

The Way Old Records Go Today

By Alan Jones
Sentinel Staff Writer

There are two ways to make more space in a building. One is to make the building larger; the other is to make everything inside the building smaller.

Plans to double the size of city hall are progressing nicely, but the city finance and records department is tackling the problem from the other direction.

"A 'records retention' program mapped out by Ron Beach, the city's assistant finance and records director, is just now beginning to show results after nearly two years of groundwork. The program's aim is simple: save space. Its basic method is equally simple: if you can throw it away, do it.

Beach, under city clerk Jack Miller, has a vault full of paper to reduce. The vault contains written records of just about everything the city has even done—and Santa Cruz is 100 years old this year. Among the stacks, filing drawers, sheaves and manila folders are all the documents submitted to the city council—letters, resolutions, ordinances, lawsuits, petitions, committee reports, and more—and that's only a beginning.

There are also copies of insurance policies, insurance claims, employee records, accounting records, complete files on all assessment districts, blueprints of all public works projects, commission reports from all the standing city commissions, deeds, minutes of meetings, and on into the night.

At the start of the program, Beach put the city attorney to work to find out exactly what could be done with each type of document—whether it could be thrown away, whether the original had to be kept, whether a copy was good enough, how long records had to be kept.

There is one key element in the program, Microfilm. The department has a shiny new bunch of equipment to transfer paper documents to microfilm, to project the microfilm onto a screen, and to print photo-copies of the documents almost instantaneously.

The copy machine may be the best thing for office routine since girl secretaries were invented. Operation is absurdly simple. You find the right film reel, wind it onto the projector and roll it along to the document you want. When the document shows up on the screen, you throw the machine out of gear, punch a couple of buttons, and a photo copy pops out the top like breakfast toast.

A few weeks ago, Beach borrowed a high-speed microfilm camera owned by County Bank of Santa Cruz to film a pickup truck load of papers. The bank's machine, which can shoot 400 pictures a minute, required three days to handle the job. The truckload of documents was converted to six rolls of 16-millimeter film which could be carried in a cigar box.

Beach estimates that when city hall is twice its present size, with construction next year or so of a second building, the vault space needed will be smaller than it is now because of the retention program.

With the dramatic space-saving microfilm provides, that might seem a conservative estimate, but there's more to it than simply filming everything. Many papers must be kept in the original, Beach said. And many more have historical value, and will be kept for that reason—papers like the gracefully handwritten minutes of the first city council meetings in 1866.

There are basically four things to do with the vault documents—throw them away, keep them, keep an original plus a microfilm copy, or keep a microfilm copy and throw away the original. The decision for each type of document, Beach said, is based on legal requirements, historical value, and management needs.

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The microfilming program is just well under way, and during the next year Beach plans to purge the major files in the records department. Records will be sorted out according to the disposition to be made of them—that is, whether they are to be filmed or not.

The hottest gleam in his eye is for the records of the San Lorenzo river flood control project. The complete records stretch for yards just below the vault ceiling, atop 9-foot high shelves and filing cabinets.

Beach was visibly itching to get rid of the voluminous stack.

When that's done, there will be the other records—payrolls, cash vouchers, claims, employee records, meets and bounds descriptions, and dozens more.

Beach doesn't have the only game in town, or even in city hall. The public works department is independently filming some of its records to cut down storage space needs, and other departments may follow when the records department program is in hand.

The water department records, for instance, are about as bulky as those in the finance-records department. Many of them are stored in the city hall attic, cheek-by-jowl with the excess clerk's records.

Lesser amounts of microfilming could be useful for the personnel department, planning, building inspection and others. The police department will start filming soon, but will handle its own program to keep its confidential files confidential. Police personnel will use the existing equipment, however.



The bulky stack of documents held by assistant city finance and records director Ron Beach will shortly be converted to a few feet of microfilm like that held by clerk Linda Carr. In a "retention program" the records

department is just getting into high gear; much of the city's overwhelming volume of paper will be reduced to film with considerable space saved as a result. The machine at left is a microfilm reader-printer. It projects filmed

documents onto the screen so they can be read, and can also produce a photocopy of any filmed document in seconds—the copy pops out of the slot at the top of the machine. ♦ ♦ ♦

Community Congress For Local Progress

Plans for a Congress for Community Progress, a one-day conference on Santa Cruz problems and goals, were announced yesterday by directors of the Greater Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.

Delegates of all community organizations will be asked to participate in the congress, tentatively set this fall.

"This program has been extremely successful in several California communities," said Campbell Armor, chairman of a committee laying groundwork for the project.

A group of local businessmen, community leaders and representatives of organizations will help plan the meeting with the steering committee.

The format of the session calls for panel discussions on



"The congress will help bring together the ideas of many different segments of the community, and these ideas can be molded into a program acceptable to the majority," Armor added.

He pointed out that such meetings elsewhere in the state have brought new leadership to the surface and have provided ways of accomplishing long dormant projects.

"One of our next steps will be to select a chairman for the congress. Then we will send a letter to every local organization asking for its interest and for suggestions for topics," Armor continued.

Tom Ludke, special community representative for Pacific Gas and Electric com-



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original. The decision for each type of document, Beach said, is based on legal requirements, historical value, and manage-



This truckload of city documents was trundled off to a high-speed microfilming camera the other day, and required three days work to be filmed—with a machine that shoots up to 400 pictures a

minute. The end product was six little rolls of microfilm like the one held here by Mrs. Carol Toline, accounting machine operator with the finance and records department.

Got Photos

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