

Government Record News

The Newsletter of the Government Records Section
of the Society of American Archivists

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From the Chair

This column has traditionally been a place for the chair to inform section members about the actions of the Steering Committee, plans for the annual meeting and to encourage active participation in the GRS. Other pages of Government Records News will provide brief descriptions of the section's activities over the past few months, and you'll hear about the 2002 annual meeting in upcoming issues, but for now, I'd like to focus on a subject that has many of us concerned.

The accessibility of government records has always been an important issue for those of us in the government records "business", but in the months since September 11, we have witnessed several instances where access to government records is being threatened.

On November 1, 2001, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order 13233 on Presidential Papers, which in effect circumvents the authority of the National Archives to appraise these government records and make them available to the public in accordance with the Presidential Records Act (44 U.S.C. 2201-2207) and places the power to deny access to Presidential records with any sitting or past President.

Another troubling example occurred the following month, when outgoing New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's made arrangements with George Rios, head of the City's Department of Records and Information Services to transfer records created during Giuliani's tenure as a public official to a privately maintained third-party institution, the Giuliani Center for Public Affairs. In addition to denying access to these records, this action has weakened the very governmental department charged with preserving the City's institutional memory.

In addition, several state legislatures are now considering bills that seek to close certain record series, for fear that terrorists might be able to utilize those records to plan attacks. Although the circumstances and rationales for these actions are different, each of these examples hinders the

public's access to public information and threatens the very democratic principles for which our nation stands.

We should all be aware of actions such as these and I urge GRS members to consider how they as records professionals can make an impact and help ensure both our security as a nation and our rights as citizens. I also encourage you to use this newsletter as a vehicle to share your efforts with other section members.

September 11

Many our colleagues in the Government Records Section have been affected by the events of September 11, both personally and professionally. For those who experienced a personal loss we can only extend our deepest sympathies. And to those in local, state and federal records programs, who continue to deal with the aftermath or face the challenge of documenting 9/11, we offer our admiration and support.

Jelain Chubb
Chair, Government Records Section
Society of American Archivists

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Building the Future: NARA's Electronic Records Archives (ERA) Program

By Adrienne M. Woods
ERA Communications Specialist

In 1970, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) accepted its first electronic records. Since then, they have successfully accessioned, preserved, and made available nearly 42,000 data files from more than 100 Federal agencies, bureaus, and departments. So far, most of the electronic records scheduled for transfer to the National Archives have been in the form of highly-structured data files and data bases.

A Federal court case in the early 1990s changed the electronic records picture for NARA. In that case, which involved records of the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations from 1981 to 1993, the court held that printed copies of e-mails and memoranda about them were qualitatively different than the original e-mail in electronic form. So the originals themselves had to be managed as records.

The case has been closed for years, but it forced the Government, and NARA in particular, to focus its attention on electronic records as never before. At the end of President Clinton's first term, using data provided by the Executive Office of the President (EOP), NARA staff estimated that, when Clinton left office, it would face the prospect of receiving at least 10 million e-mail messages from the EOP.

NARA determined that its electronic records efforts at the time would be insufficient to deal with the complexity, diversity, and enormous volume of Federal electronic records that were being created. For example, in the last decade the capacity of NARA's Electronic and Special Media Records Services Division to perform full archival processing of electronic records has grown from hundreds of files to tens of thousands of files annually. Now, NARA needs to expand annual capacity to millions, and probably tens of millions, of digital files over the next few years.

Such growth is not manageable with NARA's current systems and processes. Federal agencies' output of electronic records now includes vast quantities of e-mail, geo-spatial data, digital images, World Wide Web sites, and word processing documents. For example, in eight years, the Clinton White House generated not 10 million, as once predicted, but approximately 40 million e-mail messages in only one of its systems.

The anticipated deluge of electronic records won't come solely from the White House. The State Department will soon begin transferring to NARA millions of diplomatic messages annually in electronic form. Moreover, the Pentagon anticipates sending annually more than 50 million scanned page images from official military personnel files starting in 2005. It's conceivable that NARA may receive close to one billion files annually by 2009.

To meet the challenge that electronic records pose to NARA's mission, in 1998 the Archivist established the Electronic Records Archives (ERA) program, an initiative designed to research, plan, and develop a system that can assemble, manage, preserve, and access the electronic records produced by all branches of the Federal Government. Its goal is to give NARA the capability to accession an enormous quantity of digital archival materials in complex and ever-changing varieties of formats and to preserve and provide access to these valuable materials permanently.

ERA's early efforts have been driven by the recognition that, in effect, no one in the world has yet produced a way to permanently preserve electronic records. But they are on the leading edge of efforts to do so. Over the last three years, they have joined various research collaborations and partnerships with a network of experts in the technical and archival infrastructure necessary to support preservation of electronic records.

While most of the research partners have far greater computer capabilities and expertise than NARA, they uniformly agree that they face the most difficult problems in the digital arena. The reason is simple: While the other Federal agencies work to pursue their own missions, NARA has to deal with the results of all those missions.

But NARA also needs to meet pressing needs related to the lifecycle management of records. To address these needs, the ERA staff is working with staff in other offices to develop a plan for "progressive roll-outs." These "roll-outs" will provide tools that NARA staff can use in their work even before the ERA system is developed. The "roll-outs" will eventually be folded into the ERA system.

Equipped with an understanding of the problem, the technological partnerships and expertise,

and a skilled team of Government staff and expert contractors, NARA is well on its way to building the archives of the future.

For more information about the Electronic Records Archives Program visit their website at www.nara.gov/era.

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Minnesota State Archives Announces Publication of Two New Records Management Resources

By Charles Rodgers

The Minnesota State Archives has two new resources available for use. The first is a series of electronic records management guidelines, now online at: www.mnhs.org/electronicrecords in HTML and PDF formats. The series covers a variety of topics: general management strategies, file naming, file formats, digital media, storage, web content and e-mail management, electronic document management systems, and digital signatures.

Special attention is given to related Minnesota records management laws and policies, and each offers discussions of key concepts, questions to consider, and pointers to more information.

Questions and comments are welcome, and should be directed to Shawn Rounds, shawn.rounds@mnhs.org or 651-297-2605.

The second resource is entitled: *Managing Your Government Records: Guidelines for Archives and Agencies*. These guidelines cover a number of topics, including a general introduction to government records and applicable laws, appraisal, description, preservation and storage, reference service, and issues relating to information technology.

The guidelines are primarily directed at county/local historical societies, and local government units, but the guidelines are also useful to state government agencies.

The guidelines are available at www.mnhs.org/recordsguidelines in HTML and PDF formats. Comments and questions are welcome, and should be directed to Charles Rodgers, charles.rodgers@mnhs.org or 651-297-2344.

The home page for the Minnesota State Archives is at: www.mnhs.org/preserve/records.

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Annual Meeting Highlights

The Government Records Section held its annual meeting on August 30, 2001 in Washington, DC.

Nancy Smith, Director of the Presidential Materials Staff, and Sam Watkins, Project Director,

Clinton Electronic Records, graciously agreed to fill in for scheduled speaker Dra. Stella Ma. González Cicero, Director of Archivo General de la Nación, Republic of Mexico, who was unable to attend the meeting. provided those present with a fascinating view of the planning process for a Presidential records “move” and anecdotal tales about working with the Clinton White House, including a last minute rush to transfer some electronic records.

After the presentations, the Section conducted a brief business meeting, which included the election of new Steering Committee Members:

Arian Ravanbakhsh, Archives Specialist, NARA **R. Jackson Armstrong Ingram**, Archivist, City of Henderson, Nevada **Paul Bergeron**, City Clerk, Nashua, New Hampshire

They will fill the vacancies left by federal representative and outgoing section chair **James Casedy**, NARA, state representative **Kimberly A. Cumber**, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, and local representative **Lenora Gidlund**, City of New York, Department of Records and Information Services.

Incoming section chair, **Jelain Chubb**, Administrative Archivist, Missouri State Archives, **Diana Banning**, City Archivist, City of Portland, Oregon and **Archie DiFante**, Archivist, AFHRA/RSA will continue to serve through August 2002. **Tim Johnson**, University of Minnesota and **Anita Taylor Doering**, LaCrosse (WI) Public Library will continue in their capacities as Newsletter Editor and Web Master respectively.

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Federal Representatives	State Representatives	Local Representatives
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Comments and questions regarding this web site can be directed to [Janet Waters](#)