

PAUL R. CAMPBELL
City Archivist



City of Providence
Division of Archives and History

Memorandum

TO: ANNA STETSON, CITY CLERK
FROM: PAUL CAMPBELL, CITY ARCHIVIST
DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2010
RE: OCTOBER 2010 MONTHLY REPORT

Patron use trends at the City Archives continue to rise. In October, 130 patrons used the city archives collections, up 37% from the prior month and more than double that recorded two months ago. Besides genealogists, engineers, title examiners, and historians, we had a large influx of students, primarily from Brown University, New England Institute of technology and the Rhode Island School of Design who used our facilities. We also fielded a number of requests for documents, primarily from the City Clerk's office and answered a number of written, phone and e-mail inquiries.

Our citywide records management initiative gained added momentum with our hosting of a special workshop on records management practices on October 27th. Staff from the State Archives conducted a power point presentation on proper procedures for storing, labeling, and, in some cases, preparing records for destruction. There was also considerable discussion on electronic records. This very successful workshop was attended by 41 city employees from a variety of departments. We would like to acknowledge the strong support given us by Gwenn Stearn, Rhode Island State Archivist and her staff. Follow up workshops are being planned. Staff spent considerable time working with staff in the Controller's and Assessor's offices to identify records that had exceeded their useful retention. Our plan is to reduce the volume of records stored in the basement of City Hall as well as in the records storage facility in West Warwick. During the past three months alone we shredded or destroyed more than 400 boxes of records. This process will continue in ensuing months. 320 linear feet of new shelving in the archives is now in place and we have ordered an equal amount of shelving for the Atrium storage area.

In October the City Archivist attended a disaster planning workshop, and we have begun work on a "dplan" for the archives. We have also purchased a "React Pak" that contains supplies needed should a flood or other disaster occur. Our training in this area was put to use after a weekend flood (October 23/24) in the City Engineer's Office damaged a number of records stored in their basement. Staff from the City & State Archives teamed up to remove records from affected areas, dried books, and identified those damaged records that could be eligible for destruction. This incident illustrates once again the

danger of storing records in basement areas. I have contacted the City Engineer with the strong suggestion that little used archival records in their basement be moved to the City Archives for safe keeping.

Our effort to preserve books and other records continues. We now have two restoration bookbinders who are at work cleaning and repairing bound volumes, some dating from the pre-Revolutionary period. Archives staff has also begun a treatment program for leather bindings that seeks to prevent further deterioration by applying a stabilizer along with a moisturizing agent. Some of our earliest documents, many dating to the settlement of the town in the mid-17th century, are in poor condition. Here I have begun working with specialists at the Northeast Documents Conservation Center on a specific treatment plan for these rare and historically important documents. Cleaning of all storage areas continues.

The City Archivist met with Congressman Langevin regarding our proposed federal grant and received enthusiastic support from him. I have also contacted Senator Reed's office. The archives' cataloging initiative continues and we are hopeful that we can purchase a catalog/management software platform used by other archives programs that will greatly improve our development of finding aids and make them available to a wide audience. We are also working towards development of a web site.

In April of this year a Special Commission to Study Archival Storage made seventeen recommendations to improve conditions at the City Archives. I am happy to report that during the past six months some form of action has been taken on 13 of the 17 recommendations. They are:

- Ensuring budget for preservation of archival material
- Pass ordinance to centralize records retention (accomplished without an ordinance)
- Schedule regular cleaning
- Restrict copying of fragile material
- Consider off-site storage of paintings (accomplishing this goal without resorting to off-site storage)
- Limit use of scanners
- Update job descriptions
- Re-establish document retrieval tracking system
- Re-establish accessioning system
- Develop a master plan
- Install lockers
- Centralize records management function with Deputy Archivist
- Explore funding sources

Two of the remaining four recommendations are beyond the control of the City Archivist to effectuate; relocation of city archives, and conducting an engineering study to determine roof leakage. The latter remains an ongoing threat to the stability of the building and the records stored beneath its dome.

IN CITY COUNCIL
DEC 2 - 2010

READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.
Ann M. Slot CLERK