

**Sonoma County  
Historical Records Commission**

**Appraisal of Local Government Records  
for Historical Value**

**August 1997**

# Sonoma County Historical Records Commission

## Appraisal of Local Government Records for Historical Value

The Sonoma County Historical Records Commission was established in 1979 by Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 65011 (Exhibit A) pursuant to California Government Code 26490 (Exhibit B). The Commission is charged with the identification of historically significant records and with the promotion of the preservation of these records.

### Sonoma County Records Management Program

The Historical Records Commission works closely with the Sonoma County Records Management. This program was established by the Board of Supervisors in 1984 to implement a countywide records management program that would document, organize, apply controls and set standards for Sonoma County records and information from creation through final disposition. The Records Management Program applies to records of all departments, divisions, boards, commissions, programs, districts and agencies of Sonoma County government. Each entity is required to create a records retention schedule that identifies what records exist, appraise the records to determine their retention periods, secure necessary approvals for the disposition of the record and issue the retention schedule for mandatory use. This retention schedule must cover official and duplicate records of all media types, the entire department in all locations, and must assign retention periods to each record series. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors adopted a policy on the retention, storage and destruction of all County records in Resolution 92-0563, 11/18/92 (Exhibit C)

There are several individuals or entities that are involved in the approval of records retention schedules for Sonoma County.

1. Each **Department Head** is responsible for the retention, protection and disposition of all the department's records.
2. **County Counsel** reviews the retention periods assigned to records to determine their conformance with legal requirements.
3. The **County Auditor-Controller** reviews the retention periods assigned to records to determine their conformance with audit requirements.
4. The **Sonoma County Historical Records Commission** reviews retention schedules to identify which records have archival, historical or research value.

5. The **Sonoma County Board of Supervisors** approves records retention schedules reviewed by the Records Manager, Department Head, County Counsel, Auditor-Controller and Historical Records Commission, and authorizes the destruction of records in accordance with Government Codes 26201, 26202, 26205 and 26205.1. Retention schedules approved by the Board of Supervisors provide departments with ongoing authority to keep or destroy records in accordance with specified retention periods.

### **Sonoma County Archives**

The Sonoma County Library is the official archives for Sonoma County and the City of Santa Rosa and "... provides for the cataloging, preservation, study and exhibition of historical materials pertaining to Santa Rosa and Sonoma County." (Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 14021, 9/27/65) (Exhibit D). Each department sending records to the Archives must submit Deed of Gift and Conditions of Transfer forms (Exhibits E and F).

Some archival records as well as historical information are stored in the Sonoma County Room located in the annex across from the Central Library, at 3rd and E Streets in downtown Santa Rosa. Other archival records are stored in a facility located at Los Guilucos, about 11 miles east of Santa Rosa.

### **Appraising Records for Historical Value**

Historical records contribute valuable information to our lives, information which helps us address contemporary issues and solve current problems. Society benefits from historical records in a variety of ways.

Sonoma County's archival program benefits local government in at least three ways:

- It provides the operational foundation documents of government.
- It provides legal documentation and protection.
- It helps local officials learn from the past and ensure policy continuity.

### **What Are Archival Records?**

In the normal course of business, a government creates a record for a specific purpose--to carry out a specific function. Records are created to meet:

- *Legal needs.* The records explain the government's responsibilities, protect the government's rights, or protect the rights of the citizens it serves. Examples include ordinances, resolutions, and minutes of the chief government body.

- *Fiscal needs.* The records establish fiscal responsibility, demonstrate accountability, and track the flow of revenue. Examples include budgets, general ledgers, and assessment rolls.
- *Administrative needs.* The records support ongoing, day-to-day, administrative affairs of the government. Examples include personnel files, policies, procedures, and student attendance records.

### **What Makes a Government Record Historically Important?**

A local government record is historically important if it:

- Provides significant evidence of how government goes about its business (how it functions and does its work) *or*
- Provides significant information about people, places, or events with which the government is involved.

Government records contain important information about the people, places, and events within their jurisdiction:

- Information about people --- their economic conditions, their values and concerns.
- Information about places within the local government's borders -- the buildings, infrastructure, and land use of the area.
- Information about events in the area -- from national events (such as the impact of the Civil War or the Great Depression) to significant localized events (such as the closing of a military base, the displacement of people due to the construction of a reservoir, or the development of a thruway system).

The historical importance of the records is shown every time a class studies the impact of the construction of a reservoir, dam, or thruway on their town; local governments receive federal funds to renovate their historic buildings, sewers, and subways; citizens successfully conduct historic house research; or local entrepreneurs undertake land use studies for a proposed development. See Sonoma County Records Series Commonly Considered Historical (Exhibit G).

The information in the records about people, places, and events is only important, however, if the information itself is *significant*. Significance depends on:

- When the records were created.
- What kind of information the records contain.
- Who created the records.
- What other records exist (in the municipality and elsewhere in the state or county).
- The unique history of the local government or community.

## Conducting the Appraisal

Records are appraised as *series*, not as individual documents. A record series is a group of records that result from the same activity. The records in each series are managed together, filed together, indexed together, and disposed of together. Examples of series **include minutes, building permits, contracts, and general ledgers**. Since record series are kept and managed together, they can also be appraised together. Occasionally a few items within a series are worth keeping while the rest can be destroyed. However, in most cases, the records are appraised as a whole series.

Appraising record series to decide if they have significant historical information involves:

- Asking certain *questions* about the records, and then
- Deciding to keep or dispose of the records *based* on the answers.

Appraisal questions fall into four general groups:

1. **When** were the records created?
  - A. Are the records from an important period?
  - B. Are the records scarce?
  - C. Are the records old?
  - D. Do the records cover a long or short time period?

Records created during times of momentous change, survive from a period when many records have been destroyed, or cover a long period of time tend to be more significant.

2. **Why** were the records created?
  - A. Which office created the records?
  - B. What are the principal functions of that office?
  - C. Do the records document the principal functions of the office?

Records that preserve evidence of the office's principal functions are normally more significant than those that do not.

3. **What** is in the record?
  - A. Do the records cover historically significant activities?
  - B. Are the records an important source of information on the topic?

Records which contain more in-depth information about people, places, or events in the community are more likely to be historically important.

4. **Who** created the records?

- A. What was the official position of the person who created the records?
- B. Was the record creator personally involved in the events recorded?
- C. Did the creator have a significant impact on the history or policy of the county?

Records which reflect an employee's perspective or individual point of view may be more significant.

These questions provide a framework for determining which record series might have historical importance. Since appraisal is a process, the final appraisal decision will not be based on any single answer to these questions; instead, it will be gleaned from the responses as a whole. The appraisal process involves looking at all clues and then making an informed decision. See Appraisal Scorecard (Exhibit H)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The Appraisal Scorecard and other information in this brochure are adapted from *Appraisal of Local Government Records for Historical Value* published by The University of the State of New York, the State Education Department, State Archives and Records Administration, Local Government Records Services, Albany, New York 12230.

## **Exhibits**

Resolution 65011 Establishing Historical Records Commission	A
Government Code 26490 Authorizing the Creation of an Historical Records Commission	B
County Administrative Policy 6-1: Records Retention, Storage, and Destruction	C
Resolution 14021 Designating the Official Archives of the County and City	D
Sonoma County Archives Deed of Gift Form	E
Sonoma County Archives Conditions of Transfer Form	F
Sonoma County Records Series Commonly Considered Historic	G
Historical Records Appraisal Scorecard	H

RESOLUTION NO. 65011

Sonoma County Administration Bldg.  
Santa Rosa, California

December 4, 1979

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF  
THE COUNTY OF SONOMA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA,  
ESTABLISHING THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTION OF  
INTENT TO ESTABLISH A COUNTY HISTORICAL  
RECORDS COMMISSION

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma has adopted a resolution of intent to establish a County Historical Records Commission, and

WHEREAS, it is the desire of the Board that this resolution be administered in accord with certain procedures, now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the following procedures shall be followed by the Sonoma County Historical Records Commission.

ESTABLISHMENT

A County Historical Records Commission is established to carry out the purposes and duties specified in Section 26490 of the Government Code of the State of California.

DUTIES

The purpose of the County Historical Records Commission, as stated in Chapter 16 of Part 2 of Division 2 of Title 3 of the Government Code, is as follows: to foster and promote the preservation of historical records.

Duties of the County Historical Records Commission include:

1. Conduct a feasibility study including the identification of significant information sources in the county, recommendations for an archives and records management program, and the creation of an information network.
2. Support and assist the Sonoma County Records Inventory Project so that all extant county records will be identified and inventoried.

3. Identify and encourage the preservation of additional governmental, business, professional and private records deemed to be historically significant.
4. Encourage historical and genealogical societies, professional associations, private researchers and students to participate in the detailed research involved in preserving historical records.
5. Promote the preservation of historical records through newspaper articles, television interviews, talks and slide shows to civic groups, preparation of pamphlets and posters, and the establishment of specialized advisory groups.
6. Establish and maintain liaison with the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission.
7. Seek outside funding for activities which promote the preservation of historical records.
8. Encourage historical records preservation by endorsing appropriate activities of historical societies, civic groups and commission, schools, etc.
9. Conduct such additional activities as foster and promote the preservation of historical records.

#### MEMBERSHIP

The Sonoma County Historical Records Commission shall consist of five voting members, drawn from the following areas: county government, library services, academic professional historian, community history, genealogical research, and business and/or professions.

All voting members shall be appointed by the Board of Supervisors. To ensure competent representation from each field, the following criteria shall be used:

1. County Government

The County Clerk, or designate.

2. County Library

The County Librarian, or designate.

3. Library Services

A professional librarian with demonstrable experience in archival and records management.

4. Academic Professional Historian

An academic professional historian affiliated with one of the accredited institutions of higher education in the county.

5. Community History

An active member of one of the established historical societies in the county who has had significant experience in researching and writing community history.

6. Genealogical Research

An active member of the Sonoma County Genealogical Society with significant experience in researching local genealogical records.

7. Business and/or Professions

A recognized, licensed or accredited professional from a field in which historical records are a significant concern of that business or profession.

TERM OF APPOINTMENT

All members appointed by the Board of Supervisors to the Historical Records Commission shall serve for a term of four years. A member may be reappointed by the Board. When first fully constituted, the five initial members of the Commission shall determine by lot three members who shall serve a full term, and two who shall serve for two years. All members serve at the pleasure of the Board of Supervisors.

SUPERVISORS

Kahn \_\_\_\_\_ Putnam \_\_\_\_\_ Esposti \_\_\_\_\_ Koenigshofer \_\_\_\_\_ Rudee \_\_\_\_\_

Ayes 5 Noes 0 Abstain 0 Absent 0

# CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE

## Chapter 16

### HERITAGE AND HISTORICAL COMMISSIONS

*Chapter 16 was added by Stats. 1974, c. 59, p. 128, § 2.*

**§ 26490. Designation of existing commission; appointment of new commission; membership**

The board of supervisors may designate an existing county historical commission or county museum commission to foster and promote the preservation of historical records. An existing commission to be so designated may include in its membership the county clerk or his designate, the county librarian or his designate, and the county museum director (if one exists) or his designate. If no such commission has been designated, the board of supervisors may appoint a historical records commission to foster and promote the preservation of historical records. The commission shall be composed of the county clerk or his designate, the county librarian or his designate, the county museum director (if one exists) or his designate, and two or three additional members for a total of five members.

(Added by Stats. 1974, c. 59, p. 128, § 2.)

Resolution No. 14021

Sonoma County Administration  
Building, Santa Rosa, Calif.

September 27, 1965

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF SONOMA COUNTY  
ADOPTED CONCURRENTLY WITH A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL  
OF THE CITY OF SANTA ROSA, DESIGNATING THE SANTA ROSA-  
SONOMA PUBLIC LIBRARY THE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES OF THE COUNTY AND CITY

WHEREAS, the month of September has been designated California History month, and

WHEREAS, the purpose of this celebration is to foster the preservation of materials  
pertaining to the colorful history of our state and the dissemination of information about the past,  
and

WHEREAS, Sonoma County played a unique and most significant role in the  
development of California, and has a particularly rich tradition, and

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon local government to collect, preserve, organize, and  
make available for public use documents, records, books, manuscripts, photographs and all other  
written, printed and graphic materials of local significance, both presently and in the future, and

WHEREAS, the Santa Rosa-Sonoma County Public Library central building is about to  
be constructed, and will contain a special room designated the Sonoma County Room, and will  
have other storage and display facilities suitable for the cataloging, preservation, study and  
exhibition of historical materials pertaining to Santa Rosa and Sonoma County,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Supervisors of Sonoma  
County that said Board and the City Council of the City of Santa Rosa do hereby designate the  
Santa Rosa-Sonoma County Public Library official archives for the County and the City, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all departments of county and city government are requested to deposit in the Library three copies of all significant reports and publications which they may issue or cause to have issued from this date forth, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the people of Sonoma County are urged to give, bequeath or deposit in the Library such materials of historical import as may be to the public interest to preserve and maintain perpetually.

The foregoing resolution was introduced by Supervisor Shoemaker who moved its adoption, seconded by Supervisor Nordyke and adopted on roll call by the following vote:

Supervisor Vella	Aye
Supervisor Shoemaker	Aye
Supervisor Nordyke	Aye
Supervisor Rath	Absent
Supervisor Ruonavaara	Aye

Ayes: 4                      Noes: 0                      Absent or not voting: 1

WHEREUPON, the Chairman declared the above resolution adopted, and

SO ORDERED

## Sonoma County Records Series Commonly Considered Historical<sup>2</sup>

Advisory Board/Committee Files

Annual Reports

Assessment Rolls

Audits

Blueprints

Commission Files

Contracts

Construction Files

Deeds

General Plans and Amendments

Handwritten Permanent Records<sup>3</sup>

Maps

Minutes

Official Records and General Indexes

Ordinances

Patents

Photographs

Policies

Probate Records

Procedures

Publications

Real Estate Appraisals

Resolutions

---

<sup>2</sup> Microform formats are the preferred medium for longevity and durability.

<sup>3</sup> The Historical Records Commission recommends that handwritten permanent records be retained for reasons of legibility.

Rights of Way

Road Books and Files

Scientific Data (Rainfall, Air Quality, Water Quality)

Statistics

Subdivision Plans

Summary Reports

Superior Court Records

Surveys

Tax Rolls

Vital Records

Water Rights

Zoning Files

## Historical Records Appraisal Scorecard

NAME OF SERIES:

1. When Were the Records Created?

1A. Are the records from an important period?

1B. Are the records scarce?

1C. Are the records old?

1D. Do the records cover a long or short time period?

2. Why Were the Records Created?

2A. Do the records document principal functions of the office?

3. What is in the Records?

3A. Do the records cover important activities?

3B. Are the records the only source of information?

3C. Are the records the best source?

3D. Do the records dispute other records?

3E. Do the records contain unique information?

4. Who Created the Records?