



# The Duniway Years at the State Archives, 1946-1972

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## 1 Introduction

David C. Duniway served as Oregon's first State Archivist from 1946-1972. He was an avid historian and activist for Salem's historical community. Following is the history of the Oregon State Archives and Duniway's efforts to preserve valuable historical records.

## 2 Existing State Government Archival Situation

Prior to 1946 no unified approach existed for preserving historical state records in Oregon. The Secretary of State had custody of the records of the Legislative Assembly and the Governor. All other departments and agencies cared for their own records. Some records of defunct agencies had been deposited with the Secretary of State or with the State Library, however many were presumably destroyed. The Oregon Historical Society in Portland held the Oregon provisional and territorial government records at the request of the Secretary of State because of a lack of suitable storage space in Salem. A large number of records documenting state government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had disappeared over the years. Moreover, the fire that destroyed the state Capitol in 1935 consumed additional valuable records.

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The State Library apparently first maintained state government primary documents in 1921 when it accepted 31 cubic feet into its holdings.<sup>1</sup> Still, no active collection effort ensued until a conference of librarians and social scientists first asked the Oregon State Library in 1933 to collect primary government records related to social science research. However, deciding which records to keep permanently proved to be a continuing problem.

### **3 Developing an Archival Strategy**

In 1942 the Board of Library Trustees asked the State Librarian to develop a strategy for improving the archival situation. A committee studied the problem for a year before submitting its report to the Board. The report recommended that:

- the state recognize its responsibility to care for its own valuable records.
- the valuable records of the state should be unified as a state archives.
- the State Library was the proper agency to administer the archives.

At the same time an independently formed committee was working from a different perspective to protect Oregon government records. Only weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 the Committee on the Conservation of Cultural Resources organized. It functioned under the Oregon State Defense Council and was chaired by Professor Luther Cressman, head of the Department of Anthropology and director of the Museum of Natural History at the University of Oregon. Concern for the safety of historical records in the event of enemy air raids occupied much of the early committee discussion. The resulting research into how and where records were housed led to the realization that many valuable records were in danger of destruction because of neglect.

In response to this, Cressman appointed a subcommittee to formulate recommendations. The subcommittee (which included the State Librarian as a member) submitted a report to Governor Earl Snell in 1944 recommending "the creation of a depository, the appointment of a custodian or archivist, and the establishment of standards for the selection of those records that are non-current and proper for preservation."<sup>2</sup> The report also noted nagging problems of poor storage, the uncertain fate of records of defunct agencies, and the potential benefits of a microfilm program. It pointed out the need for an adequate budget and strong legislation to facilitate the creation and development of an effective archives program.

Bolstered by these reports, supporters introduced archives legislation to the 1945 Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, the Society of American Archivists model law used as the basis of the bill conflicted with existing statutes including the Oregon laws of evidence. Because of this a comprehensive act creating a state archives did not pass.

However, the Legislative Assembly did approve a provision for the State Archives as part of the 1945-1947 State Library budget. The modest amount of \$15,000 was allocated to get the program underway. Additionally, the Attorney General issued an opinion which allowed the state

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<sup>1</sup> J.D. Porter, "Growth of the Oregon State Archives," December 1, 1966, Oregon State Library Records, Box 27, Oregon State Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon State Library, Division of State Archives, First Biennial Report, 1944-1946, n.d., 2.

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archivist to collect records for the use of government agencies but did not further define specific activities. State Librarian Eleanor Stephens painted the budget in rosy terms in a letter to a prospective candidate for the State Archivist position, "Because office and storage space will be furnished the Archives in the Oregon State Library Building without expense to the archival budget, this provision is even more liberal than it appears."<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, the Board of Library Trustees approved the appointment of David Cushing Duniway as State Archivist. The challenge of creating a state archives from the ground up helped him overcome initial reservations to Salem while interviewing for the position: "The whole area was filled with the smell of the paper mill and I can remember my wife saying that she never wanted 'to live in a town like that.'"<sup>4</sup>

## 4 Legislative Foundations

With the failure to pass comprehensive archives legislation in 1945, Duniway knew that he had essentially been hired to create his own job. He used the opportunity to explore the possibility of establishing the archives as a separate state agency but met resistance from the office of the Attorney General. Duniway later spoke with a representative of the State Board of Control about establishing the archives under their jurisdiction. In his words, "I was advised to stay in the agency where I was already welcome."<sup>5</sup>

Having satisfied his curiosity about the political and organizational boundaries of his new job, Duniway set about defining the role of the State Archivist under the State Library. The legislation resulting from the passage of House Bill (HB) 485 in 1947 set up the basic organizational framework that was to endure for more than two decades. Provisions included:

- The State Archivist was to be appointed by the Board of Library Trustees and was to be supervised by the Board and the State Librarian.
- Eligibility for the office was limited to those with five years of experience as an archivist.
- The State Archivist could negotiate for, acquire, or receive public records with legal, administrative, or research value and act as custodian of such records.
- The State Archivist could, with certain restrictions, requisition noncurrent public records.
- The State Archivist was required to maintain a state archivist seal.
- The State Archivist was required to provide advice and assistance on public records problems to state and local government officials.
- The State Archivist was to be given reasonable access to all public records.
- The Trustees of the State Library were required to set fees for various services performed by the State Archivist.

The 1947 Legislative Assembly passed two other bills that helped to define the role of the State Archivist. HB 483 required county officials to seek "the advice and consent of the State

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<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Stephens to John E. Dethman, October 3, 1945, Oregon State Library Records, Box 27, Oregon State Archives.

<sup>4</sup> David C. Duniway, "Reminiscences of Service as Oregon State Archivist, 1946-1972," 1973, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.

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Archivist" before disposing of certain records. HB 484 gave the Board of Control responsibility for the disposition of state records generally. However, it required that a 10 day notice be given to the State Archivist before the destruction of records. This would provide the State Archivist with an opportunity to review and requisition valuable records.

## 5 Early Organizational Challenges

The State Archives opened its doors in the basement of the State Library Building in January 1946. The modest furnishings included several large tables, chairs, two typewriters, and two transfer cabinets. Waiting there also were the 406 cubic feet of unprocessed records that had accumulated over the years. Although a second floor office was provided for the State Archivist, he soon moved down to the basement in order to provide professional direction to his newly hired untrained assistant.<sup>6</sup>

Duniway devised an ambitious agenda to get the archives program underway. The agenda for 1946 included establishing rules for the description of records; analyzing supply and equipment needs; training his new assistant; visiting and studying state agencies; budgeting for the next biennium; and undertaking an inventory of records already in the custody of the State Archives.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the year approximately 5000 entries had been prepared for a catalog of State Archives holdings.<sup>8</sup>

State offices transferred more and more records to the State Archives as agency heads and employees became aware of its existence. Duniway helped increase awareness through an aggressive schedule of agency visits during the first few years of operation. But with more records came more headaches. Often unidentified boxes of records were found on a table in the State Archives without any warning or explanation. This led to a stepped up effort to coordinate transfers before their arrival and the use of a simplified records transfer receipt. Still, "orphaned" records plagued the State Archives for years.<sup>9</sup>

Duniway maintained a careful, hands on approach to the appraisal of records for destruction. His experiences seemed to justify the caution. One time he was looking over some apparently mundane records of the Secretary of State in the Capitol basement related to taxes on motor fuel. Mixed in with the soon to be destroyed records were historically valuable county records from Oregon's territorial period. On another occasion he was in a six foot square basement of a county building performing a routine destruction appraisal of some volumes of tax receipts. As he pulled a volume off of the shelf along one wall, he noticed paper piled from floor to ceiling behind the shelving. The room was actually twenty feet deep! After a month of unpacking and sorting, he identified many records of enduring value.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> David C. Duniway, "How Does One Collect Archives?-The Oregon Experience," reprinted from *Indian Archives* 17 (1967-1968): 1.

<sup>7</sup> David C. Duniway, "Oregon State Archivist Agenda for 1946" n.d. Oregon State Library Records, Oregon State Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Oregon State Library, Division of State Archives, *First Biennial Report, 1944-1946*, n.d., 4.

<sup>9</sup> David C. Duniway, "How Does One Collect Archives?-The Oregon Experience," reprinted from *Indian Archives* 17 (1967-1968): 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

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## 6 Improved Care of Legislative Records

Although many records documenting legislation from the 1800s and early 1900s had been lost forever to careless handling and the 1935 Capitol fire, steps were taken to systematically improve future record keeping. Some legislative committees had begun keeping minutes in the 1930s. However, the movement to create the State Archives spurred a more widespread realization of the historical value of legislative records. By 1949 most committees were keeping minutes. The Legislative Assembly adopted resolutions in 1955 requiring the preservation of minutes. Senate Resolution 15 from 1955 went so far as to require them to be deposited with the State Archives.<sup>11</sup>

The 1961 Legislative Assembly further developed the practice by requiring that legislative records be delivered to the State Archives for permanent retention.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, records transferred to State Archives custody included original bill files; floor and committee audio tapes; and committee minutes, exhibits, and audio tape logs.

## 7 Provisional and Territorial Government Records

The 1931 Legislative Assembly authorized the transfer of the provisional and territorial government records from the Secretary of State's Office to the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. This was partially in response to a 1926 report by the Board of Control which outlined the high risk of fire in the Capitol. Of course the accuracy of the report was soon displayed by the 1935 Capitol fire that destroyed the building and most of its contents including a great number of valuable records. The law allowed the Board of Control to judge when conditions were suitable for the records to be returned to Salem.

Twenty years later a number of factors led to calls for the return the records to Salem:

- A series of land claim court cases caused questions to be raised about provisions for authentic copies of the documents while in the custody of the Oregon Historical Society.
- The State Archives program had been created by law in 1947 to care for historical public records.
- The Capitol building now had adequate storage facilities.
- Governor Douglas McKay summarized a general opinion held by many in saying that the records should be returned because "they are state documents and Salem is the seat of state government."<sup>13</sup>

The president of the Oregon Historical Society responded with reasons why the records should stay in Portland.

- They were kept in a reinforced concrete vault with a fire door.
- The Society had enhanced the usefulness of the records by creating an index.

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<sup>11</sup> Senate Resolution 15, Oregon Laws, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 150, Oregon Laws, 1961.

<sup>13</sup> Oregonian, 6 Dec. 1951, p. 14, col. 6.

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- The records should be kept where they could be studied by scholars in conjunction with other records and publications found only at the Society.
  - The president pointed out that "had the society not rescued them from the dusty wastes of the old capitol basement in 1931 they would probably have been burned in the fire that destroyed the building in 1935."<sup>14</sup>

The Board of Control settled the issue by voting unanimously for the return of the records to Salem. By April, 1952 the records were in the custody of the State Archives. However, in 1973 an effort was made to permit the transfer of the records once again to the Oregon Historical Society. After a flurry of letters, Secretary of State Clay Meyers (who as of July, 1973 had authority over the State Archives based on the passage of HB 3205) rejected the idea and stated that he could not "contemplate transfer of the 'Oregon Territorial Papers' without specific statutory direction."<sup>15</sup> The issue died in spite of the fact that some legislators had voted for HB 3205 based on an understanding that it would permit the transfer.<sup>16</sup>

## 8 Manuscript Collections

Within a few months of starting work as state archivist, Duniway had accepted several large photographic collections from local studios. Soon manuscript collections documenting important local individuals and businesses came to the State Archives. The ostensible reason for collecting from private sources was to provide an option for people who, for one reason or another, did not want to deposit their papers with the Oregon Historical Society or the University of Oregon Library.<sup>17</sup>

Over the years friction developed between the State Archives and the Oregon Historical Society related to collecting private records. After a series of confrontations and conferences, the political pressure became too great. The State Library (and therefore the State Archives) agreed to withdraw from further collecting. In 1958 the manuscript collections held by the Archives Division were transferred to another division of the State Library. A 1960 agreement further developed the separation of responsibilities.

## 9 Records Management Program Development

The 1947 legislation that created the State Archives included several records management responsibilities. The State Archivist served as an advisor to the Board of Control with respect to authorizing the destruction of state records. Counties were required to seek advice and consent from the State Archivist before destroying records. Moreover, both state agencies and counties could seek assistance from the State Archives about records management problems.

Streamlining the process of records destruction was an early goal. The existing system required numerous letters to authorize destruction: the agency wrote to the Board of Control; the Board

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Clay Meyers to Thomas Vaughan, July 12, 1973, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Statements by Sen. Burns and Sen. Newbry for the Oregon Senate and House Journal, 6/21/73, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives.

<sup>17</sup> David C. Duniway, "Reminiscences of Service as Oregon State Archivist, 1946-1972," 1973, 9.

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wrote to the State Archivist and to the Supervisor of Audits for advice; they wrote back to the Board of Control; and the Board wrote to the agency. This cumbersome series of letters was replaced with one form that circulated through the system and became a single record of all transactions.<sup>18</sup>

Records management for state government took a step forward in 1951 with the creation of the State Department of Finance and Administration. This department had broad responsibilities to manage state government more efficiently. And since records management had traditionally been a function of reacting to storage crises caused by decades of records accumulation, it was seen as a perfect place to show results. The department soon implemented a statewide records management program with the objective to "provide an integrated, statewide system for controlling and improving forms and records used in state government, and the methods employed in their processing, filing, storage, and destruction or permanent retention."<sup>19</sup> Program elements included the designation of agency records officers, instructional seminars; records inventories; and a centralized records center. The State Archivist was to "assist in the direction of the overall program" as well as "provide technical services such as appraisal, cataloging, and microfilming."<sup>20</sup>

While the program proved to be overly optimistic and drifted into intermittent lulls of inactivity, it did lay an important foundation for later records management efforts. The creation of the state records center in 1958 led to reductions in the costs of storing records and freed up valuable office space. The introduction of the "Records Management Manual" in 1959 provided state employees with a fundamental, consolidated source of information on general topics such as the life cycle of a record as well as technical duties such as how to fill out a records inventory form. Subsequent updates helped to further systematize the management of state records.

Much work remained, however, to further streamline the process of deciding how long to keep various state records. A survey in the mid-1960s indicated that one-half of state records had not been inventoried or scheduled for disposition. In response to this the Executive Committee on the Study of the Retention and Destruction of Public Records in Oregon issued findings calling for the development of "general schedules." These schedules were developed to provide continuing authority to state agencies to destroy certain common fiscal and operational records. The goal was to reduce the necessity of individual applications for authorizations to destroy records. The Department of Finance and Administration, the Supervisor of Audits, and the State Archivist cooperated in the development of these schedules.<sup>21</sup>

By the late 1960s the organizational problems associated with several agencies sharing records management responsibilities led to strong calls for change. Although some records retention schedules for state agencies were drafted by the State Archivist, Board of Control administrative

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>19</sup> Oregon Department of Finance and Administration, "Bulletin No. 23," October, 6, 1958, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives, 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>21</sup> Oregon State Library, "Report of the Executive Committee on the Study of the Retention and Destruction of Public Records in Oregon," May 12, 1966, Oregon State Library Records, Box 27, Oregon State Archives, 4-5.

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rules gave the responsibility to individual agencies. This led to a confusing tangle of practices, terminology, and levels of quality. In response, the State Library called for the unification of the records management program for both state and local government under the State Archives.<sup>22</sup> The 1971 Legislative Assembly responded by making the State Archivist responsible for authorizing the retention and destruction of state records.

## 10 The Search for Growing Room

Lack of space plagued the State Archives from the beginning. The program had only a few sections of shelves in the State Library basement and soon was stacking boxes of records in rows on the floor. Over the years additional space was provided in the State Library building, but eventually even that proved inadequate.

Soon the State Archives was looking for space in other state buildings in the Salem area. At one time it occupied seven separate storage facilities which offered varying degrees of safety and utility.<sup>23</sup> A storage area at the State Hospital suffered problems related to dust; the danger of leaking pipes; and the presence of cats, both dead and alive. A vault in the basement of the State Office Building had a leak from overhead pipes that resulted in mold damage to tax rolls.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually, in 1958 the State Archives and the Department of Finance and Administration won the assignment of space for archives storage and a records center capable of holding 10,000 cubic feet of records in the basement of the Capitol. This provided more space and overall efficiency but also had overhead pipes that leaked from time to time. Unfortunately, this location fell victim to the Columbus Day wind storm of 1962. The storm caused no damage to the records but it did cause the governor to decide to use the Capitol basement as a civil defense control center. This in turn led to moving the records center to the second floor of the Finance Building which provided less space.

After many studies and much lobbying, permission was granted to lease space on the second floor of Larmer's Warehouse at 1005 Northeast Broadway Street. While the site did have problems, it offered low cost, relatively good security, and the least amount of needed construction. The other possibilities were the Evans Building on the State Hospital grounds and the Keith Brown Warehouse at Madison and Baker Streets.<sup>25</sup> An additional benefit of leasing space in Larmer's Warehouse was the possibility of expansion if and when other leaseholders vacated. This in fact happened later and the State Archives eventually occupied space on four floors of the building including the basement.

Vacancies in the State Library building created other opportunities for growth over the years. Space on the third floor and in the basement previously occupied by the Veterans Department

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<sup>22</sup> Oregon State Library, "Annual Report of the State Librarian to the Governor," 1968, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives, 44-46.

<sup>23</sup> David C. Duniway, "How Does One Collect Archives?-The Oregon Experience," reprinted from *Indian Archives* 17 (1967-1968): 6.

<sup>24</sup> David C. Duniway, "Reminiscences of Service as Oregon State Archivist, 1946-1972," 1973, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum from Eloise Ebert and David C. Duniway to the Oregon Department of Finance and Administration, June 19, 1967, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives, 2.

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and the Department of Education was dedicated to the State Archives. The State Archivist even got a new office out of the deal.

## 11 Growth in Holdings and Staff

The State Archives grew enormously during its 27 year existence as a division of the State Library, but it could have grown much faster. At times archival acquisitions nearly came to a standstill due to a lack of space. With minor variations, the amount of holdings stagnated at around 12,000 cubic feet from 1960 to 1972. Accessions of county records other than selected records from the territorial period were halted in the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> State agencies were often told to maintain their own historical records until the State Archives could accommodate them.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, statistics bear out the overall growth. Starting with 406 cubic feet in 1946, the State Archives by 1972 included over 12,000 cubic feet of archival holdings and almost 37,000 cubic feet of records center holdings.<sup>28</sup>

The growth in the number of employees in the Archives Division followed a similarly sporadic pattern. The first professional staff position was created in 1948 when Duniway's secretary was promoted to the position of archival assistant. In 1957 the position of records examiner was created to specialize with records management issues. Technical and reference archivist positions were also created. But in spite of increasing responsibilities and the explosion in the creation of government records, no new professional staff positions were added for well over a decade.<sup>29</sup> By 1972 Archives Division staff numbered 10, including three archivists, one records examiner, and four technical positions.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David C. Duniway, "How Does One Collect Archives?-The Oregon Experience" reprinted from *Indian Archives* 17 (1967-1968): 6.

<sup>27</sup> Oregon Department of Finance and Administration, "Current Records Management Considerations," December, 1966, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Society of American Archivists, Committee on Buildings and Technical Services, "Survey of Archival Facilities," June, 8, 1972, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Oregon State Library, "Annual Report of the State Librarian to the Governor," 1969, Oregon State Library Records, Oregon State Archives, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Society of American Archivists, Committee on Buildings and Technical Services, "Survey of Archival Facilities," June, 8, 1972, Oregon State Archives Administrative Records, Oregon State Archives, 2.

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