

January 1973

The Georgia Records Act and Its Implementation

Monroe M. King

Georgia Department of Archives and History

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia_archive



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

King, Monroe M., "The Georgia Records Act and Its Implementation," *Georgia Archive* 1 no. 2 (1973).

Available at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia_archive/vol1/iss2/2

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

THE GEORGIA RECORDS ACT AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Monroe M. King*

Passage of the Georgia Records Act of 1972 established the first adequate legislative provision for managing the state's voluminous accumulation of records. Its implementation ends ninety-four years of trial and error.

For nearly a century before adoption of the Records Act of 1972, the care and disposition of records in the state was chaotic at best. The first legislation was enacted in 1878 to permit the destruction of certain records in the custody of the Secretary of State. An increasing interest in Georgia's colonial history in the 1880s undoubtedly stimulated an awareness of the importance of the state's historical heritage. Agitation for the appointment of a Compiler of Records began as early as 1887. Not until 1902, however, was the position filled and charged with collecting for publication important records of the revolutionary and civil war periods. Little additional interest in the state's records was manifested until 1943, when the legislature, perhaps in response to a deluge of wartime records, passed the Records Destruction Act. By its provisions only the Governor, upon the advice of the State Librarian and the Secretary of State, could order the destruction of public records. Some departments, apparently opposed to the destruction program, were exempted by subsequent legislation.

Meanwhile, the Georgia Department of Archives and History, created in 1918, began taking a more active role. By 1960, an amendment to the Records Destruction Act made the state archives responsible for certifying to the Governor that records proposed for destruction should in fact be destroyed. Further amendment to the act in 1969 charged the Georgia Archives with responsibility for the application of modern, efficient methods to the creation, util-

*Mr. King is Senior Records Analyst, Records Management Division, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

ization, maintenance, retention, disposition and preservation of records.

Following this directive, several state departments appointed records officers, issued policy and procedures information, and trained certain of their employees in rudimentary records management techniques. A state records center was established and the Department of Archives and History made provision for a records management staff in its organizational structure. Georgia finally had the beginnings of a records management program.

The Records Act of 1972, which supersedes all previous Georgia legislation, is a facet of Governor Jimmy Carter's Reorganization Program and extends the records management system throughout the state government. Moreover, it places the state's records management program on a firm legal foundation and outlines clearly the duties and responsibilities of all state agencies in implementing records management programs, making the Georgia Records Act by far the most comprehensive attempt to deal effectively with the state's fast-growing records holdings. The improved management techniques that it has introduced already have saved state money by reducing the amount of obsolete, or seldom-used, records stored in costly office space and by providing alternatives to expensive microfilm programs.

The act fundamentally changes the records disposition procedures and responsibilities of state agencies. First, it creates a State Records Committee composed of the State Auditor, the Attorney General, the Governor, and the Secretary of State, who serves as chairman, to determine the final disposition of all state records. Second, the Department of Archives and History is given the authority to establish and administer a statewide records program. The program encompasses operating a state records center, developing and issuing management procedures, rules and regulations, and assisting state departments to set up their own records programs. Each state agency, moreover, is required to create and to maintain adequate records and an ongoing arrangement for the management of those records, which includes developing retention standards for all records series. These standards must be approved by the State Records Committee to become effective. Third, the act enables local gov-

ernments to establish records management programs, adapting state rules and procedures, and makes the State Records Committee available to them for whatever assistance they require.

If the provisions appear to deal only with records after their creation, the philosophy underlying the legislation is more basic. The act intends that the ultimate disposition of the records be the basis of the records-keeping activity. Forms design and filing systems, for example, are prescribed to facilitate records creation, utilization, maintenance and final disposition. Microfilm programs are allowed, or disallowed, on the strength of approved disposition of both paper and microfilm files. No filing equipment may be purchased until disposition/retention schedules have been accepted for the records to be maintained in them.

Effecting a comprehensive records program throughout a state government takes time. To ensure that a strong foundation was established for a solid, continuing operation, and to provide immediate relief for certain critical records accumulations, priority in the implementation of the statute has been given to developing disposition standards, to developing basic procedures and policies, to perfecting the state records center enterprise, and to training employees of state departments in records management techniques. The finer points of records management can be settled after the overawing mass of records is reduced to manageable proportions and the level of expertise of records personnel is raised.

Perhaps the real significance of the Georgia Records Act for historians, archivists, political scientists and other researchers is that, for the first time, a body of trained professionals, not administrative personnel, will be determining the shape of the archives of the future. The records manager, because of his intimate and authoritative relation to the creator of the records, can accomplish this work more effectively than the archivist. But basically, the records manager and the archivist, despite their much-touted differences and antagonisms, here share a common concern to ensure that adequate documentation is preserved in usable form, efficiently and inexpensively.

Georgia's records program is based on sound leg-

islation which ensures appropriate disposition of state records. Where once there was no system, there now is economy, purpose and efficiency in records keeping.

Indeed, the work has made historical records accessible that heretofore were unknown or unobtainable, and thus has added immeasurably to the progress and success of the state archives program. The next few years should provide even more impressive evidence of the effectiveness of the records management program established by the Georgia Records Act of 1972.