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## What Are Affiliated Archives?

**T**he Affiliated Archives Program of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) offers an alternative to the usual physical transfer of permanent historical records into a NARA facility. This program authorizes the records creating agency to maintain and keep records at a non-NARA facility using non-NARA staff as long as they are maintained to NARA standards and made available to the public. The National Park Service has successfully participated in the affiliated archives program since the mid 1970s through its Yellowstone National Park archives and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) collection.

The Archivist of the United States is authorized to establish affiliated archives under the provision of 44 USC 2107. Applicants for affiliation with NARA may be other federal agencies or state and private institutions. The process of affiliation is usually initiated by the applicant and begins with the submission of a formal application to the Archivist. There follows a period of internal NARA review and discussion and then negotiations with the applicant. If the request is approved, the Archivist places on deposit the permanent federal records, which have been previously accessioned into the National Archives of the United States, at the designated non-NARA facility. **As a result of this transaction, the affiliated archives receives physical custody of the records, while NARA retains legal custody and, along with it, ultimate responsibility for them.**

For this privilege, the affiliate, through a formal memorandum of agreement with NARA, agrees to house, maintain, and service the records in

accordance with pertinent federal laws and appropriate NARA regulations and archival and facility standards. Essentially, the records are to be treated like any other records comprising the National Archives of the United States, and their status, as such, is seen in their inclusion in NARA's reference guides and listings. The affiliate also is responsible for all costs associated with establishing and maintaining the records and archival facility and for providing a qualified archivist to administer them. NARA may terminate the agreement if the affiliate fails to meet its obligations.

The Federal Records Act of 1950, which first authorized affiliated archives, was passed at a time when NARA had no regional archival operations and no field presence, other than for the lone Roosevelt Presidential Library at Hyde Park, New York. Upon accessioning by NARA, all permanent historical records came from the creating agency to the National Archives Building on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC. **In time, it was recognized that there were instances when permanent historical records, because of peculiar local interests and uses, ought to remain locally.** The Federal Records Act, by authorizing the establishment of affiliated archives, provided the Archivist with an alternative to the centralization of all permanent historical records in Washington. The first affiliate was established in 1953 at the US Military Academy at West Point.

It was found, however, that because of their specialized nature, as well as a certain NARA reluctance to establish them, affiliated archives offered only a partial solution to the problem of regionalization of archival records. Consequently, in 1969, NARA established a nationwide system of regional archival facilities, which have now grown to 13 in number, to house and make available records of local interest. Their presence in major metropolitan areas across the country has ended the need for affiliated archives as simply an archival storage alternative to NARA in Washington.

Today, affiliated archives are established only under special circumstances when the value of records to their users will be significantly enhanced by their deposit at a non-NARA facility, although other factors may occasionally come into play.

The Yellowstone National Park Archives, which became an affiliated archives in July 1978, illustrates this program's rationale. Researchers at the Yellowstone National Park Archives clearly

*Albright Visitor Center, Yellowstone National Park. Photo courtesy Yellowstone National Park.*



benefit from being able to use the park's records in the physical setting in which they were created, and to which they relate, and from the availability of the park's cultural resources complex. Among these research resources are related materials found in the park's manuscript collection, in its extensive library holdings, in its non-federal photo and map collections, and in its museum's holdings. Another advantage is the availability of the park's knowledgeable staff.

At Yellowstone, researchers also benefit from the proximity of the records to Montana State University, which, through its Library's Special Collections, makes available its significant holdings of greater Yellowstone papers and books, which expands upon and supplements the park archival holdings. The University's faculty and student body, moreover, with their interest in Yellowstone, constitute a focused and continuing source of researcher interest. A similar value enhancement occurs to the records found at the other affiliated archives.

There are currently seven affiliated archives, four of which are at federal agencies and three at state-operated institutions. The first affiliate, as previously noted, was established at West Point in 1953; the most recent, the Hartranft, which was opened by the Archivist in May 1995 at the Pennsylvania State Archives. The latter's establishment is unusual in that it resulted directly from the settlement of a legal issue involving their ownership. **The federal affiliates are found at:**

- Yellowstone National Park Archives
  - Records of Yellowstone National Park
  - Record Group: National Park Service (RG 79)
- HABS/HAER Division, National Park Service, and the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress
  - Historic American Engineering Record (HAER)
  - Record Group: HABS/HAER (RG 515)
- United States Military Academy Archives
  - Record Group: United States Military Academy (RG 404)
  - William W. Jeffries Memorial Archives, U.S. Naval Academy
  - Record Group: United States Naval Academy (RG 405)

**The state operated affiliated archives are at:**

- Oklahoma Historical Society
  - Records of the Five Civilized Tribes and of Other Indian Tribes of Oklahoma
  - Record Group: Bureau of Indian Affairs (RG 75)
- New Mexico State Records Center and Archives
  - Land Records of New Mexico
  - Record Group: Bureau of Land Management (RG 49)

- State Archives, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
  - Records of General John Frederick Hartranft
  - Record Group: US Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920 (RG 393)

In 1995, NARA established a Task Force on Affiliated Archives to consider their future. The Task Force report reaffirmed their place in NARA's archival program and suggested ways for strengthening and improving the program. NARA's 1997 Strategic Plan also addresses affiliated archives' role in a positive fashion, looking toward their possible use in handling certain large electronic records databases. There is the possibility of several new affiliates coming into being over the next few years. One now under consideration is for certain large scientific databases maintained at an agency data center. Another possibility is for a traditional affiliate at a military staff college. Encouragingly, there also have been exploratory discussions with NPS staff regarding the establishment of new affiliates within NPS, focusing in particular on the great western parks, as was originally envisioned 20 years ago when the Yellowstone affiliated archives was established.

Since 1989, NARA has had a formal program for overseeing and supporting affiliated archives activities. As NARA's liaison, I maintain frequent contact with affiliated archives personnel and, in turn, serve as their contact point within NARA. My principal concern is in providing assistance and guidance in areas of archival administration and in ensuring that the provisions of our joint agreements are met. Benefiting the affiliates are periodic meetings with NARA staff specialists to discuss issues and matters of mutual interest and the archival training provided, usually gratis, to affiliated archives archivists and archives technicians. Affiliated archives personnel are also free to call on NARA specialists for assistance, as, for example, in the areas of preservation or in planning a new facility or moving archival holdings.

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