

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC RECORDS

“Public records are public property, owned by the people in the same sense that the citizens own their courthouse or town hall, sidewalks and streets, funds in the treasury. They are held in trust for the citizens...As public property, public records may no more be altered, defaced, mutilated, or removed from custody than public funds may be embezzled or misappropriated. Indeed, because [public] records document the conduct of the public’s business – including the protection of rights, privileges, and public property of individual citizens (and the county) – they constitute a species of public property of a higher value than the buildings, equipment, and even money, all of which usually can be replaced by the simple resort to additional taxes. *It is the unique and irreplaceable nature of records that give them a sanctity uncharacteristic of other kinds of property and that account for the emergence of common-law principles governing their protection.*”

Jones, H.G., *Local Government Records: An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History), 1980, pp. 23-24.