coordination evident in preserving Alabama's documentary heritage is not intended as a criticism, but rather as a future direction to enable the state's archival community to better achieve its goal. Alabama's archivists need to seriously consider the advantages available to them through increased cooperation and coordination.

#### FINDINGS

Archivists and historians need to be more effective in demonstrating to the public the value of historical records preservation.

An evaluation of the condition of Alabama's programs for the administration of public and private records reveals an implicit lack of understanding by the public - here broadly defined to include both creators and potential users - of the nature and value of historical records and their information. Although government is an essential part of the life of each citizen, the value placed upon the historical records of government is not sufficiently high enough to ensure the preservation and effective use of this information. Public records

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<sup>9</sup> "Statewide Functions and Services," in Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States, ed. Lisa B. Weber ([Albany]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators in cooperation with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, [1984]), pp. 47-57 (quote, p. 47).

document the important relationship between the citizens and their government, including the protection of many individual rights, and yet these records are often lost, inadvertently or deliberately destroyed without sufficient evaluation of their information content, or simply neglected. In a democratic society that rests upon the informed decision-making of its citizenry, the neglect of information contained in public records is a serious problem. The neglect of Alabama's private historical papers also reflects a lack of public understanding of the nature and value of Alabama's documentary heritage.

David B. Gracy, II, a recent president of the Society of American Archivists, has pointed to the profession's image as one source of the problem; inadequate resources of the archival profession exist because "we have no identity in the public mind."<sup>10</sup> Other states, such as New York, have identified similar causes for this problem. The final report of the New York assessment project concluded that

there is insufficient appreciation of historical records as the central documentation of the past, present, and future human activity and as a key ingredient in the passage of our civilization from one generation to the next.

This lack of awareness is partially due to the fact that historical records custodians

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<sup>10</sup> "Archives and Society: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty," NASARA Clearinghouse 7 (October 1984): 11.

have not made a major effort to educate the public about the nature and significance of archival work.<sup>11</sup>

The same could be written for Alabama.

The Society of Alabama Archivists has begun to speak in behalf of Alabama's archivists since its formation in 1978, but it is a young and small association that has had only limited impact on the general public. Its future appears promising, however, and will probably find it involved in more public-oriented programs. Few of the other archival repositories in the state have developed programs to inform the public, mainly because of their limited resources. Exceptions have been the radio series on Birmingham's black working class history by the Archive of American Minority Cultures of the University of Alabama and the creation of the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama Newspapers, a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Alabama Department of Archives and History has also recently joined with the Society of Alabama Archivists to more widely distribute its newsletter, and it has just established a new education division for increased public outreach. The public's understanding of the value of historical records and their information should show significant improvement in the future.

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<sup>11</sup> Toward a Usable Past: Historical Records in the Empire State (Albany: New York Historical Records Advisory Board, January 1984), p. 58.

There is some correlation between the archivist's societal image and the value that society places upon the preservation of its documentary heritage. There certainly appears to be a relationship between archival image and the reality of archival preservation when examining Alabama's care for its public and private records.

Archival cooperation in Alabama has not been as strong as needed for the adequate preservation of the state's documentary heritage.

Until only very recently, Alabama's archivists were uninterested in cooperative ventures of any sort, threatening the state's historical records. College and university records programs have appeared on some campuses, but there could be better communication and coordination between them. Archival repositories have not exchanged finding aids, shared information about their holdings, or participated in cooperative collecting or processing projects. Alabama's historical records repositories generally have collected without concern about other archival programs and their acquisition goals, leaving numerous gaps in the state's documentation. There has also been a minimum of outreach to records creators such as businesses, museums, churches, and professional associations to ensure that their historical records are being properly looked after; indeed, some of these institutions seem to exist outside of any archival system whatsoever. And, finally, Alabama's archival institutions have not established sufficiently strong connections to the

national archival profession. Few, for example, even report to such long-established national projects as the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections.

There are, however, good reasons for encouragement about improvement in archival cooperation. The founding and continued development of the Society of Alabama Archivists promises to provide a cohesive element to the state's archival community. SALA's publication of a quarterly newsletter, sponsorship of spring and fall meetings, and increasing interest in statewide cooperative projects will help to resolve the issue of state archival leadership. Also, the state's larger archival repositories - like the state archives, University of Alabama, Auburn University, and some of the bigger public libraries - have revealed increased interest and concern in cooperating in programs of statewide archival significance. The formation in 1983 of the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama Newspapers, with the assistance of the National Endowment of Humanities, is the first major statewide cooperative project since the Historical Records Survey of half a century before.<sup>12</sup> Out of all of this, archival leadership is emerging and being strengthened, promising better prospects for the preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage.

Having stated all of this, it would be useful to reflect briefly on the ideal nature of leadership necessary for this

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<sup>12</sup> Cooperation is such that the coalition's membership consists of the state archives, Alabama Public Library Service, Council of Librarians of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, Association of County Commissions, Alabama Press Association, Alabama Library Association, and the Society of Alabama Archivists.

cooperation to develop more fully. Such leadership has been much discussed in the 1980s, primarily because of the increase in size and diversity of the archival profession and the shift from an emphasis on collecting older documentary fragments to documenting contemporary society. Most of the discussion has centered upon the problems with archival leadership. One leading archivist was recently critical about the inadequate leadership practised by state archival institutions:

Whoever accepts appointment as the state's chief archival officer assumes the responsibility for convincing the remainder of the citizens, and particularly other officials, that an effective archival program is essential in modern society. Salesmanship, in the sense of "selling" an archival program, is a first duty of a state archivist. The sad truth is that some promising state programs have stagnated or atrophied because the archivists remained in archival convents rather than putting on the mantles of missionaries. State records programs are successful when the position of state archivist becomes accepted by administrators, legislators, and the public as a normal function of the state, and when the incumbent is recognized as an executive-level officer. This



the concept acceptance, this recognition, will not be won or with those of at meetings of professional organizations Archivists are back outside the borders of the state; it must be records won from the citizens within the state.<sup>13</sup>

Alabama has long suffered from the lack of preservation The need for such salesmanship or missionary zeal is not re- stricted to state archives, but is a requisite for any archival leadership. Moreover, leadership within state archival communi- ties is also necessary for identifying needs and planning solu- tions, a major conclusion of the first-round of state assessment projects sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.<sup>14</sup> One state summarized the condition when it concluded that

no statewide group or organization has taken the lead in developing solutions for histori- cal records programs, serving as an advocate for historical records programs, focusing public attention on historical records is- sues, or monitoring government activities that affect historical records work . . . . This makes it impossible for the archival community . . . to establish long-term goals and priorities, to take concerted action on

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<sup>13</sup> H. G. Jones, "The Pink Elephant Revisited," American Archivist 43 (Fall 1980): 478.

<sup>14</sup> See the essays in Documenting America.

important issues, and to turn the attention of the news media, the Legislature, major funding sources, and the general public to archival problems.<sup>15</sup>

Alabama's documentary heritage is endangered by the lack of adequate preservation facilities.

The identification of records that possess historical value, their arrangement and description, and their accessibility in repositories are all fruitless activities if these same records are not treated by modern preservation techniques. During the past decade the preservation of historical records has emerged as one of the most important and neglected responsibilities of the archival profession. At a national conference on archival priorities in 1977, one leading conservator stated that "until about fifteen years ago, the physical condition of archives was of concern to archivists, but attention to their care and repair was not the general practice except in a few national and state repositories . . . . [Now] we have reached the point at which if some positive steps are not taken, much of the information in these records will be lost."<sup>16</sup> As a result of such concern, there has recently developed a "new discipline" - conservation administration or conservation management - that "unites many of

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<sup>15</sup> Toward a Usable Past, p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> George M. Cunha, Frazer G. Poole, and Clyde C. Walton, "The Conservation and Preservation of Historical Records," American Archivist 40 (July 1977): 321.

the concerns and practices of the professional conservator with those of the archivist, librarian, and curator."<sup>17</sup> Archivists are tackling the problem of the preservation of their historical records with new vigor and dedication.

Alabama has long suffered from the lack of preservation facilities designed to work with historical records. Most of the state's archival repositories do not have trained conservators on their staffs and generally practice only simple techniques such as cleaning, mending, or encapsulation. Even more repositories lack the funds to support any form of conservation, including the proper storage of historical records in acid-free containers or in a climate-controlled environment. The state archives, the largest and most prosperous of Alabama's repositories, does not even possess a modern records center and its main building, although newly secured, has a very poor environment for the storage of historical records.

The above conditions have also perpetuated the introduction of poor conservation practices in the state, probably due to the lack of experienced conservators available for consultation. The prime example of this is the generally poor micrographics procedures utilized in the state. Most individuals have viewed microfilming as a technology that resolves records problems - primarily the bulky volume of modern records - not being handled by

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<sup>17</sup> For the best introduction to this new development, see Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Archives & Manuscripts: Conservation; A Manual on Physical Care and Management, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983). The quote is from page 10 of this manual.

other means such as appraisal and scheduling. But the evidence supports that state and local governments and historical records repositories are using this technology without adequate knowledge of standards or quality control. Little will be accomplished by microfilming permanently valuable historical records on a non-permanent media.<sup>18</sup>

There are some bright spots in the future preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage. First of all, Alabama's archivists are aware of and interested in resolving the dire needs of preserving the state's historical records. There are also other resources being developed for the better care of Alabama's documentary heritage, most notably a study being conducted by the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) to establish a cooperative preservation program. With assistance from the National Endowment for the Humanities, SOLINET will be conducting a two year pilot program to assist archives and libraries in the Southeast to develop, strengthen, and coordinate their own preservation programs. Whether this develops into a full-fledged cooperative conservation center in the region remains to be seen, but the promise is great since such programs in other areas have been among the most successful preservation systems.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Even under the best controlled micrographics programs, microfilming should be carefully considered as a preservation technique because of its cost and high labor consumption.

<sup>19</sup> For a model, refer to Ann Russell, "Northeast Document Conservation Center: A Case Study in Cooperative Conservation," American Archivist 45 (Winter 1982): 45-52.

Educational programs about archives and records administration need to be strengthened in Alabama.

One of the common needs of state and local government records custodians and the staffs of Alabama's historical records repositories is increased opportunity for education and training in the administration of records. Such education, of course, extends across a variety of levels. State and local government officials need training in basic records management techniques and specific guidelines for this from the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The historical records repositories require basic assistance in archives administration. There is also a need and desire by the state's more experienced archivists for advanced education on specific archives administration topics, such as planning, management, and appraisal. All these needs reflect those shared by other states and the larger profession.<sup>20</sup>

There are, of course, opportunities for archival education within Alabama, primarily among the state's colleges and universities. Several schools offer formal training programs. Auburn University established an archival education program between the history department and the school's archives department, offering

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<sup>20</sup> For recent writings on archival education that reflect all of these needs, see Frank B. Evans, "Postappointment Archival Training: A Proposed Solution for a Basic Problem," American Archivist 40 (January 1977): 57-74; Lawrence J. McCrank, "Prospects for Integrating Historical and Information Studies in Archival Education," ibid. 42 (October 1979): 443-54; Nancy E. Peace and Nancy Fisher Chudacoff, "Archivists and Librarians: A Common Mission, A Common Education," ibid. 42 (October 1979): 456-62; and Ruth W. Helmuth, "Education for American Archivists: A View from the Trenches," ibid. 44 (Fall 1981): 295-303.

a directed reading course and an internship; the program is also supported by an offering of introductory records management courses. The University of Alabama offers records management and introductory archives administration courses through the library school along with internships in the university's archives. The University of Alabama at Birmingham has a master's program in history with a specialization in public history that includes archives administration and internships. There are also a number of other schools that do not have formal archival education programs but offer internships of various kinds.<sup>21</sup>

Although these courses provide a good basic introduction to archival administration, they do not meet all of the needs for archival education in the state. These programs are focused upon the training of beginning archivists, not outreach to records creating institutions or archival repositories such as historical societies or public libraries nor continuing education for those already working as archivists.<sup>22</sup> The meetings of the Society of Alabama Archivists fulfill some of these needs, with programs that concern both the basics of archival practices and profes-

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<sup>21</sup> These include Birmingham-Southern, Samford, University of Montevallo, and the University of South Alabama. Faulkner University (formerly Alabama Christian College) occasionally offers a records management course in the evening and Alabama A&M is developing a minor in public history that will include a university archives internship.

<sup>22</sup> Individuals training to be archivists require considerable exposure to the theory of archives administration; the staff of historical societies and similar institutions are generally more interested in the practical aspects of archives administration.

sional issues and theory, but even these meetings require careful reevaluation for frequency, content, and the institutions and individuals that are being attracted to them.<sup>23</sup> A greater need, however, is a consideration of archival training opportunities (available outside of the state of Alabama), such as those offered by the Society of American Archivists or the South Atlantic Region Archives and Records Conference or other regional archival associations. With the rate and pace of change in modern records and information systems, continuing education has become a virtual necessity.

There seems to be definite improvements in educational opportunities for Alabama's records custodians occurring in the mid-1980s. The Society of Alabama Archivists appears to be expanding its mandate for archival training to a broader community and is beginning to encourage its membership to greater participation in other professional associations.<sup>24</sup> The state archives also has discussed with the Alabama Public Library Service the possibility of offering an extensive series of seminars on the management of local history materials for public libraries and historical societies.<sup>25</sup> But these initiatives are far from comprehensive and much more will be needed.

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<sup>23</sup> SALA remains a small organization and the twice-a-year meetings are simply not enough to meet the needs of Alabama's archival community.

<sup>24</sup> It is planning, for example, longer meetings in cooperation with other regional archival associations like the Society of Mississippi Archivists.

<sup>25</sup> This would be similar to the Alabama Public Library 1983 and 1984 Management Development Programs that focused upon financial management, small group dynamics, management skills, and personnel administration.

Alabama's modern history is not being adequately documented  
by the state's archival repositories.

As has been stated already, the archival profession has become increasingly concerned about documenting contemporary society. One president of the Society of American Archivists selected the challenge of documenting the tremendous change of Post-World War Two America as a difficult, but crucial, task for the archival profession. This archivist reminded us that

whatever the causes, archivists ultimately have to deal with the documentary consequences of social change. This generation, by sheer size and by a lifestyle that challenged the practices of its parents' generation, has left us a larger and more complex culture to record . . . We archivists have to be historians in our own time.<sup>26</sup>

Other archivists have focused upon the complexities of modern society's records, such as the widespread use of computer technology or the extensive interrelationships of various records creators in even one program or project.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Edward Weldon, "Archives and the Challenges of Change," American Archivist 46 (Spring 1983): 127, 134.

<sup>27</sup> F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," American Archivist 44 (Summer 1981): 207-16.



Alabama's archivists, however, have not adequately addressed the issue of Alabama's twentieth-century history. The inadequacy of the state's records management program has meant that many valuable state and local public records remain outside of archival custody or have been lost. This problem has been exacerbated by the increasing complexity and volume of the modern government records. Other historical records repositories also consistently acknowledge needs across the state in this area.<sup>28</sup> With the exception of the new Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama Newspapers, there is little sign of progress in this area.

Alabama's records custodians and archivists are strongly interested in improving the administration and preservation of the state's historical records.

One of the most consistently encouraging aspects of this project has been the discovery of the great interest in improving the care of Alabama's historical records. No matter how serious the problem, there has generally been a corresponding interest and desire for improvement. State and local government officials and the staffs of Alabama's historical records repositories have expressed serious interest in workshops and seminars, published technical advice, the establishment of standards, on-site visits and consultations, assistance in improving storage conditions,

<sup>28</sup> For the proper way to proceed, see Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," American Archivist 47 (Winter 1984): 30-42.

and in the prospects for cooperation and coordination of programs. If programs can be developed to take advantage of this interest, it may be possible for Alabama's archival repositories to achieve substantial gains in the preservation of the state's historical records.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the introduction and one of the findings of this chapter, the nature and necessity of cooperation and coordination among archival repositories and their staff was briefly discussed. Cooperation and coordination must occur if Alabama's documentary heritage is to be preserved; this is essential to better acquaint the public with the work and importance of the archivist, strengthen archival leadership in the state, develop effective and efficient conservation strategies, enhance education and training programs for Alabama's records custodians, and adequately document all the periods and elements of the state's past. But there is no single formula for the development and sustenance of such cooperation and coordination. In fact, within the archival profession there are various models for archival cooperation and various forms of coordination; advocacy and outreach, education and training, an informational clearinghouse, and planning all have sufficient cooperative models that need to be replicated in Alabama. Some can be developed rather quickly, others will require considerable additional thought and planning.

Alabama's archivists must be more effective in informing the public about the value of historical records and of programs to ensure the proper preservation and use of these records.

The matter of improving the image of the archivist is a subject that has preoccupied the archival profession's attention for the past two years. The archivist's image, as has already been pointed out, has much to do with the legal, financial, and other forms of support that determine the archivist's ability to preserve and manage the documentary heritage. The improvement of that image, aside from certain more intricate professional matters,<sup>29</sup> can be achieved through more sustained public relations efforts, exhibitions, and publications that communicate to the public what the archivist does and why it is important. The most recent and comprehensive manual on public programs for archival institutions describes an extensive variety of oral history projects, photographic documentation programs, exhibitions, lectures, publications from brochures to extensive finding aids, receptions and special events, and slide and other audio-visual projects that can be utilized to better explain the work of the archivist to the general public.<sup>30</sup> As one archivist experienced in the nature of such educational programs points out,

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<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly, many of the image-related problems of the archivist generate from the archivists' self-image. This concerns, for example, improvements in education and training standards, definitions and parameters of archival work, and certain archival practices. None of these can be readily improved without significant work and effort by the profession.

<sup>30</sup> Ann E. Pederson and Gail Farr Casterline, Archives & Manuscripts: Public Programs, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982).

only a small percentage of the population either understands or appreciates the functions of an archival institution . . . . [To combat this] the development of outreach programs must be given equal priority with acquisition, arrangement, description, conservation, and reference. Archivists must accept the concept of the educational archivist just as they have recently accepted the concept of documentary editor, administrator and computer analyst as comparable professionals.<sup>31</sup>

The acceptance of such an approach in Alabama would be a significant step in beginning to work on improving the archivist's image in this state and, hopefully, the support for his or her work. The question, of course, is what organization will provide leadership in Alabama in this area? Certainly, this is a shared responsibility and one that every major repository that has been involved in public outreach should consider. The advantage, however, of a major organization concentrating upon such programs is the prospect of coordinated action on a broader base than merely the local geographical context of the repository or the nature of its constituency. Coordinated action on the behalf of

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<sup>31</sup> Jane Meredith Pairo, "Developing An Archival Outreach Program," Georgia Archive 10 (Spring 1982): 4-5.

International Archives Week or for the Bicentennial in 1987 of the drafting of one of this country's most important documents, the Constitution, would provide opportunities for the development of significant positive support in behalf of the work and goals of Alabama's archival community.

At present, the Society of Alabama Archivists seems to be a likely candidate for such leadership. The society's commitment since its founding in 1978 has been the improved care of the state's historical records, and its twice yearly meetings and quarterly newsletter have reflected such a purpose.<sup>32</sup> The organization has included representatives from all the major archival institutions in the state and from many of the smaller repositories and constitutes an excellent forum by which to consider means and opportunities to improve the image of the Alabama archivist and to gain stronger support for important programs. Could not SALA consider special sessions at its regular meetings to focus on such public outreach issues? Such sessions could feature reports from institutions that have sponsored successful projects and discuss the possibilities of coordinated strategies.

Closely related to educating the public about the work of the archivist is the need for greater advocacy for archival issues in the state. Advocacy is a much broader commitment than an educa-

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<sup>32</sup> The society's recent membership brochure presents its commitments "to promote the preservation, special care, and systematic management of historical records; to improve the standards of professional competence in the field of historical records management; and to encourage cooperation, mutual assistance, and coordination of activities and information for the preservation of historical records in Alabama."

tion outreach to the general public about the profession of archivists. Instead, advocacy is a deliberate and sustained effort on behalf of the archival profession to influence policymakers or public opinion on specific issues that concern the management and preservation of historical records. One state, New York, that studied the condition of its archival community clearly and succinctly stated the need for such advocacy:

Our elected State officials and their key staff members do not presently think of historical records as a "problem area" or identify the organizations, institutions and individuals involved in historical records matters as an important, ongoing, organized constituency. There is no systematic constituency effort to monitor, propose, or influence legislation, regulations and State programs for historical records.<sup>33</sup>

Generally, this observation has been true for Alabama.

As a whole, the archival profession has become much more cognizant of the need for such advocacy and some interesting models and success stories have emerged. New York, for example, has founded a "Coalition for New York's Documentary Heritage" in

<sup>33</sup> Editorial by Larry J. Hackman in For the Record, the newsletter of the New York State Archives and the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board, 2 (Winter 1984): 2.

order to encourage the preservation of that state's documentary heritage, increase public awareness of archival issues, develop a unified position for and represent organizations concerned with such issues, stimulate action by organizations and individuals interested in the preservation of historical records, and monitor and influence public programs and legislation.<sup>34</sup> On the national level both the Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage and the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History are advocacy groups that were primarily responsible for the successful conclusion in the long war to gain administrative independence for the National Archives.<sup>35</sup> The lessons from these recent events is that such advocacy is not only important but essential and that to be successful it requires coordinated leadership and often a central focus.

Again, the Society of Alabama Archivists appears to be the likely candidate for advocacy leadership because it is the only organization in Alabama that can represent or speak for the broader archival community. This is not meant to suggest that individual archivists or repositories should not or could not effectively

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<sup>34</sup> The founding members of this coalition are the New York Caucus of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, The Archivists' Roundtable of Metropolitan New York, the Long Island Archives Conference, Lake Ontario Archives Conference, Capital Area Archivists, and representatives of New York's genealogical community; for a description see For the Record 2 (Summer 1984): 25.

<sup>35</sup> Charlene N. Bickford, The Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage: An Important Lesson in Archival Advocacy (n.p.: Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, 1984). There has not been a full study or statement of the NCCPH, although it produces a regular newsletter with primary support by the American Historical Association.

engage in supporting archival causes. However, the chances of success are certainly increased when legislators or others hear from multiple institutions and archivists or one association speaking in their behalf. Regardless, advocacy will require coordination among the archival community and a network of communication. The Society of Alabama Archivists - with its meetings and newsletter - has an excellent base upon which to build an effective archival advocacy program and to improve the preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage.<sup>36</sup>

Alabama's archivists and archival institutions need to cooperate in developing stronger archival training and education programs to support those responsible for the state's documentary heritage.

The education of entry level professional archivists continues to be an extremely controversial topic within the national profession. Despite the wide array of options that have been presented for training archivists,<sup>37</sup> there still remains little significant improvement in the theoretical base of such education from the

<sup>36</sup> Examples of issues that could use such advocacy are improved legislation for public records programs and archival theft, financial support for archival institutions, and the establishment and support of specific projects.

<sup>37</sup> See the literature cited in footnote 23 for a few of the various approaches.



profession's fledgling condition of a half-century ago.<sup>38</sup> Frank G. Burke, Executive Director of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, has aptly summarized the main problem to be the poor development of archival theory. Burke writes that "we are confronted with archival training under the guise of archival education. Students are taught what and how, but not why. [We] are producing a large corps of parish priests when no one has bothered to devise a theology under whose standard they can act."<sup>39</sup>

Burke's conclusion regarding a major weakness of the nation's archival education system, however, is only partly relevant to Alabama's needs. Earlier in this section of the report it was stated that there is a need for both basic training in records management and archives administration and for advanced education on more specific aspects of this work, especially its underlying theory. The first need for Alabama is an emphasis upon greater opportunities for basic training of those who already have responsibility for records, the primary desire expressed by the state's public records managers and private historical records custodians; the majority of these individuals have had little or no exposure to professional records principles and practices.

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<sup>38</sup> See Jacqueline Goggin, "That We Still Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930-1960," American Archivist 47 (Summer 1984): 243-54.

<sup>39</sup> "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," American Archivist 44 (Winter 1981): 44-45.

Fortunately, there are numerous sources for such basic training. Over the past decade both the Society of American Archivists and the American Association for State and Local History have published basic manuals and operated basic seminars on such work.<sup>40</sup> There have also been very successful multi-week basic training programs on records administration, some that go very far back in the history of the archives profession, such as those offered by the National Archives and the Georgia Department of Archives and History. The main problem for Alabama is not to recreate such basic publications and training programs, but is rather to seek ways to use these sources.

One way, of course, to improve archival training in the state is for some of the larger archival repositories to provide some assistance in this to at least their immediate localities and constituencies. Institutions with trained archivists on the staff need to help those of the many smaller repositories and, at times, even public records custodians that lack such training. The weaker repositories are often the only ones providing any sort of effort to preserve the historical records of that area and, be-

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<sup>40</sup> The SAA, for example, has published manuals on the administration of photographic collections, conservation, machine-readable records, appraisal and accessing, arrangement and description, reference and access, security, surveys, exhibitions, automated access, maps and architectural drawings, public programs, and reprography. The AASLH has also published a number of manuals on archives, oral history, and other related topics.

cause of this, professional assistance is doubly important.<sup>41</sup>

Some activity such as this has been going on in Alabama for some years, but there must be more than an ad hoc program to ensure adequate care of Alabama's documentary heritage.

Organizations with larger statewide perspectives - such as the Alabama Public Library Service and the Society of Alabama Archivists - need to concentrate upon examining the needs of archival repositories across the state and in developing programs that reach greater numbers of these institutions. There are several reasons for this. First, such organizations have already established networks that can be utilized more efficiently in such training programs. Second, these organizations are capable of reaching greater numbers of repositories than by individual institutions providing help on an ad hoc basis. And third, and most important, some of these organizations have greater resources in supporting relationships to other state, regional, and national associations. One of the biggest needs of Alabama's archival community is in attracting training programs, such as those offered by the Society of American Archivists on conservation administration, to the state. Associations like the public library service and that for the state's archivists can establish connections to the larger archival profession that should benefit the preservation of the state's documentary heritage. Most of this work can be accomplished informally, largely through simple commu-

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<sup>41</sup> Regional networks have shown this need extremely well; see Timothy L. Ericson, "Preserve, Perspective and Potential: A Conceptual Framework for Local Outreach," Midwestern Archivist 6 (no. 2, 1982): 149-62.

nication between such organizations and with a modest amount of cooperative programming.

The formal archives administration programs that exist in the universities and colleges also need to be involved in greater outreach and assistance to the local repositories; most of these programs in Alabama have done this to some extent but these resources need to be available even more widely than they have been. Perhaps the staffs of these programs could be brought together for better coordination, and, also, to make the training opportunities better known to the institutions and repositories that could use their services. Alabama's archival repositories could better utilize their training opportunities or seek assistance directly through their staffs and students; the use of student interns, for example, has long been a means of aid to archival repositories.<sup>42</sup>

The need for more advanced archival education in Alabama is more difficult to meet, even though it is not as serious as offering basic training programs. However, as a greater number of individuals gain the basic knowledge of archival administration, the need for more advanced education will increase. Introductions to archival principles will necessarily give way to more serious attention to archival theory for certain people. The important

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<sup>42</sup> The Society of American Archivists has issued standards for such internships; see "Program Standard for Archival Education: The Practicum," American Archivist 43 (Summer 1980): 420-22. The greatest problem for many of Alabama's repositories, however, may be the need for professional direction of the interns on the site; see William G. LeFurgy, "The Practicum: A Repository View," American Archivist 44 (Spring 1981): 153-55.

point to make about this is that the archival profession is grappling with the same issue on a national level, and the only way for Alabama's archivists and archival educators to deal with this is to strengthen their connection to the profession. The increasing professionalism of Alabama's archival community that is already underway will certainly strengthen this aspect of the preservation and management of the state's historical records.

There needs to be a planning mechanism that will foster cooperation and coordination for the improved management and preservation of Alabama's documentary heritage.

Educating the public about the work of the archivists and strengthening archival education and training in Alabama are efforts that can be benefited by increased cooperation and coordination among the state's archival community. However, there are other areas - such as preservation and documentation - that require an intense commitment to the notion of institutional cooperation. For these, planning is essential.

There has been considerable discussion within the archival profession about planning in recent years. Some of this is a reaction to the increasing concern in our society with management, accounting for the fast-paced sales of books like John Naisbitt's Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives (1982) and In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies (1982) by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. Naisbitt, for example, writes that

there is unprecedented criticism of American business management throughout the world today. A great deal of this criticism is because of the short-term orientation of American managers. It is remarkable how willing American business people are to make the current quarter look better at the expense of the future, to sacrifice the future to make this year's bottom line a little more attractive or less embarrassing.<sup>43</sup>

Most archivists also have been guilty of a similar shortsightedness.

Many archivists have recognized, of course, this problem with their profession. The expansion of the National Historical Publications Commission to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission in the mid-1970s was because

the commission saw the records program as a vehicle to break down those introspective and proprietary attitudes that isolate archivists and to bring together competing interests within a state to talk about basic archival problems and to develop common approaches to their solution - in short, to make some

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<sup>43</sup> Megratrends (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1982), p. 81.

plans.<sup>44</sup>

The interest by archivists in planning has intensified in the last several years. The theme of the 1982 Society of American Archivists' meeting was "Planning in an Archival Environment," and in 1982 the society also established a task force on goals and priorities for the profession with the recommendation that a permanent group be set up to continue such planning. One of the preeminent assumptions of this group was that

to make efficient use of limited resources and to meet the challenges faced by archivists in dealing with the identification and preservation of the contemporary record, the profession must make greater use of a few broad strategies than has been done in the past. These are planning, cooperation and mutual assistance, research and development, and advocacy and public information programs.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> F. Gerald Ham, "NHPRC's Records Program and the Development of Statewide Archival Planning," American Archivist 43 (Winter 1980): 33. See also the essays in "A National Conference of State Historical Records Coordinators and Representatives of State Historical Records Advisory Boards, Atlanta, Georgia. June 6-7, 1980," Georgia Archive 9 (Spring 1981): 1-83.

<sup>45</sup> Planning for the Archival Profession, p. 9.

Planning is the concern in this section of the report, for Alabama's archivists face large problems of preservation and management with those familiar "limited resources."

The question for Alabama's archivists is not that planning is needed, but in what form such planning should materialize. To be successful on a statewide level, this planning cannot be the responsibility or function of any single institution because of the commitment that is required on the part of many repositories. For example, careful planning is essential for the adequate documentation of Alabama's history, but this documentation will require the participation of a number of archival institutions willing to compose and exchange collecting policies, compromise on areas of competition, identify neglected areas, and even give up existing holdings to support a full-fledged cooperative approach to the problem of documenting the state's history. The other example, that of preservation, should be even more obvious as a candidate for deliberate planning. The preservation and conservation of Alabama's documentary heritage is something that is being presently approached on a piecemeal and extremely limited basis and it is, hence, in jeopardy. The state's archival repositories must learn to more effectively use and share their limited preservation resources, especially to identify priorities. It is hard to imagine any of this occurring without statewide planning and, as a result, systematic and sustained cooperation.

The most effective mechanisms for such statewide planning are those that are composed of pertinent professional associations, institutions, and individuals. There must be professional associations consisting of custodians (Society of Alabama Archivists,



Alabama Library Association, Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, Alabama Public Library Service), creators (Association of County Commissions of Alabama, Alabama League of Municipalities), and users (Alabama Association of Historians, Alabama Historical Association, Alabama Genealogical Society, Alabama Bar Association). Such groups might also include representatives of the major archival repositories like the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the Birmingham Public Library, and the archives divisions of Auburn University and University of Alabama. Although the exact composition of such bodies can be carefully worked out at a later time, the goal should remain that of representing the full spectrum of the archival community from all areas of the state.

There are a couple of options open for the formation of such a planning mechanism. One is that the Society of Alabama Archivists, the association that speaks for the archival community, could either sponsor this group or absorb this role as an organizational goal. The biggest obstacle to this, however, is that the society has extremely limited resources, probably too modest to support an endeavor. A more appropriate role for the Society of Alabama Archivists might be to support sessions at its regular meetings that provide a forum for the consideration of statewide archival needs and projects. Another possibility could be the reconstitution of the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board, the sponsor of this project, into a body composed of representatives of associations of records creators, custodians, and users. Although this would require additional resources, there is a

Planning is the concern in this section of the report, for possibility for some support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and it would be a natural extension of the group's present responsibilities and concerns.<sup>46</sup> Even if the state board is not the appropriate support for such planning, it is obvious that such statewide planning is desirable. The state board can, if nothing else, carry on the valuable work started by this Assessment and Reporting Project in 1983.

### Conclusion

The problems facing one archival repository are generally shared by other institutions; likewise, these repositories also share similar goals, the preservation and management of some portion of the state's documentary heritage. Alabama's archival repositories, therefore, can either operate individually and, like Sisyphus, make little progress in improving Alabama's documentary heritage or band together to plan, to cooperate, and to share resources. Certainly, in this case at least, there is strength in numbers. Can the archival profession really convince the public of the need for saving the state's historical records without stronger and better advocacy by Alabama's archival community? Can the state's archival community really utilize its limited resources wisely without careful planning and coordination? There needs to be emulation of the excellent project now underway under the auspices of the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama's Newspapers.

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, this was one of the primary reasons for creating the state boards in the first place; see Larry J. Hackman, "The Historical Records Program: The States and the Nation," American Archivist 43 (Winter 1980): 17-32.

# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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### PRIORITIES FOR ALABAMA'S ARCHIVES, 1985-87

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Where Do We Go From Here?

Priorities for Alabama's Archives, 1985-87

Introduction

The content of the previous four chapters - concerning state government records, local government records, historical repositories, and common needs of and solutions for the archival community - was long-range in focus. The purposes of these chapters were to evaluate the present conditions, and the reasons for these conditions, of Alabama's documentary heritage and to propose solutions for improving

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A period of two years seems to be a reasonable span of time for laying an adequate foundation for improving the condition of Alabama's documentary heritage. After that period it will be necessary to evaluate the progress accomplished on these priority actions and to revise long-range needs and goals with a new set of short-term priorities. Hopefully, in this manner, Alabama's archival community can

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The content of the previous four chapters - concerning state government records, local government records, historical repositories, and common needs of and solutions for the archival community - was long-range in focus. The purposes of these chapters were to evaluate the present conditions, and the reasons for these conditions, of Alabama's documentary heritage and to propose recommendations for improving its inadequacies or neglected aspects wherever they might occur. Since the recommendations, taken collectively, constitute a portrait of the ideal environment for preserving and managing Alabama's documentary heritage, it is necessary to determine priority actions for beginning to work toward such an environment. The purpose of this chapter is to suggest such priorities, to identify the actors for carrying forth those priorities, and to provoke their consideration and debate by Alabama's archival community.

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continue to improve the preservation and management of the state's documentary heritage. This report is a start, but it is necessary to follow it up with specific actions and projects. After all, the preservation of Alabama's historical records is at stake.

The recommended short-term priorities have been presented below within the structure of the previous four chapters, a structure required by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for this project. In this section, unlike the others, these recommendations have no explanations. The individual desiring more information about the recommendations should refer back to the fuller discussions within the previous chapters. The careful reader will also notice two other characteristics of these short-term initiatives. First, they are not comprehensive in nature, especially when compared to the earlier chapters. Again, these are short-term priorities only; the fuller treatments of the four previous chapters constitute long-range goals. Second, there are noticeable differences between the nature of these recommendations in the four areas. The reason for this is the relative degree of complexity of the various long-term goals and the differences between the conditions of the various areas. For example, recommendations regarding the establishment of a state government records administration program will be quite specific because this is the current priority of the Alabama Department of Archives and History; the recommendations in



the final area of common problems will be a great deal less specific because these are not the priority of any one institution or organization and, as a result, require considerably more discussion and planning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### State Government Records

\* The State Records Commission, with the assistance of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, should issue a comprehensive manual that will serve as the basis of a state government records administration program and begin a regular series of introductory records management training programs.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History should acquire start-up funds for the creation and operation of a records center for the storage and management of state government records that do not have permanent historical or administrative value.

Local \* The Alabama Department of Archives and History should begin to arrange and describe the historical records of state government currently housed in its facility for greater use by the public and state officials, acquiring and using an automated information and management system.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Alabama Public Library Service should seek to establish a statewide depository system for state

government publications that facilitates the public use of information about and produced by state government.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History should seek to establish stronger working ties with other state agencies that provide information for the administration of state government, ensuring that the information contained in historical records is better used for this purpose. As a part of this, the state archives should conduct a careful study of its publication of the Official and Statistical Register.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History should recruit and hire a conservation officer who will be responsible for planning and taking steps toward the improved storage of the state government's historical records and the development of a program for those records requiring additional conservation.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History, with the assistance of the State Records Commission, should expand its capabilities to assist state government agencies in the production of quality microfilm and in the acquisition of security and reference copies of microfilmed records having historical value.

- \* The State Records Commission, Alabama Department of Archives and History, and Alabama Commission on Higher Education should begin to cooperate in developing a statewide program for the administration of records of Alabama's state-supported colleges and universities.
- \* Legislation supporting the administration of state government records needs to be carefully studied by the State Records Commission and the Alabama Department of Archives and History and recommendations for strengthening or improvement presented to the Governor and state legislature.
- \* The Alabama Department of Archives and History needs to continue to strengthen its ties to the archival profession and with other state archival institutions in order to improve its management of state government records.

#### Local Government Records

- \* The County Records Commission should be reactivated and consider its enlargement to representatives from other local political subdivisions such as municipalities, airport authorities, and school boards.
- \* The County Records Commission, with the assistance of the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the State Records Commission should issue a

local government records administration manual that can be the basis of a statewide records education program.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History, with the assistance of the County Records Commission, should plan for and test workshops and training programs to educate local public officials and their staff about the proper administration of their records.

\* To educate and assist local public officials in the administration of their records the Alabama Department of Archives and History should continue to strengthen its relationship to local government professional associations, such as the Alabama League of Municipalities and the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. Records management sessions at meetings and preparation of articles for their journals and newsletters could be cooperative efforts.

\* The Alabama Department of Archives and History must acquire additional resources, including a minimum of four professional archivists/records managers, for operating an effective local government records administration program.

### Historical Records Repositories

- \* Alabama's archival profession should discuss and plan for the development of an informational clearinghouse for the use of the state's historical records repositories.
- \* The Society of Alabama Archivists should continue to develop its newsletter into an effective means of communication and information about archival issues and concerns.
- \* Alabama's archivists need to begin discussing and planning for a mechanism that will foster cooperation and planning for the improved care and use of the state's documentary heritage in areas like a union list to historical records, the development of cooperative acquisition policies and documentation strategies, and the study of issues such as a regional conservation center and regional depository network.

### Common Problems, Coordinated Solutions

- \* The Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board, with the assistance of the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Society of Alabama Archivists, should promote the recommendations of the final report of the Assessment and Reporting Project as an advocacy tool for improving the work of the archivist and the public's image of that work.

- \* Alabama's archival profession should begin planning events for the 1987 Bicentennial of the Constitution as a means to publicize the work of the archivist.
- \* The Society of Alabama Archivists or some other organization should develop an advocacy role for archival issues and in educating the public about the work of the archivist in the state.
- \* Alabama's archival profession should cooperate in attracting basic training programs for archivists/records managers such as those offered by the Society of American Archivists.
- \* The Society of Alabama Archivists should continue to offer its twice yearly meetings, emphasizing both the offering of basic records administration training and the discussion of professional archival issues.
- \* Alabama's archivists and archival repositories need to begin to discuss the nature of a mechanism that will foster cooperation and coordination for the improved management and preservation of the state's documentary heritage.

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Glossary of Commonly Used Terms

The following are frequently used terms that may not be familiar to all readers of this report. The definitions are based upon Frank B. Evans, et al., "A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers," American Archivist, 37 (July 1975): 415-33; Heartzell Young, ed., The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science (Chicago:

**APPENDICES**

American Library Assoc. Historical Records in the Empire State (Albany): New York Historical Records Advisory Board, January 1984), pp. 71-72.

The definition of "documentation strategies" was provided by Patricia Arneson, Larry J. Backman, and Helen W. Samuels.

Access. Availability of records and manuscripts for consultation and research.

Accession. The act or procedures involved in the transfer of legal title and physical custody of records to an archival repository or records center.

Acquisition policy. See "collecting policy."

Appraisal. The process of determining the value and thus the disposition of records based upon their current administrative, legal, and fiscal use; their historical value; and their relationship to other records.

Archives. This term may be used in any of three ways in this report: (a) the historical records of an organization or

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**Archives.** This term may be used in any of three ways in this report: (a) the historical records of an organization or

institution, also referred to as archival materials or archival holdings; (b) the agency responsible for selecting, preserving, managing, and making available archival records, also referred to as an archival agency; (c) the historical records repository where such materials are located.

**Arrangement and description.** "Arrangement" is the process and result of organizing archives, records, and manuscripts in accordance with accepted archival principles. "Description" is the process of establishing intellectual control over holdings through the preparation of finding aids.

**Collecting policy.** A written policy that determines and governs the selection of historical records housed in a repository. Such policies often provide criteria for the cooperation between institutions and weeding of holdings. Sometimes referred to as an "acquisitions policy."

**Conservation.** The use of chemical and physical procedures in treatment or storage to ensure the preservation of manuscripts and records. Although technically there are subtle differences, the term "preservation" has been generally used as a synonym in this report.

**Current records.** Records necessary for conducting the current business of an office.

**Description.** See "Arrangement and description."

**Disposition.** Action taken with records after their survey and appraisal. Disposition could include transfer to a records center for temporary storage, transfer to an archival repository, reproduction on microfilm, or destruction.

**Documentary heritage.** All records and papers determined to be of value for researching and understanding the past.

**Documentation strategy.** Plan formulated to assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or area carried out through the mutual efforts of many institutions and individuals influencing both the creation of the records and the archival retention of some of them.

**Finding aids.** The descriptive media, published and unpublished, created by an originating office, archival agency, or manuscript repository, to establish physical or administrative and intellectual control over records and other holdings.

**Historical records.** Records that contain significant information about the past and are therefore worthy of long-term preservation and systematic management for historical and other research.

**Historical records repository.** Institutions that collect, care for, and make accessible historical records.

**Intrinsic value.** Inherent value of a document dependent upon some unique factor, such as its age, the circumstances regarding its creation, or some other aspect.

**Micrographics.** The science and technology of creating micro-images; designing indexing, storage, and retrieval systems for them; or using them in a micrographics system.

**Preservation.** See "Conservation."

**Records.** Any type of recorded information, regardless of its physical form or characteristics.

**Records Center.** A facility for the low-cost and efficient storage and furnishing of reference service on records pending their ultimate disposition.

**Records management or administration.** The area of general administrative management concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, use, maintenance, and disposition of records.

**Replevin.** The recovery of property - records, archives, or manuscripts - by an institution or organization claiming ownership.

**Retention schedule.** A document governing, on a continuing basis, the retention and disposition of the recurring public records series.

**Surveys.** Evaluation of records to determine their value, through appraisal, and, hence, how long they should be maintained.

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