

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Major Breakthrough

Local Government Ordinance no. 1

It is not often that archival matters reach the front page. They made it in the *NSW Government Gazette* on 5 July, with a new list of local government records to be retained in perpetuity.

The original ordinance was proclaimed in 1920. Its 55th clause permitted all local government records to be destroyed after six years, save for council minutes, legal documents and some registers. An entirely new clause 55 has now replaced this original, very limited one.

The New Clause:

Clause 55 extends the number of records which shall be preserved because of their archival and historical value to the community and lists a wide range of local council records which may not be destroyed. These include minute books of council and its committees, legal documents and their registers, indexes of council's files, electoral material (except voting papers), maps, contracts, building applications and their registers, audited accounts and reports, registers of development consents and building applications and approvals, rate books, and cemetery registers. All other material may be destroyed or disposed of six years after the completion of the file or in accordance with a ministerial disposals schedule. Some, but not all, of the records otherwise to be retained may be disposed of if they have been microfilmed according to approved standards.

Why retain?

Local government is now a complex business.

It requires not only the proper management of its current records but the proper preservation of its older ones. Retention is a matter for careful thought and action. These must be made with consistency and good sense. At the same time, the general community has a greater interest in these records than at any previous time.

How it happened:

In October 1981 a seminar on local government records, held at History House, Sydney, brought together a wide range of people, representing organisations interested in such matters — librarians, record managers, archivists, local councillors and council officers, historians. At this seminar, a clear indication was given that reform was possible.

Out of the seminar arose the Action Committee on Local Government Records under the auspices of the Library Association of Australia (NSW Branch) and the Australian Society of Archivists (Sydney Branch). Its fifteen members are wide-ranging in their interests. The Action Committee's status was assured when it received formal recognition by the Minister for Local Government.

Four years is a long time — except, perhaps, for governments. The Action Committee has worked with pertinacity, and mostly with patience, to produce the action that its name promises. To have achieved anything without the work of John Cross (Principal Archivist, Archives Authority of NSW) and Janet Howse (Archivist, Council of the City of Sydney) would have been difficult. To have got anywhere at all without the industry and enthusiasm of Patricia Ward (Library Association of Australia, NSW), the secretary, would have been impossible.

Local government itself has been most helpful and the attitude of the Department of Local Government has been encapsulated in the devotion of its Acting Chief Inspector, David Le Page.

The Action Committee has held seminars

and instructional workshops. It has had countless meetings and, gradually, success has come.

What is to be done?

In a real sense, the work proper has only just begun.

A Ministerial Working Party has been appointed to formulate that most formidable of documents, a Records Disposal Schedule for Local Government. The Department has sought Bicentennial funding for an archivist to work on the Disposal Schedule.

A Microform indicator has been prepared to inform councils about acceptable equipment and standards. To avoid conflict with other legislation, 'good faith and observance' has been requested of councils by a Departmental Circular for the inevitable interim period. A whole series of seminars and classes must be held for those concerned with the preservation of council records.

What is a 'record'?

Perhaps the truly significant element in the amendment to Ordinance I lies in the definition of 'record'. All librarians will appreciate its wide-ranging character: "'Record" means a document (including any written or printed material) or object (including a sound recording, coded storage device, magnetic tape or disc, microfilm, photograph, film, map, plan or model or a painting or other pictorial or graphic work) that is, or has been, made or received in the course of official duties by an officer or servant of the Council.'

With such a definition, it means that local librarians will soon find themselves involved with council record matters (whether or not a council can create an archive for itself) in a way which, until now, can scarcely have been considered.

Kenneth J. Cable

See page 10 for list of members of the Action Committee.

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The Australian Database Development Association is updating its *Directory of Australian Databases*. At the same time, ADDA is creating a database of currently available and proposed public Australian databases.

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hear from you so that they can include details of your database in the Directory.

The Directory will contain details of videotex databases as well as bibliographic and numeric files. All database producers who have already provided ADDA with database information will be contacted to update details of their database in the Directory.

If you have a database you want to tell the world about, the Directory is a good place to start. New entries for the *Directory of Aus-*

tralian Databases should be with ADDA by 30 September to meet publication deadlines.

To obtain a questionnaire on which to submit details of your database, please contact ADDA's Secretary, Sherrey Quinn on (03) 850 3361, or write to ADDA at PO Box 53, Hawthorn, 3122.

Maternity Leave Review

The Federal Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations has announced that a review of maternity leave is to take place.

The study was suggested by the ACTU and is being supervised by a tripartite committee made up of representatives of the ACTU, the Confederation of Australian Industry and the Federal Government.

It will include a mass survey of employers and employees to examine such factors as:

- the extent to which maternity leave is covered in awards
- the extent to which maternity leave is being used by employees
- the advantages and disadvantages of the current maternity leave provisions to employers and employees.

The study is scheduled to conclude in June 1986.

Library and Information Staff Union Log of Claims

The Library and Information Staff Union which covers staff in special libraries in NSW in private enterprise, had the second hearing of its log of claims on July 19 1985. The hearing was stood over so that negotiations with employers could continue.

Louise Lansley

Industrial Information and Research Officer

LOCAL GOVT. RECORDS from page 9

MEMBERS OF THE ACTION COMMITTEE

Chairman: Associate Professor Ian Jack (Department of History, The University of Sydney)

Secretary: Patricia Ward (Library Association of Australia, NSW Branch)

Associate Professor Ken Cable (Royal Australian Historical Society)

John Cross (Principal Archivist, Archives Authority of NSW)

David Le Page (Senior Inspector, Department of Local Government)

Janet Howse (Archivist, Council of the City of Sydney)

Judith May (Representing Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW)

Terry Kass (Sydney History Group)

Peter Orlovich (Senior Lecturer, Archives Administration, School of Librarianship, The University of New South Wales)

John Perry (Representing Records Management Association of Australia, NSW)

Michael Regnis (Town Clerk/General Manager, Woollahra Municipal Council, representing the Town Clerks' Society, NSW)

Christine Shergold (Senior Archivist, Archives Office of NSW)

Kenneth Smith (Archivist, The University of Sydney)

Mary Vinter (Local History Librarian, Stanton Library, North Sydney)

Andrew Wilson (Australian Society of Archivists, Sydney Branch)

For information on the work of the Action Committee:

Mrs Patricia Ward, Secretary

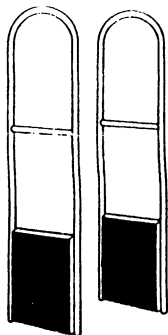
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as these relate to libraries and their services.

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