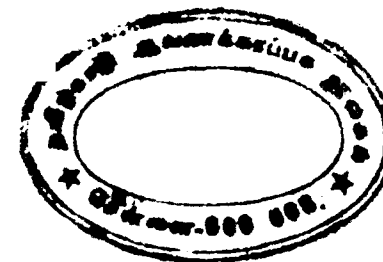


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THE MADRAS RECORD OFFICE by Dr. B. S. Baliga

Introductory

MADRAS occupies a unique place in archive administration in India. It was perhaps the first among the States to realise the administrative and historical value of archives; it was certainly the first to organize a Central Record Office. So long ago as 1806 Lord William Bentinck centralised the Secretariat records in Fort St. George which were till then scattered in the various Departments and appointed a Record Keeper to look after them, to arrange them properly, and to issue them promptly on requisition to the various Departments for reference; and in 1871 and 1893 the Government employed William Huddleston and A. T. Pringle respectively to publish selections from, and publications *in extenso* of, old records. But this was only the beginning of archive consciousness. A real start was made in 1909 when a separate office was established to organize all the important archives of the State in a systematic manner. Since then it has become possible to centralise a large number of important series of records, to house them properly, to preserve and mend them on up-to-date lines, to throw them open for historical research, to publish regularly such of them as are of historical interest, and to make them readily available for official reference in carrying on the day-to-day administration of the State.

Repository

The Record Office building situated in a spacious compound, in Egmore, consists of an Administrative Block and nine large Record Blocks connected to it by corridors. The Administrative Block and six Record Blocks were constructed in 1909; the seventh Record Block was built

1927 and the eighth and the ninth Blocks were added in 1938. Each of the Record Blocks is about 30 to 40 feet wide and 100 to 120 feet long. The entire building is of solid construction. Some idea of the capacity of the Record Blocks can be obtained when it is realized that their floor area is more than 50,000 square feet and their stack area more than 160,000 cubic feet. Special arrangements have been made in these Blocks to provide proper shelving, plenty of light and air and effective protection against insect pests, thefts and outbreaks of fire. In the older Blocks the record racks, both the uprights and shelves, are wholly made of galvanised iron or polished teak wood; in the new Blocks the racks are made of iron uprights and teak wood shelves since wood is kinder to records and eliminates all danger from rust, sweating and buckling. All iron racks are painted white. The racks are as a rule 3 feet deep, 10 to 15 feet long and 22 feet high. Except in one Block, which has two floors, in all Blocks the tall racks are partitioned into three sections by grated steel gangways constructed above the ground floor. This provides good vertical ventilation and light. In all Blocks the racks are arranged on either side of a 7 feet wide central passage at right angles to it leaving a sub-passage 3 feet wide between each rack, and each of these sub-passages, both on the ground floor and on the upper tiers, is lighted by a window. This arrangement secures rows of windows facing each other on each floor on either side of the whole length of the Block. The central passage in the Block is purposely made wide to allow the records being easily carried on trollies to any part of the ground floor; and the gangways are provided with openings through which the records can be taken to the upper tiers more easily than by the staircases provided at either end of the tiers.

There are on the whole more than 1,000 windows in the Blocks. Additional ventilation is secured by ceiling and exhaust fans and cowls and window ventilators. Save in one Block, which is fitted with special type of windows of reinforced glass, the windows in all the Blocks on both the ground floors and the upper tiers are fitted with glazed shutters and iron bars. As an additional protection all the ground floor windows are provided with steel shutters. The walls of the Blocks in most cases are covered with glazed tiles to prevent dust, damp, and danger of white ants; and the floors are made of cement concrete or Cuddapah slabs. The joinings of the walls and floors both in the Blocks and in the corridors are rounded off with cement to prevent cracks and entry of white ants and to facilitate cleaning. All the buildings are watched during the night and out of office hours by a resident watchman and an assistant watchman, and their duties are checked with the help of a tell-tale clock. At the

entrances to the Blocks and at other convenient places are kept hand fire engines, stirrup pumps, chemical fire extinguishers and buckets of sand and water. All the Blocks are provided with iron doors and iron fire escapes and all round the Blocks in the compound are located a number of fire hydrants connected to the city's water supply. These hydrants are intended chiefly for the use of the public fire engines which can be summoned in an emergency. There are also large static water tanks in the office compound. The whole staff of the office is regularly trained in the use of the fire fighting equipment.

Records Centralised

In this building, so carefully designed and safeguarded, are centralised many important series of records of this State. Here have been brought together all the records of the various departments of the Secretariat, non-confidential as well as confidential, from 1670 down to 1948; of the Board of Revenue and the Survey Office from the beginning down to about 1940; of the District Collectors from the earliest times down to 1857; of the defunct departments; and all the 'strong room' documents, such as documents of the land mortgage banks and co-operative societies, bonds, covenants, agreements, etc. All the electoral rolls of the recently held elections in the entire State are now being deposited here; and to the office will also be shortly transferred all the old records of the merged states of Sandur, Banganapalle and Pudukkottai. The office not only centralises as far as possible all the important series of records but also exercises supervision over all other non-current series of records left with the heads of departments. It receives an annual report on the condition of these records and offers help and advice for their preservation, mending and weeding.

Arrangement, Cataloguing, Dusting, etc.

The records placed in the custody of the Office are, as far as possible, properly arranged, catalogued, and preserved. The arrangement adopted is strictly departmental and chronological; i.e., the bundles or volumes of records of each Department are separately arranged in chronological order and no attempt is made to have any subject classification. Records in the shape of bound volumes are kept horizontally on the shelves so as to prevent sagging and to eliminate the strain on the backings. Those that are in the shape of files are generally placed between teak wood boards, made up into bundles of convenient size and kept vertically on the shelves. This arrangement of records on open racks, though it exposes

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them to dust, affords them plenty of light and ventilation which protects them from the triple danger of dampness, growth of fungus and breeding of insects. Strong-room documents like bonds, deeds, etc., are kept for safety in almirahs but these are frequently aired and are provided with air-holes. They are also periodically coated on the inside with creosote or cresol or izal to ward off insect-pests. Maps and plans are kept in specially designed map-cabinets but they too are periodically aired and provided with naphthalene balls or D.D.T. powder to keep away pests. A few of the records are kept in cartons provided with naphthalene balls. In all cases printed slips indicating the department, the year and the month to which the records belong are pasted on the volumes, bundles, cartons, etc., to facilitate their identification. The records are periodically dusted by means of vacuum cleaners and soft and wide hand-brushes.

Every series of records is catalogued. There are printed catalogues of the records of the pre-Mutiny period and manuscript catalogues of the records of the subsequent period. The catalogues are maintained up-to-date by making entries in them promptly as soon as the new accessions are received. New accessions of the Secretariat records are received regularly every year; of the Board of Revenue records, periodically. The Secretariat keeps only the last three years' records and the Board of Revenue, the last ten years' records. Other offices, like the offices of the Co-operative Department transfer their strong-room documents as and when the documents come into being. It may also be mentioned here that for the important series of records, such as the Secretariat and Board of Revenue records, the Office possesses printed indexes by the aid of which the records of any department bearing on any subject dealt with in any period can be traced without much difficulty. These indexes, however, are not prepared by the Office; they are prepared by the departments themselves and sent along with the records.

Mending and Preservation

[One of the main functions of an archival repository is repairing and reconditioning records. The Madras Record Office is provided with a well-equipped mending unit and arrangements have been made not merely or carrying out routine repair work but also for scientific treatment of the most fragile and badly damaged papers. Every sheet of paper and every volume in the collections receive special attention and their rehabilitation work is done in accordance with their individual requirements. It will be out of place here to describe the methods of repair and

reinforcing of paper records which are practised in most of the well-organized record-offices in India as well as foreign countries.

It must, however, be stated in this connection that the mending papers used in this Office are of hand made varieties (Whatman 14½ lbs., Hodgkinson 18 lbs., Pale Buff 32 lbs. manufactured by Arnold and Porter & Co.) and that the paste used is prepared out of wheat flour mixed with 2 per cent of mercuric chloride as a repellent against record pests. It must also be remarked that this office does not do any mending with Japanese tissue paper, since experience has shown that such mending, after a lapse of some years, makes the documents brittle, dark and opaque. The Office normally uses chiffon for strengthening brittle papers. It has no records in its custody which are infested with record pests like borers and silverfish and has not felt the need so far of resorting to fumigation in any shape.]

Mending and reconditioning of a very large number of manuscript volumes of records and loose files in the bundles has been completed. All the volumes of the Secretariat records from 1670 to 1800 and some of the volumes of the same series from 1800 to 1857 have already been mended and re-bound. The Office has also mended and re-bound hundreds of volumes of the District records, the Mayor's Court records, the Dutch and Danish records and a large number of maps, plans, etc. It is now engaged in mending and reconditioning the records of the Secretariat, the Board of Revenue and other offices of the period 1800 to 1857 and in flattening and repairing all the damaged Government Orders of the modern period and it takes particular care to see that no records are sent out on requisition unless they are fit for handling. All flattened files are provided with manilla dockets and all mended volumes are re-bound in green art canvas or cloth covers.

Encouragement of Historical Research

Another important duty of this Office is that of making records available for historical research. For this purpose revised rules have been recently issued throwing open all records, including confidential records, down to 1902 for *bona fide* historical research. Only the last fifty years' records are withheld from research, but, even among these records, those that have been published for general information are made available to researchers. Research scholars and students, men as well as women, are provided with proper accommodation and facilities. Those who cannot undertake the examination of the records in person can get copies of the records they require by paying a moderate search fee and a transcription

fee; the search and transcription in such cases are undertaken by the Office. In order, however, to ensure that the permission to consult the records for historical research is not misused, notes taken by the research students are required to be submitted for the inspection of the Curator and he has been given full discretion to withhold such portions of the notes as are either irrelevant or objectionable on public grounds. Many scholars and university students come to the Office to do research, but considering that the field is vast and the portion yet covered by research is negligible, it is to be hoped that more and more scholars will come to explore the archives. It may be repeated that Madras archives are of immense bulk, and that they afford invaluable materials for research alike in the political, social, economic and administrative history of the State.

Publications from Old Records

In order to encourage and assist historical research the Office has also undertaken the preparation and publication of Press-lists, Guides, Publications *in extenso*, Calendars and Selections. The Office possesses printed indexes for all series of important records supplied by the departments themselves. Press-lists, however, have been prepared and published by the Office for all series of records of the period 1670 to 1800. Guides have been prepared and published for all District records down to 1835. Publications *in extenso* have been issued in the case of all volumes from 1670 to 1750, numbering more than 300; and they are now being issued in the case of all volumes of the period 1751 to 1765. Calendars have been compiled and published for certain records of the period 1740 to 1765; and they are now being compiled for the Revenue Records of 1765 to 1800. Selections are now being made from the records of the Judicial Department of the period 1800 to 1857. It has also been proposed to issue Selections from the records of all departments of the pre-Mutiny period. Besides these works some old Dutch records and Ananda Ranga Pillai's Diary have also been published.¹

Supply of Records for Administrative Purposes

The functions of the Madras Record Office are not confined to centralisation, safe keeping and preservation of records and making them available for historical research. Its duties demand that it should be vitally interested in the administration of the State. For it has to furnish daily

¹ A complete list of the publications of the Office can be had on request from the Curator, Madras Record Office, Egmore, Madras.



The Madras Record Office

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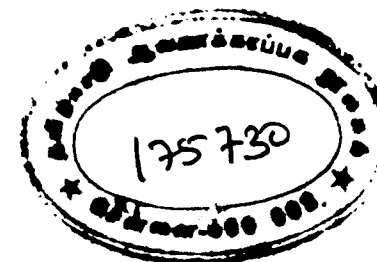
THE MADRAS RECORDS

information and records to the various departments of the Secretariat, the Board of Revenue, the Courts, the Collectors and other heads of departments on all sorts of matters that arise in the day-to-day administration of the State. The volume of work turned out in this connection is very large. Every year, more than 17,000 calls for information and records are dealt with in the Office and more than 35,000 documents are furnished in answer to these calls. About 500 to 750 searches on intricate or important matters are also annually undertaken by the Office, some of them covering more than a century of records and all of them demanding careful investigation. There is no subject too small or too big which is not referred to this Office for elucidation. The subjects vary from individual claims to public policies. Indeed, no public policy can be revised, no important change in any branch of administration introduced, without a study of the records available in this Office. On all important subjects the records are not only traced and studied by this Office but comprehensive notes based upon them are written and submitted. Such notes have been prepared on a variety of subjects ranging from political claims to reforms in land revenue and judicial administration. They have invariably been found very useful by the Government and several of them have been recently published for official use in two volumes under the title of "*Studies in Madras Administration*". It will thus be seen that the Office does a lot to assist the general administration of the State. The Office maintains special registers for entering requisitions for records, their issue and their restoration. This system ensures that no records are lost or misplaced.

Supply of Records to the Public

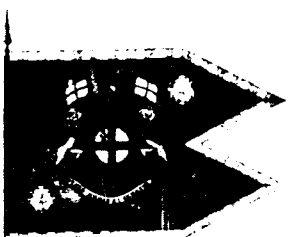
It is also the duty of this Office to help all those private persons who seek the aid of records to uphold their legal rights. Although it does not deal directly with private parties, it conducts hundreds of searches every year to dispose of applications for copies of documents received through the Board of Revenue. It also receives from the Board of Revenue and the Collectors summonses issued by the Civil Courts for production of the records required for trying civil suits. It is also very often approached by private individuals for documents containing genealogical data about their ancestors.

B. S. BALIGA



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Musters of the Ornaments of the Engineers Dress, from Vol. 72 of *Regimental Records, Madras Army Records—Series III (b)*.



Old Regimental Flags of the Madras Army from Vol. 72 of *Regimental Records, Madras Army Records—Series III (b)*.