have moved from the use of bulky folders devoted to individuals to coded file cards, thence to punch cards that can be machine sorted, then to the tape used in electronic memory banks. And now the experts are learning that it is feasible to hook up a number of electronic memory banks, data banks, to one giant system which can be activated for purposes of inserting or retrieving information from numerous locations.

Records on individual Americans now number in the billions. We leave a trail of records behind us from the moment of birth. Our birth, incidentally, is recorded not only on a birth certificate, but also on our parent's income tax return when we became a deductible item.

Consider for a moment this trail of records most of us leave. Non-Government filekeepers have, for example, the information on our income, worth of home, debts, and location of our bank which we often surrender when we apply for credit. Then there are the reports made to insurance companies investigating us as risks. This may involve an appraisal of our social life and our sex life as well as our financial stability. There are the employment files that may be complete with results of personality inventories and lie detector tests. There are hospital and medical records, and the records of the moving companies that have prudently made an inventory of our possessions being moved.

Units of our State and local governments have our school records including our grades, IQ, and any reports of emotional difficulties. At least one of them will have our driving record, any brushes with the law, our property holdings and all licenses obtained, including any for marriage or its dissolution.

The Federal Government has our tax returns over a number of years, our responses to the increasingly lengthy census questionnaries, our social security record, our application for a passport, and perhaps our fingerprints. If we have been in military service, worked for a defense contractor or for the Federal Government, there are lengthy files on us that may well indicate known associates, affiliations, religious beliefs. If we have applied for an FHA loan on a home there will usually be an estimate of the prospects that our marriage will hold together.

These are just a few of the records we leave behind. Many of the filekeepers have been quick to learn that the records they control may hold considerable interest for people outside their own organization. Years after our birth, for example, an interested party such as a lawyer may be happy to pay $50 for information from our birth certificate, which officially is confidential information. And in a number of cities there are entrepreneurs happy to obtain and sell the information, as well as hospital records, police records, immigration records, passport records, and so on.

Then there are the legitimate organizations engaged in selling personal information about us. The credit bureaus circulate to members the information that we give a store when we seek credit; and if there is any interest the same information may be passed on to curious Federal investigative agencies that inquire. Also there are the giant investigating enterprises such as the Retail Credit Co. which has openly assured prospective clients that it can strengthen any report it makes by drawing from its vast file of investigations made