

PAUL R. CAMPBELL
City Archivist



City of Providence
Division of Archives and History

Memorandum

TO: ANNA STETSON, CITY CLERK
FROM: PAUL R. CAMPBELL, CITY ARCHIVIST
DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 2010
RE: AUGUST 2010 MONTHLY REPORT

P.C.

A major focus of our activities during the month of August centered around records management issues. We began implementing a plan to survey all records storage areas within City Hall with the intention of eliminating all records that have exceeded their retention period. This month alone, we were able to eliminate approximately 300 boxes of non-permanent records, principally from the basement storage area. We have begun working with a number of departments, however, our effort in August centered on the Tax Collectors office.

In addition to reducing the volume of records stored at City Hall, we also made significant progress in adding additional storage space. One section of the Atrium was cleared of boxes, cleaned and we are now in the process of installing 320 linear feet of new shelving. Following the completion of this project, we will initiate a similar plan in the adjacent Atrium storage area.

I continue to work with a volunteer on preparations for a large NHPRC grant to catalog, preserve and make available on-line the archives' substantial collections of blueprints, plat plans and maps. We have had discussions with the State Archivist and staff at the NHPRC regarding the proposed application. I hope to include records currently stored at the Recorder of Deeds Office and the City Engineers Office in the grant. I visited the latter office this month and performed a preliminary survey of records there. Many are heavily used and have suffered from continuous handling and, in some instances, poor storage conditions. The basement storage area houses valuable collections stored in under very adverse environmental conditions.

Our summer employee Meaghan Spillane concluded her work here at the end of the month. She assisted us with shelf reading our printed collection and created inventories of Alderman and Providence Reform School records. While working on these inventories, she placed these early records in acid-free boxes and folders to protect them from further deterioration. Our temporary employee, Joan Peterson, began her service with us the first week in August. She has helped us dramatically accelerate our cataloging. Here we are planning to develop an on-line catalog which will be an invaluable aid to researchers. We have also begun a top to bottom cleaning of the archives reading room.

I have spent considerable time in developing plans for a web site with a series of features designed to drastically improve search capability, scan important documents and collections, and provide detailed finding aids to our collections (among other features). The analysis of other archives web sites evolved into an examination of software platforms that would support our document storage and search criteria. Here we have received technical support from Richard Weinberg in this evaluation process. Currently we are conducting discussions with West-Coast based Eloquent Solutions who have developed a specific software solutions product for special libraries and archives. The staff is working with the IT Department on specifications for a flat bed scanner that, if purchased, could help preserve fragile documents while at the same time making them available to researchers around the globe. We have also identified a number of bound records for rebinding and are now working with two bookbinders on a stepped-up preservation binding plan.

We have initiated work on an emergency/disaster plan. With chronic roof leaks continuing, we have covered all potentially affected areas with plastic sheeting. In making preparations for the end-of-the month tropical storm the staff made a remarkable discovery in the basement. Nearly hidden in a small storeroom in the northwest corner of the basement we found approximately 30 boxes, some heavily damaged, of 18th and early 19th century town and city records. Highlights among the records found were original and unedited minutes of Town Council Meetings from the period 1789-1800 and petitions (some for slave manumissions). Another manuscript contained a hand-written vote tally of freemen in the town in 1832 regarding the issue of whether to adopt a city charter. We have removed these records and are in the process of placing them in acid-free boxes and folders. I am very pleased with our progress to date.

IN CITY COUNCIL
OCT - 7 2010

READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED

Charmaine Bate CLERK