



New Jersey State Archives
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County and Local Records Accessioning Guidelines

Introduction

The State Archives' principal function, traditionally, has been to preserve the official records of New Jersey colonial and state government agencies and make them available to the public for research. The Archives, however, has also accepted certain historical county and local government records as permanent accessions from time to time. The Archives' earliest predecessor agency, the Public Record Office (PRO), surveyed local government records throughout New Jersey during the 1920s and '30s, and gathered together then what is a substantial portion of the Archives' present county and local records holdings.

It has always been the State Archives' policy to encourage county governments to establish their own archival storage and research facilities. While a number of counties have made tangible progress in building or renovating central storage facilities and establishing a professionally staffed archives program, many others have not been able to do so. Important historical records of certain counties are therefore left vulnerable to loss or theft (when their use is not supervised by a professional archivist) and to serious deterioration or complete destruction (when environmental controls and storage space are inadequate).

Considering this, in October 1990 the State Archives developed guidelines for accepting county and local records for permanent accession into the State Archives. These guidelines established cut-off dates for most of the loose-manuscript series, and some bound-volume series, found in the clerks' offices. Most of these cut-off dates fall between 1880 and 1920. The 1991 Court Bifurcation Act (P.L. 1991, c. 119), which absorbed the former county courts and their records into the state court system, and a subsequent order of the New Jersey Supreme Court, compelled a further revision of the Archives' accessioning policy.

Below is a list of the revised guidelines to be used by State Archives staff in appraising county and local records. It will continue to be the policy of the New Jersey State Archives that county and local governments first be strongly encouraged to provide suitable storage for their archival records at home as part of a central archives and records management program. When, however, it appears to Archives' staff that the preservation of, or public access to, important historical county and municipal records depends on transfer of such materials to the State, this document will allow us to apply guidelines consistently as to what should--and should not--be transferred to Trenton.

Categories of Records Eligible for Accessioning

Series Description	Datespan
Aerial Photographs	pre-1950
Birth records	pre-1880
Census records (federal and state)	up to 1920
Coroner's records	selected pre-1920 ¹
Court records	selected pre-1948 ¹
Death records (including County Physician's	pre-1920
Precepts) Divisions/partitions of land [loose]	pre-1900
Election records	pre-1910
Firemen (exempt) records	pre-1930
Incorporations of non-profit organizations	pre-1920
Justice of the Peace dockets	pre-1920
Licenses (taverns, peddlers, fisheries, medical)	pre-1930
Lunacy records	pre-1920
Maps and atlases	pre-2000
Marriage records (loose returns or books)	up to 1910
Militia records	pre-1917
Minutes (township committee or county freeholders)	pre-1920
Naturalization records	pre-1948
Oaths and appointments	all pre-1880; selected pre-1920 ¹
Poor relief/overseer's records	all pre-1920; selected pre-1950 ¹
Road, turnpike, canal, and railroad records	pre-1900
Sheriff's records (selected)	pre-1920 ¹
Slave manumissions and slave birth records	all
Surrogate's records	selected pre-1900 ¹
Tax ratables	pre-1880
Unrecorded/original deeds	all pre-1870; selected pre-1900

1. Selection based on appraisal of record content, and comparison with related series; subject to established record retention schedules.