



Office of Public Records/DC Archives & Records Fact Sheet 2022

This fact sheet, compiled for the DC History Conference 2022, provides an overview of the location of DC government records at the Office of Public Records/DC Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and at other repositories. It's designed for researchers, advocates, and politicians as an initial overview. It includes a bibliography (page 6) with selected articles, as well as references to other advocacy groups. The fact sheet is also available for download from the Friends of the DC Archives web site under the [News](#) section.

Pre-1973

* The history of DC's Archives (the Office of Public Records), and the history of DC's government records reflect the complicated history and legal status of the city since home rule in 1973. Until Home Rule in 1973, DC's records, including court records, were managed and housed by NARA. These records remain at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and are described and accessible in various record groups, the most significant being:

* [RG 351: Records of the District of Columbia](#)

* An outline of NARA holdings, 1791 – 1978, in RG 351, can be found in the [Guide to Federal Records](#)

* A detailed inventory published in 1976, of RG 351, Preliminary Inventory 186, by Dorothy Provine, is available online as [Microfilm Publication M248, \(Publications of the National Archives\) Roll 34, frames 219 – 251.](#)

* As an example of archival foresight, the holdings in PI 186, published in 1976, are included in a series described as "[Publications of the National Archives 2001 - 2001.](#)" Some of the holdings in the RG have been microfilmed.

* [RG 21, United States District Courts](#), including the US District Court for the District of Columbia, which served as the local court for DC, in various incarnations, until 1970. For an overview of DC's complicated court system, see: <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/DCCts-timeline.pdf>



After 1973 (Home Rule)

* Congress in 1973 passed the [D.C. Home Rule Act](#) that created the elected mayor and the 13-member legislature, the D.C. Council. Previously, the President appointed commissioners who governed the District with much oversight by Congress. With home rule, DC also gained control over its municipal government records.

* Philip Woodworth Ogilvie fought for the establishment of an independent archives and records management system, and the DC Council passed the [Public Records Management Act of 1985 \(DC Law 6-19\)](#), signed by Mayor Marion Barry. Ogilvie located the space at 1300 Naylor Court, where DC's OPR continues to be located.

* Former Public Records Administrators include: Clarence Davis, Bill Branch (interim), Mark Mandel, and Rebecca Katz.

Where are DC's public records?

* Generally, records remain in the physical and intellectual custody of individual agencies and are maintained – or destroyed – based on [retention schedules](#).

The retention schedules also provide the framework for the transfer of those records to the OPR that are classified for permanent retention. Ideally, these records should be appraised by the responsible officer(s) at the agencies and the OPR.

DC Archives/Office of Public Records: Facts & Figures

* [The Office of Public Records](#) falls under the administration of the Office of the Secretary. The OPR includes the physical archives at Naylor Court (the DC Archives), the District's public records management program, and the Library of Government Information.

For hours and a summary description of the holdings, see: <https://os.dc.gov/service/district-columbia-archives>

Staffing

* The OPR currently has 5 employees (direct reporting), plus one on detail. The new DC State Archivist (beginning in April 2022) is Dr. Lopez Matthews, Jr., the Archivist is William Branch.

The Secretary announced at the 2022/23 budget hearings that one new records management position will be created. Historically, the staffing has varied between 1-14 persons.

Volume

- * Over 45,000 cubic feet on site (there is a box-by-box inventory that doesn't include volume calculations yet).
- * Approx. 162 000 additional cubic feet in federal records storage.
- * The electronic records volume is unknown.

Finding Aids and Accession Lists

- * Types of records at the DC Archives include historical birth, death and marriage records, wills, and land records. While there does not exist a full inventory of the records that have been and are expected to transferred to the DC Archives, there exist a shelf list, without a volume count.
- * Preliminary finding aids and box lists of mostly 20th century records: [Preliminary finding aids and Box lists](#)
- * [Guide to the accession records of the DC Archives](#), compiled as part of the D.C. Africana Archives Project, funded by a CLIR Hidden Collections grant in 2014.
- * An [accession register](#) (only partially identical with the accession records made accessible through the DC Africana Archives Project).

Reporting

- * The most complete report on the Office of Public Records/DC Archives was compiled by Rebecca Katz (the previous Public Records Administrator) and archives staff during the tenure of Secretary Lauren Vaughan: [Secretary Vaughan's 2018 testimony and report](#)

Mayor's Records

- * Archivists distinguish between personal records of a mayor and public records. The line is fluid, even in the best of circumstances, and mayor's records are often dispersed among different repositories, if they have been preserved at all.

Walter Washington and Sharon Pratt Dixon Kelly donated their personal papers to Howard University, while (some) files from their administrations are at the DC Archives.

Walter Washington papers at Howard University and at the DC Archives

- * Howard University/MSRC: [Finding aid to the Walter Washington papers](#)
- * OPR: [Preliminary finding aid for the subject files of Walter Washington at the OPR](#)

Sharon Pratt Dixon Kelly

* Howard University/MSRC: [Finding aid to Sharon Pratt Dixon Kelly papers](#)

Marion Barry, Jr.

* [Accession registry](#) for the papers of Mayor and Councilmember Marion Barry at the OPR.

* [Accession registry](#) for photographs from the Barry Administration at the OPR.

Anthony A. Williams

* Records from the Williams administration are at the OPR (DCA-16-0005), but the level of description is unknown and no finding aid is available online.

Adrian Fenty

* There are few records from the Fenty administration, and much concern about losses since the administration aggressively transitioned to electronic records, while the District did not have a electronic records preservation plan.

Vincent C. Gray

* The OPR/DC Archives have materials from Mayor Gray's Administration, but the level of description is unknown and there exists no finding aid yet.

* The status of the records from the Anthony Williams administration is unclear, and Mayor Bowser have not donated their personal papers to a repository (yet).

DC Delegates to Congress/Senate

- Walter Fauntroy, D.C. Delegate in Congress, 1971-91, gave his [papers](#) to George Washington University, <https://searcharchives.library.gwu.edu/repositories/2/resources/245>

DC Council

Councilmembers

* The Special Collections Research Center at Gelman Library holds a large collection of Washingtoniana and DC Council Records, as well as the papers from a range of councilmembers, including Carol Schwartz, Jim Graham, Linda Cropp, David Clarke, Nadine Winter, Polly Shackleton, John Wilson, Frank Smith, and others. For an overview, see [Gelman's Council of DC Resources page](#).

* The OPR only holds records from Councilmembers Graham and Barry.

* DCPLs [People's Archive](#), including the Washingtoniana collection, includes the papers of DC Council members, including the Council records from [Hilda Mason](#) and [Arrington Dixon](#)

Council and Committee Records

* Early Council records are at Naylor Court, and DC's official legislative records are housed at the DC Records Center (and should be transferred to the custody of the OPR).

* Committee records remain in the custody of the committees – it is unknown whether any committee records have ever been transferred to the OPR.

Court Records

* Courts historically manage their own records, but in most US states selected historical records are transferred into the custody of state archives. DCs historical court records (US District Court) are managed by NARA, RG 21.

* Records from DC's Superior Court and the Court of Appeals are currently at the Office of Public Records as well as at the Federal Records Center. They remain in the custody of the courts and have to be requested through the courts.

* Probate records: The OPR holds probate administrative records, which are only partially indexed.

* Other court records: Other 19th century records that were partially indexed by former archivist Dorothy Provine.

Portals

* The only access portal so far that provides consolidated access to the finding aids of different collections is the DC [Africana Archives Project](#), concluded in 2017. The George Washington University's [Special Collections Research Center](#) and [Africana Studies Program](#) joined with five partner archives throughout the city, including the DC Archives, to enhance access to research materials documenting the history of the African diaspora in DC, the civil rights movements, the struggle for Home Rule, the rise of Black-owned businesses, the development of Howard University, slavery in the nation's capital, jazz music in D.C., and the literary arts.

And Many Other Collections

Other resources include the substantial collections [D.C. History Center](#), and the D.C. Public Library (see the "Dig DC" and "People's Archives" [collections](#)).

New Facility Planning

Note: Some progress has been made on the planning of the new facility on the UDC Campus, currently budgeted at \$73 million, but much work remains to be done and major concerns about the lack of planning remain. For updates, including links to current testimonies, please consult the Council's [DC Archives Advisory Group](#), the [DC Archives Advocates](#) and our website: [Friends of the DC Archives](#).

*Council passed legislation to establish the Archives Advisory Group in 2018 and the group was sworn in in 2021. The establishment of the group was an important step toward the development of a new state-of-the-art facility for the DC Archives. Much work remains to be done.

* Over the past decades, many groups and individuals have advocated for the improvement of the DC Archives and a new facility over the past decades, including MARAC.

* For a detailed timeline of the planning of the new facility, planned on the UDC campus for a budget currently set at \$73 million, see the FDCA website: <https://www.dcarchives.org/facility-planning.html>

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Selected Bibliography

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Other selected news articles and op-eds available on the FDCA website: <https://www.dcarchives.org/news-coverage.html>

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