

QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES – SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

P. D. WILSON, B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Lib., Archivist,
State Library of Queensland.

The writer summarises the recent history of the Queensland State Archives, dealing primarily with this institution from the points of view of accommodation and legislation. The dual responsibility of the Queensland State archival authority for archives on the one hand, and intermediate records on the other, is explained, and an outline is given of the system of classification used, and the various control media and finding aids. There is information on the Queensland map collection, and on the level of service given to academic and other enquiries. One paragraph is devoted to each of:

The file issue service, the staff establishment, preservation methods, the photographic services, the microfilm vault and publications of the Archives.

The Editor, in his customary persuasive fashion, prevailed upon the writer recently to contribute a few words on the contemporary operations of Queensland State Archives. He pointed out that very little had appeared in print since his own comprehensive article which appeared in *The American Archivist* in 1963.⁽¹⁾ The obvious rejoinder is that we are all too busy to compile articles for *Archives and Manuscripts*. However, I succumbed to his customary effective persuasion and what follows is a brief attempt to update the printed information on what has been happening on the archival scene north of the Tweed during the last 10 years.

My ability to speak about the period before 1970 is rather limited. My personal contact with the Archives, except as a History Honours student, was minimal before I joined the staff of the State (then Public) Library of Queensland early in that year. Using the memories of long-serving staff members plus routine reports, I have endeavoured to sketch in the broad outlines of events from 1963 to 1969.

From the time of establishment in 1959 until mid-1968, the Section occupied part or all of the convict-built Commissariat building in William Street, next to the present State Library building. This building was most unsuitable, being subject to roof leaks, rats, borers, white ants, and on occasions, unauthorised visitors bent on alcoholic celebrations of various kinds. All available record space was filled by 1966, and the Archivist made energetic efforts to convince all concerned that new accommodation was required. The Library Board of Queensland supported this view in general and suggestions were made by the government in 1964 for the construction or purchase, in a suburban area, of an Intermediate Records repository only. The existing building was intended to continue as the Archives. A site at Rocklea was approved, but proved to be unsuitable because of the lack of suitable foundation strata. In 1965, a site at Dutton Park, adjacent to the Brisbane Prison, was approved and planning began for a combined Archives and Intermediate Records repository. Construction work began in mid-1967 and the building was ready for occupation by July, 1968. The general layout of our building, plus details of the move from the City to Dutton Park, are given in R. C. Sharman's article in *Archives and Manuscripts* published in November, 1968.⁽²⁾ The building has proved very satisfactory, but, as one would expect, there are some features which would be changed if one was starting a similar project elsewhere and ignoring considerations of cost. The staff facilities and meal/tea room are too close to the reading room and noise is a problem. The lack of air-conditioning in the staff working area is detrimental to work-output in the long hot months of the

Brisbane summer. It is amazing how many staff members, including the Archivist, find it necessary to work in the air-conditioned Archives section of the building on summer days.

The main section of the building is close to full storage capacity, only five years after opening. In fact, archival material has had to be put into the intermediate records area (non-air-conditioned) because the Archives storage area is completely full. Relief is in sight, however, as work is currently going ahead on the enclosure and equipping of the hitherto unused section of the building on the lower ground floor level. This area of approximately 8,000 square feet, will be equipped with compact shelving sufficient for about 15,000 feet of records, plus map storage in multi-draw cabinets. At the same time, the photographic section is being enclosed and air-conditioned, a new room for the sole use of the Document Repairer/Bookbinder is being built and equipped, and new office space for four graduates is being provided within the existing office accommodation. Reorganisation of this space will give the Assistant Archivist an office of her own and the stenographic staff will get a new office and more space.

Forward planning for future buildings has been undertaken in theory. There is sufficient space on the present site for more construction to the east of the existing building, or possibly by extension of our Reserve to the north, towards the Prison. At present we control subsidiary repositories at the Anzac Square complex, at the old Lady Bowen building and the Chest Clinic building, all in or near the city centre. We shall be vacating the Chest Clinic space in favour of the Department of Health shortly and the archival records held there will be transferred to the new accommodation at Dutton Park. The Anzac Square complex is almost totally occupied by Titles Office and Public Curator's records and is at full capacity.

Before dealing with the matter of records – archival and intermediate, the subject of legislation needs to be mentioned. As Robert Sharman pointed out in 1963, our legislation is a copy of the original Tasmanian Public Records Act.⁽³⁾ It is, however, workable and administrative conventions which have grown up since 1959 have rounded off some of the awkward corners and smoothed out some of the bumps without departing from the letter of the Act. The Archivist is expected to carry out the day-to-day administration of the Act, with ultimate responsibility resting upon the State Librarian. Specific destruction requests are put to the Library Board for final approval, although routine financial and general records whose characteristics are well known are subject to automatic destruction approval without need for repeated specific applications to the Board. Throughout the period of operation of the Archives, however, court records have been a problem. There is considerable doubt as to whether the relevant Part (Part IV) of the Libraries Act can be construed to include the records of any court, from Magistrate's level to the Supreme Court. Despite this, large transfers of court records of all kinds have been made and considerable sorting and accessioning effort has been expended on them, especially on those originating in the Southern (Brisbane) and the Northern (Townsville) Registries of the Supreme Court. Apart from the dubious legality of such physical transfers, access for research is a continuing difficulty. The accumulation of plaint and complaint files at Magistrate's (Petty Sessions) level has been and still is a serious problem. Amending legislation to attempt to solve some of these problems is under consideration and it is hoped that the overall situation can be eased if this legislation is passed.

The work of the Queensland State Archives divides itself fairly neatly into the dual responsibilities of archival records and intermediate records. The former are formally transferred and accepted under Part IV of the Libraries Act. They come of course, from all parts of the State, from Thursday Island to Coolangatta and west to Birdsville. They are fumigated as soon as possible after arrival, sorted, accessioned, bundled and shelved according to established procedures. Brown paper and tape are still the bundling media, but we hope to make a submission on the desirability of boxing our records before too much longer. We

are well aware of the acid-content of the brown paper we use and of the damage inherent in paper bundling, not to mention the large labour component in wrapping, un-wrapping and re-wrapping.

The system of classification in use is a product of our 14 years' experience. Briefly, it consists of a record group oriented approach, on a series basis with descriptive symbols as identifiers and a shelf arrangement governed by the classifying symbols. For example, the inwards correspondence of the Colonial Secretary (1859-1896) is a series bearing the descriptive symbol COL/A – COL being the record group indicator and the symbol A indicating inwards correspondence. The full classification is COL/A1-807, representing 807 bundles. This series is shelved in alphabetical arrangement after COL/1-486. There are multiple refinements applied in the system to cover the particular problems one always encounters in dealing with archival material, but space does not allow a full treatment here.

The archival records are controlled by a series of classifying registers and a companion series of accession registers. The former records in brief detail the contents of the Archives in alphabetical classification order of record group, whereas the latter, kept in transfer number order, records the detailed accessioning product. In the control catalogue, there is a card for each series, kept under record group headings. In addition, we keep a subject catalogue, as described by Jan Carroll in 1969.⁽⁴⁾ There are a number of finding aids available, mainly in card form and their scope and complexity is forcing us to produce a 'guide to the indexes'. Much more work needs to be done in the production of a concise series list (printed for circulation), subject guides, more indexes and more administrative history, but the usual limitations of time and staff place unavoidable restraints in this type of work. However, I hope that at least a concise guide will become a reality in the near future.

A particular feature of Queensland State Archives is the map and chart collection. Consisting mainly of cadastral maps produced by the Survey Office, the total of sheets held is now in the region of 15,000. As well as maps showing freehold and leasehold tenure, there are topographic, mining, exploration and land use maps. Our collection of Admiralty charts of the coast of Queensland, dating from Lieutenant Wickham's chart of Moreton Bay (1846), is a very useful adjunct to research. The whole collection is controlled by a card catalogue and the cadastral maps are classified according to a system based on the pastoral districts, counties and parishes of Queensland.

Personal assistance to researchers is available as well as written answers to specific queries received by mail or phone. Present policy is to encourage people living in or close to Brisbane to do their own research wherever personal commitments and the complexity of the records allow. In the compilation of written research answers, preference in terms of lengthy work is given first to departments of government and the legislature and then to enquirers from Queensland rural areas. Very little discrimination against interstate inquirers actually result, provided the queries are specific. In other words, the aim is to give all enquirers a 'fair-go' constrained only by staff and time limitations. Academic enquirers and researchers do not receive 'special' treatment, but they do get a 'different' type according to their needs. Our general policy can be expressed in the cliché that we do as much as possible for everyone but not always as much as we would like.

The operation of the intermediate records repository and its associated file-issue service involves considerable effort in terms of staff time. This aspect of our operations occupies the equivalent of the working time of three clerical assistants. Receipt of records, taking of requests for files by telephone, obtaining the requested files from the shelves, issuing controlling paperwork, delivering the files and then, eventually, reversing the process, impinges to a considerable extent on the archival operation. However, as we are expected by the government to carry out this function, the dual aspects of our daily lives settle down fairly well into a tested routine and there is not as much conflict as those unused to such parallelism might possibly expect.

The staff establishment has grown from two in 1960 to 15 in 1973. At present there are an Archivist, Assistant Archivist, three Graduate Assistants, a Document Repairer/Bookbinder, Photographic Assistant, Library Assistant, two Steno-typists, and five Clerical Assistants on the staff. It is hoped to add another graduate next year, followed by an apprentice Bookbinder after that. Mr. James Bruce, our Document Repairer, is at present overseas on a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship studying new techniques and materials in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. Most repair work so far has been confined to maps and to the re-sewing and binding of volumes. However, with new facilities and using the information gleaned overseas by Mr. Bruce, we hope to begin a more comprehensive program of preventive work, as well as routine repair.

On the subject of preservation, mention must be made of the successful operation, since its installation in 1969, of the Degesch fumigation equipment. We are still unable to use the equipment throughout the entire year, because the process loses efficiency when ambient temperature drops below 70 degrees Fahrenheit (21 degrees Celsius). However, with a ready supply of commercial gas available in Brisbane, the plant gives good service from October to June. It is hoped to investigate shortly the possibility of artificial heating to allow operation through the winter months. Full details of the plant and its operation can be found in Woodhouse's article in *Archives and Manuscripts*.⁽⁵⁾

The Photographic section, centered on a Fuji L2 Microfilm camera, commenced operations on the appointment of our Photographic Assistant, Mr. Stan Ellis, in mid-1971. Our program of placing important archival series on film has been delayed by the urgent necessity to microfilm a number of North Queensland newspapers which my predecessor obtained from Charters Towers. Some of the film produced is now available for sale. In addition, a Roma newspaper, *The Western Star*, for the years 1875-1929 has been filmed and is also available for sale. So far the only archival material filmed comprises two Survey Office registers of land sales 1842-61 [SUR/4-5], Crown Lands Office registers 1848-70, [CLO/12-15], and the papers relating to the annexation of Papua, 1874-1907 [COL/1-10]. As a security precaution, the accession registers to date have also been filmed. Mr. Ellis is also responsible for some copying and enlarging for other sections of the State Library and dark-room facilities for this work are available. Some work is done for the Oxley Memorial Library, but microfilming has to take precedence and we are unable to do more than a small fraction of the copying carried out for Oxley Memorial Library readers.

The Photographic Assistant also has as one of his tasks the oversight and operation of the microfilm vault located within the Dutton Park building. This vault operates in conjunction with the Microfilm Service Bureau within the Department of Main Roads which provides a plan copying service for that Department and for the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission, the Department of Works and the Titles Office. The vault receives the original copy of all film exposed by the Bureau. Conditions within the vault are maintained by a filtered air circulation system with refrigerating and conditioning machinery maintaining a storage temperature of 50°F (10° Celsius) and 25% relative humidity. The vault was constructed between 1970 and 1972 and the first film was placed in storage in December, 1972.

Finally, the production of the Library Board publication *Queensland Heritage* has continued to be an Archives responsibility, with the Archivist as Editor and all the editorial and photographic work being done using the resources of this section of the State Library.

The future seems assured by a growing recognition of the role of the Queensland State Archives by both the Government and the general public. This very brief summary will hopefully shed just a little light on what we are doing in Queensland to meet the responsibility of the collection, preservation and use of the records of the Colony and the State.

1. R. C. Sharman. 'The Queensland State Archives.' *The American Archivist*, V.26, No. 2, April, 1963, p.167-176.
2. R. C. Sharman. 'New building for old. The transmigration of the Queensland State Archives.' *Archives and Manuscripts*, V.3, No. 7, November, 1968, p.25-35.
3. R. C. Sharman. 'The Queensland State Archives.' *The American Archivist*, p.167.
4. J. M. Carroll. 'To Catalogue or not to Catalogue: The Subject/Form Catalogue of the Queensland State Archives.' *Archives and Manuscripts*, V.4, No. 1, November, 1969, p.8-18.
5. A. J. Woodhouse. 'The Queensland State Archives Fumigation unit; Ethylene Oxide/Vacuum Fumigation as an aid for the preservation of Archives and Manuscripts.' *Archives and Manuscripts*, V.4, No. 3, November, 1970, p.14-20.