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Essentials of Archival Management

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Rutherford County Archives Case Study

Archiving is an essential process for any organization. It involves the systematic storage and preservation of important documents and records for future reference.¹ In this case study, we will be focusing on the archiving process for two key committees in Rutherford County: the Rutherford County Committees, held in the “Committee Files Collection” for the years 2005-2006, including the Budget, Health & Education, Property Management, Public Safety, Public Works, and Steering Committees, as well as the Purchasing Committee, held in a collection of the same name, for the years 1994-1995. We will explore the challenges these committees face in archiving their records, the steps to address them, and the potential benefits of implementing a more efficient archiving process.

The Rutherford County Committees oversaw county governance, including budgeting, health, education, property management, public safety, public works, and steering from 2005-2006. Each committee managed various records and documents, including meeting minutes, financial reports, and policy documents. However, there is a need for a proper and efficient accessioning system to make it easier for stakeholders to access and retrieve these records promptly. As the first responsibility of an archivist, appraisal, which involves determining the

¹ Laura Millar, “What are Archives?,” 4, 10.

value and significance of records, is conducted.² Archivists use appraisal to determine which records are worth preserving and which can be discarded, ensuring that valuable information is retained for future generations.³ In the case of the Purchasing Committee 1994-1995, archival appraisal would involve evaluating the importance of the committee's records in documenting the institutional entity's history and decision-making processes. A descriptive catalog is made for the Committee Files collection for description and arrangement.⁴

One of the critical challenges the Committee Files Collection faced was the sheer volume of records that needed to be appraised, accessed and cataloged. Multiple committees met regularly and generated many records found in the collection, and the existing archiving process appeared unable to meet the demand.⁵ Indeed, the collection box unveiled heap of unprocessed material. Vital records were scattered across multiple folders, making it difficult for potential stakeholders to find the needed information.⁶ The absence of a comprehensive index or catalog made locating specific documents within the folders harder. Furthermore, these records were housed in non-archival folders, which are designed to protect documents from damage such as tears, creases, and fading but not deterioration. Upon inspection, a majority of the documents were in relatively good condition despite being housed in non-archival folders for nearly two decades. Staples, known for rusting, are still embedded in the documents and require a spatula to remove them.

To solve the problem, it was necessary to implement a complete appraisal process. The process involved indexing all of the committee's records and implementing a secure storage

² T.R. Schellenburg. "The Principle of Provenance and Modern Records in the United States," 39–40; Terry Cook, "'We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are'," 174–175.

³ Lucania Duranti, *The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory*, 329; Terry Cook, "'We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are'," 179, 182.

⁴ Jennifer Meehan, "Making the Leap from Parts to Whole," 73–74.

⁵ Laura Millar, "Acquiring Archives," 211.

⁶ Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process," 208–09, 211–12.

solution for easy access. By consolidating their records in a single location, the committees could streamline their archiving process and make it easier for members to retrieve the needed information. The principle of arrangement, as outlined by T. R. Schellenberg in “Archival Principles of Arrangement,” governs the organization and structure of records within an archival collection.⁷ Arrangement ensures that records are logically organized and easily accessible to users, facilitating research and retrieval.⁸ In the context of the Rutherford County Committees and the Purchasing Committee, proper arrangement of records is essential to ensure that information is organized coherently and systematically.

The archiving process for the Rutherford County Committees of 2005-2006 involved several steps to ensure the preservation and organization of records. The process began with identifying records that needed to be archived, including meeting dates, reports, financial documents, correspondence, and other relevant materials. After identifying and analyzing the records, they were categorized by their respective committees.⁹ For example, all records pertaining to the Public Safety Committee are arranged in a folder dubbed “Public Safety Committee File.” This step was essential for ensuring that records were organized and easily accessible for future reference.¹⁰ Of course, all records were housed in archival-quality folders, ensuring their preservation and continued use for stakeholders.

The archiving process for the Purchasing Committee Collection of 1994-1995 followed a similar process to that of the Committee Files Collection of 2005-2006. The records and documents of the Purchasing Committee were identified, sorted, and categorized according to

⁷ T.R. Schellenberg, “Archival Principles of Arrangement,” 12.

⁸ Society of American Archivists, “Statement of Principles,” in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020), x–xvii, xii–xiii.

⁹ T.R. Schellenberg, “Archival Principles of Arrangement,” 14–21.

¹⁰ Cheryl Oestricher, “Introduction,” in *Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts*, 2, 4–5.

their provenance while retaining original order.¹¹ Unlike the Committee Files Collection, the Purchasing Committee contained non-archival folders with written contents on the interior. This allowed for easy searching and retrieval of records and ensured their long-term preservation. Physical copies of the records were also preserved in a secure location as a backup. The records were stored in acid-free folders and boxes to prevent deterioration and damage.

The Purchasing Committee Collection faced the crucial challenge of maintaining records for compliance purposes. Being a government entity, the committee needed to keep comprehensive records of its procurement activities for auditing and ensuring transparency. Another challenge faced by the Purchasing Committee was the need to streamline their archiving process to improve efficiency. With voluminous records generated daily, committee members often needed help locating specific records on time. In addition, approximately one-third of the material encompassed mail envelopes addressed to or by the Purchasing Committee. To address this challenge, a comprehensive reappraisal procedure was implemented to analyze the records in the collection. This reappraisal involved reappraising all paper documents and implementing a robust metadata system to categorize and index their records. Only one envelope needed to be deaccessioned during the entire reappraising session.¹² Non-archival folders were replaced with archival-quality ones to ensure long-term preservation of the paper records.

The archiving process is a critical component of effective governance for any organization. The Rutherford County Committees 2005-2006 and the Purchasing Committee 1994-1995 serve as important case studies in the field of archives and records management. By applying the principles and practices outlined in the referenced articles, archivists can ensure the

¹¹ Jennifer Douglas, "Origins and Beyond," 31–33; Jennifer Meehan, "Making the Leap from Parts to Whole," 73–75.

¹² Laura Millar, "Acquiring Archives," 210–11.

reliability, authenticity, and significance of archival records. Through careful consideration of provenance, appraisal and arrangement, archivists create a more accurate and representative record of the past, preserving information for future generations. By appraising and reappraising, the Rutherford County Committees Files for 2005-2006 and the Purchasing Committee for the years 1994-1995 were able to improve efficiency, compliance, and transparency in their operations.

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