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Society of American Archivists, Montgomery, Alabama,  
November 11, 1940

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY IN RELATION TO STATE ARCHIVES

This paper is based primarily on the experience of Historical Records Survey projects of the Work Projects Administration in the inventory of state archives, especially in North Carolina. This phase of the work of the Survey is much less far advanced than is the inventory of county archives, and the research procedures devised are in only a tentative form. There is now in process of release a technical circular on the preparation of state archives inventories in which the procedures to be used will be outlined in more detail than is possible within the limits of the present paper.

For the purposes of this discussion, administrative history will be considered as embracing the development of the structural organization, the functions or objectives, and the modes of procedure of governmental agencies.

The importance of this study of administrative history to the archivist in the reconstruction of files, the identification and classification of series, and the service of reference has been clearly pointed out by Mr. Trever. The actual problems encountered in its study, however, vary materially with the type of governmental agency studied and with the period of history being explored. In the complexity of problems encountered in research in administrative history, state government lies between county government and the Federal government. Its functions are not so restricted as those of county government, nor is its structure so simple. On the other hand, students of state government are not confronted with the bewildering maze of departments, commissions, and independent agencies, nor with the complex and ever-changing breakdown of departments into bureaus, bureaus into divisions, divisions into sections, and so on nearly ad infinitum which confront the student of Federal administrative history.

The patterns of government within the states, and consequently the techniques of research in administrative history, have changed with the changes in the function of the state. Beginning with the Post-Revolutionary period, we can perhaps distinguish three major periods in the development of state government, each of which offers its own problems in administrative history. In the first period, extending into the second quarter of the nineteenth century, state policy, as determined by the legislature, was generally carried into effect by such local bodies as the county courts or the wardens of the poor, or was enforced through the courts rather than through any administrative organs of the state government itself. The result is that during this period the civil establishment of the state was very small, consisting