

PAUL R. CAMPBELL  
City Archivist



City of Providence  
Division of Archives and History

**Memorandum**

TO: ANNA STETSON, CITY CLERK  
FROM: PAUL CAMPBELL, CITY ARCHIVIST *P.C.*  
DATE: MAY 17, 2011  
RE: QUARTERLY REPORT, JANUARY 1 – MARCH 31, 2011

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The archive's records management initiative continued to be a major focus of operations during this period. Our staff worked with the Collector's, Controller's, and Treasurer's offices on reducing the volume of non-permanent records in their respective offices. In addition, we continued to make significant progress in reducing the volume of records in the basement storage areas of City Hall. More than 200 boxes of records were shredded, allowing the remaining records to be removed from the floor and stored on shelving. We were also able to remove large volumes of records that cluttered these offices. Another round of records removal is being scheduled for July which will further reduce the volume of records stored at City Hall and in basement storage areas. This pro-active records destruction program will save the city money by reducing the number of records placed in off-site storage.

The second element of the records management program involved a complete review of records current stored at NOVA, the city's records storage vendor. At this time, nearly 6,000 cubic feet of city records are stored there. Unfortunately, a number of boxes stored there have little or no labeling making it difficult to determine whether many of these records are permanent or non-permanent. We have begun a process of retrieving boxes of records in batches of 100 from NOVA for review. Of the 105 boxes retrieved from NOVA during this quarter, 101 boxes were determined to be non-permanent and were destroyed. Continuing this process, we hope to stabilize or possibly reduce future records storage costs.

In January, the archives added another 350 linear feet of new storage capacity. This compliments an equal expansion that took place last fall. This additional space will allow the archives to store records on site, again reducing costs for storage and retrieval. We are also continuing to implement a major organization of records that have been stored here for decades. Interns and staff have begun to process a large collection of 19<sup>th</sup>

century City Council and Board of Aldermen records. These important records detail the remarkable growth and development of our city but have been unavailable for research.

Preservation of materials under the archives care is another important priority. We have continued to conduct a systematic cleaning of all shelving areas and are re-boxing records in acid-free folders and boxes. Security copies of important documents have been either transferred to our off-site storage facility or, in some cases, copies have been given to the RI State Archives. We have also begun the process of repairing and encapsulating Providence city atlas maps in mylar sleeves, preventing their further deterioration. During this period, the 1875 and 1882 atlases were encapsulated. Our conservation bookbinding program is helping to preserve valuable vital record, census, and early town record volumes. A special cradle to protect paintings has been constructed and a condition assessment of the mayoral painting collection was completed.

In addition to servicing the records needs of various city departments, the city archives serves a diverse group of researchers. This group includes lawyers, title attorneys, historians, genealogists, house researchers, engineers, archaeologists and large groups of students from area colleges. We also regularly host city hall and/or archives tours. In March, we began working with a group of Brown University graduate students on an exhibit to be staged at City Hall in May. This exhibit will commence the city's celebration of its 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The city archivist has also assembled nearly two dozen historians who are writing topical essays on various aspects of the city's history. These essays will be published in the *Providence Journal* during the course of the year. The archives' newly established web site is generating an increasing amount of traffic and we are adding collection descriptions and finding aids to the site to facilitate research.

During this period we utilized interns provided by the West Bay Collaborative and the MET School and discussions are now underway with area colleges to provide interns for the long list of projects in the archives pipeline. Our principal problem remains water penetration during rainstorms in a number of areas. December storms damaged records in our blueprint room as well as bound records stored in the Recorder of Deeds storage area. Water now regularly cascades down the west wall of the archives reading room area during storms. Plans are apparently being develop to address this problem sometime during the summer. We are hopeful that this much-needed roof repair will take place.

IN CITY COUNCIL  
JUN - 2 2011

READ  
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT  
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

 CLERK