



# **Report of the Special Commission to Study Archival Storage**

**City of Providence**

**April 2010**

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2007-2011**

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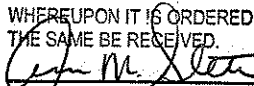
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**REPORT  
OF THE  
SPECIAL COMMISSION  
TO STUDY  
ARCHIVAL STORAGE  
CITY OF PROVIDENCE**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Special Commission to Study Archival Storage (hereafter Commission) was established by Resolution of the Providence City Council on June 11, 2009. Since that time the Commission has held a series of meetings, conducted field trips to the Rhode Island State Archives and the Warwick City Archives and interviewed a number of city officials and former city archivists.

After considerable discussion, the Commission has developed a series of recommendations that are summarized below and presented in greater detail in the body of this report. The Commission would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the City Clerk's Office and the City Archives for their assistance. In particular, we wish to compliment City Archivists John Myers as well as former archivists Susan Chapdelaine and Carole Pace for their insights on past and current archival practices and management.

This study of the City Archives, its physical setting, the current conditions of its records, and the management of its operations is by no means exhaustive. We hope, however, that this report can serve as a starting point for further study and analysis. Nevertheless, there are concerns detailed in this report that, in our estimation, require immediate attention. One is ensuring an optimal working environment for both staff and those who visit the archives to utilize its resources. Another priority is timely action by the City Properties Director to stabilize the structural integrity of the City Hall dome area that surrounds the archives. More difficult to achieve in its current location is a guarantee that all, including those with physical disabilities, can enjoy the opportunity to conduct research there. It is our strong belief that the present interest of the city in consolidating offices and municipal departments in a new leased facility offers a real opportunity to relocate the city archives to a more suitable space and we strongly urge the city to include the archives in this relocation plan.

We trust that the time spent by the Commission in examining the city's archival program results in positive change which will, in turn, ensure the use of these invaluable records for generations to come.

## **Recommendations**

- **Relocate city archives to a cleaner, accessible, and environmentally stable location**
- **Take immediate steps to test for lead and other hazards**
- **Conduct engineering study to discover source of roof leakage**
- **Ensure proper budget for preservation of archival material**
- **Pass ordinance to centralize retention and disposition of records**
- **Schedule regular cleaning of archives**
- **Restrict copying of fragile materials**
- **Consider off-site storage of paintings**
- **Limit use of scanners**
- **Update job descriptions of all archives personnel**
- **Re-establish tracking system for document retrieval**
- **Re-establish accessioning system for incoming records**
- **Develop a disaster plan**
- **Consider valuable paper insurance**
- **Install lockers and security cameras to improve security**
- **Centralize records management functions and give assistant archivist primary responsibility for records management program**
- **Explore funding sources for indexing, preservation, and collection analysis**

## INTRODUCTION

Concern for the well-being of Providence government records can be traced back to the late seventeenth century when, during an Indian uprising in 1676, town clerk John Smith threw the town records into a local mill pond to prevent them from being destroyed by fire. A more formal process for maintaining municipal records was instituted with the adoption of a city charter in 1832. Here the new charter ordered the city clerk to "record in a book to be kept for that purpose, all notes, orders, resolutions, ordinances and rules and regulations made and passed by the City Council." The charter provision, however, made no accommodation for the preservation and storage of the increasing volume of municipal records as the city underwent dramatic expansion in the late nineteenth century. Growing concern over the potential loss of vital city records in the 1890s led a group of volunteer Records Commissioners to publish a 22-volume collection of assembled records under the title *Early Records of the Town of Providence*. That effort also produced a massive assemblage of bound records known as the "Providence Town Papers" along with an accompanying index (now housed at the Rhode Island Historical Society).

Ongoing concern over records storage and preservation in the 1920s led to a forward-looking proposal for a new "Hall of Records" building that would have centralized all major records producing offices in the city within one building. The resulting national Depression followed by the demands of war ended any hope of implementing the plan. The City Clerk's Office continued in its chartered responsibility to maintain the results of council deliberations, but little else was done to acquire, preserve and make available the records of other municipal offices.

The Archives and Records Program for the City of Providence was launched October 28, 1978 with the employment of Albin Wagner who was appointed the city's first full-time professionally trained archivist. A grant of \$21,350 was provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to help underwrite the position of archivist. Professionally trained, Wagner had extensive experience in archives and records management programs. Soon after the establishment of the program, three additional positions were authorized by the city. Senior Assistant Archivist Joseph Chrostowski held a Master's Degree in History and had relevant experience in archival procedures and document conservation. The Assistant Archivist held a Master's of Library Science with a specialty in records management, computer science and microfilming. An Administrative Assistant/Clerk Typist provided support services. The first quarterly report of the City Archivist also mentions the additional position of "Curator of Paintings and Graphic Records." It appears that this position was never filled.

During this early period staff assembled records from various departments of city government, initiated accession files, descriptive record series, began development of finding aids and produced a series of forms including accession forms, records storage and retention schedule control cards, reference service request forms, and began work on a manual of archival procedures and policies. During this formative period, program staff and the nucleus of archival collections were located in what is now the reading room.

Extensive renovations to City Hall starting in 1979 resulted in the removal of more than 800 cubic feet of records from nine cells in the attic which lined the perimeter of the building's atrium. These records had suffered extensive water damage as well as the effects of being stored in an environment lacking temperature and humidity controls. Archives staff also started work on cleaning and organizing records, books and other materials scattered throughout the building's cavernous dome and in its basement. Also that year, utilization of CETA employees assigned to the archives, student interns from local high schools and colleges and youth hired under the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) helped in the inventorying and transfer of records from various offices. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) also provided volunteers who were helpful during this formative period of the archival and records management program. Laborers from the Public Properties Department were used on a regular basis to assemble shelving, move boxes and shred deaccessioned material. Most valuable perhaps, was the inventorying, partial de-accessioning and transfer of approximately 750 cubic feet of city records from the basement of City Hall to the archives.

This early success also resulted in the award of a second NHPRC grant to cover the salary of the city archivist through the summer of 1980. The grants objectives were to make the collections more accessible to researchers, complete the processing of records housed in the archives, publish a guide to its holdings, and prepare "machine readable finding aids." At the time, records received from various city departments were inventoried and a sub-set disposed of based on approved retention schedules. Activity reports written by the city archivist during this period indicate that all city departments were cooperating with archival staff in carrying out proper procedures for records management and that non-permanent records were being disposed of by archival staff following established schedules. There is also mention of a distinct area within the archives for records management functions. During this period the archives averaged 63 reference requests per month and 35 requests for various forms of assistance from city departments. Prior to 1980 the archival program had been funded by a combination of federal grants and CETA employment subsidies. Approval by voters in November 1980 of the new Home Rule Charter formalized the establishment of the City Archives under the supervision of the City Clerk. Three positions were funded—City Archivist, Assistant Archivist, and Clerk/Typist.



During the early 1980s a professionally trained archivist continued the process to acquire and process records. At this time, a records center area was designated within the archives to house non-current records. These records were labeled and once a given records retention had expired, an evaluation was made whether to permanently archive or dispose of the records within that group. A report issued by the archivist for the period 1981-82 reveals an active records disposal programs with more than 150 cubic feet of records disposed of. It is also clear from these reports that preservation of records was an important component of the program and a portion of the annual appropriation to the city archives was set aside for conservation of historically important documents. Staff regularly attended workshops on genealogical research, disaster planning, document conservation and archival security.

Carole Pace served as city archivist from 1984 thru 1999. During this time the archives sought to coordinate records management activities with various city departments. Support from the mayor's office helped facilitate this process. It was at this time that off site storage of records was begun. Throughout this period securing adequate funding for archival operations was described as "a struggle." It was during this time that plat cards were scanned and originals sent to Capital records for storage. Assistant archivist John Meyers succeeded Pace in 1999 and continues to hold that position. More recently, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on customer service. Limited fiscal support and severe space limitations have prevented collection development or measurable preservation of materials within existing collections.

## **CURRENT STATUS OF THE ARCHIVES**

Most of the permanently archived municipal records are currently stored in a number of areas on the fifth floor of the City Hall building. Other records are currently stored in the basement of the building. Some non-permanent records were found at the public entrance to the archives. There is also a considerable collection of current municipal records stored at a commercial off-site storage facility. Other city documents can be found within a vault at the City Clerks office. Prior to the establishment of the archives, the City of Providence transferred the voluminous Providence Town Papers along with its invaluable index to the Rhode Island Historical Society for safe keeping. More recently, the Roger Williams deed was removed and relocated to a secured area within the State Archives due to concerns over security and environmental conditions. Conditions of records at the archives viewed by commission members vary widely with some showing evidence of water damage, dust and dirt.

Records stored in the city archives date to the settlement of the colony in 1636 with the highlight being the original deed to Providence signed by the city's founder Roger Williams and local Indian sachems (recently rehoused at the state archives). A partial inventory by State Archivist Timothy Slavin in 1991 counted nearly fifteen hundred lineal feet of permanent records within the fifth floor storage areas. A sampling of those records include deed books dating back to 1677, early vital and probate records, mayoral



correspondence, colonial town records, blueprints, Civil War militia records, street layout maps dating to 1800, and intention to build records. Bound volumes are generally shelved, while paper records are, for the most part stored in one cubic foot archival boxes. Non paper records include more than 3,000 microfilm records, an extensive collection of photos including a visual record of towns leveled to make way for the Scituate Reservoir and photo inventories of neighborhoods removed during the era of urban renewal.

Besides being a valuable resource for municipal purposes, these records are used extensively by a diverse group of users including genealogists, historians, lawyers, urban planners, schoolchildren, architects, developers, homeowners, and staff at the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Also under the archivist's care are a collection of painted portraits of the city's mayors. Many of these paintings, some in elaborate gold leaf frames, are scattered about the gallery area, with several close to areas of water leakage (see photo page 31). All storage areas are heated via the building's central heating system. A limited amount of air conditioning servicing the main storage area and reading room is supplied by an installed window unit on the east side of the room. There was no evidence of humidity control in any storage area. Generally speaking, the absence of proper storage areas for the materials as well as lack of environmental controls threatens the physical stability of these records. The absence of security is also a concern.

## **ROOM ASSESSMENT**

### **Reading Room/Office and collections storage area**

Staff and patrons enter through a pair of steel & glass panel doors into the reading room. Primary collection storage is also in this room as well as two staff desks. The archivist maintains an office adjacent the reading room. Patrons entering the reading room are asked to sign a guest book. There is also another entrance to the room immediately behind the stacks which accesses a room occupied by telephone operators.

Records here are accessed by a card catalog near the entrance to the room. The collections here seem generally well maintained, however, dust is a major issue and there is no apparent schedule to clean stacks, floors etc.

## **Gallery Area**

The gallery is an open mezzanine that runs along the entire perimeter of the reading room and stack areas below. Storage includes boxed records, large ledger books and paintings. The commission found much evidence of water seepage from the so-called dome. Along the northwest and northeast corners of the walls were found flaking paint, flaking plaster, in some instances exposing brick(see photos). Surface paint appeared to be decades old and we suspect may contain lead. These flaking surfaces represent a potential health problem to both staff and visitors to the archives and, as a result, we strongly urge the city to sample these painted surfaces immediately to determine potential lead hazard. Some water damage was evident to boxes and loose records and on a subsequent visit, a commission found small puddles of water on the floor following a rainstorm. Some valuable paintings were found leaning against water damaged walls. It was also obvious that books and boxes stored there had not been dusted in years. During a recent rainstorm, rain cascaded down the perimeter of a large air vent that extends from the reading room floor thru the ceiling of the mezzanine. Apparently the roof flashing around this vent has failed (see photo, page 30).

## **Left Storage Area off the Gallery**

This area contained mostly boxed records stored on shelving. Wall surfaces showed some evidence of flaking and the paint surfaces there also appeared to be very old. Boxes appeared to be clearly marked (see photo page 32).

## **Right Storage Room**

This room was packed with an array of furniture, architectural drawings, paintings and the archives graphic collection. The graphics were organized and stored in acid-free clamshell boxes on metal shelving. A map case houses valuable drawings of city hall among other items. Access, however, was very difficult due to the volume of records stored in this room. Once again the surface paint on the walls appeared to be very old and some flaking was observed.

## **Cell Area**

Early quarterly reports of the City Archivist indicate that there were 9 storage "cells" arranged along the west perimeter of the City Hall Atrium area. In 1979 virtually all records were removed from this area due to recurring water damage as well as the fact that this area was not temperature/humidity controlled. Access here has always been difficult. Despite major renovations to City Hall in the early 1980s, little has changed regarding this area's unsuitability for the storage of city records. Currently, wall surfaces show much evidence of water damage. Perhaps due to recurring space issues, this area is once again being used to store records. Commission members observed a number of boxes with their contents water damaged. In many areas, boxes were stacked high causing the lower boxes to be damaged. Some records were stored directly on concrete floors. There was no apparent organization of the records stored within this room.

## **Dome Area**

This area is simply not suitable for the storage of archival records. Books and records were scattered about the floor. It appeared that duplicate copies of published city documents, some from the late nineteenth century, have been stored there long before the organization of the archives (see photo page 33). The commission found more evidence of water damage and buckling of one wall from repeated moisture exposure. It appeared that the flashing around a large air exhaust pipe had failed allowing water to travel down the exterior surface of the pipe.

## **Basement**

This area is prone to flooding and, as a result, is not suitable for the storage of any records. Record boxes were scattered among a number of rooms and the committee observed several damp areas especially in the northwest section of the basement. Mold may be an issue here. One large room contained approximately 700 boxes of records stored on shelving. Although reasonably organized and stored, commission members noticed a nearby steam pipe, crudely patched, that was leaking. A rupture of this pipe could cause severe damage. Recent flooding caused additional damage to some boxes (see photos).

## **Vault in the City Clerk's Office**

This very small area measuring approximately 6 x 10 feet contains early bound volumes of city council minutes and bound council dockets among other records. Conditions within this area appear to be stable despite the lack of environmental controls.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **I. Ensuring the Proper Storage/Use of Archival Records—The Physical Setting**

#### **Relocate archives to cleaner, environmentally stable location**

The recent interest by the city in consolidating office space and making city departments more accessible to the public offers a timely opportunity to seriously consider the relocation of the City Archives to a location that is more conducive to the preservation of the records, provides a healthier environment for those who work with the records and those who visit the archives to conduct research. Currently, storage is grossly inadequate and offers no room for accessions of additional material. Although beyond the purview of this commission, we would strongly recommend an analysis to determine the future growth trends of both archival and records center documents in order to more accurately determine future space needs. Interestingly, a proposal first offered in the 1920s calling for the construction of a "Hall of Records" centralizing all municipal records producing offices under one roof offers a sensible solution to spatial and other issues not only affecting the City Archives, but other departments such as Probate and Recorder of Deeds as well. A third possibility, proposed more than a decade ago, might involve a consolidation of state, municipal, and state historical society archival and public records functions within a single building.

Whatever alternative is pursued, it is clear that the present room configuration within the City Archives presents significant security, environmental and storage issues and access to materials by staff is problematic. *Equally important is the fact that access by those who are physically challenged presents another major problem with no apparent practical solution in its present location.*

#### **Take immediate steps to test for lead and other hazards**

An interview conducted with a former archivist hired in 1978 along with observations made by commission members lead us to conclude that there is a high probability that lead based paint covers the surfaces of archival storage areas surrounding the public reading room. In addition, there are many areas along the gallery or mezzanine and cell areas where paint surfaces are failing along with underlying plaster. This flaking of paint and plaster presents a potential health risk to those who work and visit the archives. The commission members strongly recommend that the Director of Public Properties take immediate steps to test for lead paint and, where found, take immediate steps to stabilize affected areas.

Obvious areas of moisture penetration should also be examined for mold contamination.

### **Conduct engineering study to determine strategy for repairing roof**

Despite a major renovation to City Hall carried out in the late 1970s, significant problems remain in areas around and just below the slate covered domed roof. Our visual examination revealed several significant areas of moisture damage either from damaged slates and/or failed flashing. Archives staff have confirmed that the areas of falling plaster are becoming progressively larger. Deferred maintenance, no doubt, will only make the problem worse and the repair more expensive. Providence City Hall is a local landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As a consequence, any repairs to the structure must be carried out in accordance with the standards consistent with its status as a cultural landmark. In order to prevent any further deterioration of the building and endanger the contents stored under the dome area, we recommend that an engineering study be initiated as soon as practical to develop a strategy to repair the roof and refurbish interior areas that were damaged. In February 2009 the City Council passed a resolution calling for this much-needed engineering study, and the commission is hopeful that action will be taken by the city Property Director on a timely basis.

The city must also begin to consider budgeting the resources necessary to carry out the renovations. Federal funding should be pursued to partially offset project costs.

## **II. The Preservation/Conservation of Archived Material**

### **Budget for preservation—supplies/rebinding**

Adequate funding to ensure the preservation of important, and in most cases unique, archived materials has not been provided. This deferred maintenance is especially apparent in materials that are regularly used by patrons. Obvious examples include the increasingly fragile condition of printed directories, maps and atlases. Some bound city reports show advanced binding deterioration. The commission recommends that a conditions survey be conducted in order to prioritize those items in need of immediate attention with an estimation of the budget required to stabilize documents and/or collections identified as needing some form of conservation. Federal funding may be available to support survey costs (see funding resources section). The commission also recommends that regular funding for archival materials conservation be increased in the City Clerk's annual budget request. In addition, recognizing the constraints of municipal finance, the City Archivist must also be pro-active in seeking out non-municipal sources of funding to support preservation of archived materials.

### **Purchase Equipment to Monitor Temperature and Humidity Levels**

Hydrographs that measure relative humidity levels are a standard piece of equipment in most archives and can be purchased at a relatively low cost.

### **Schedule regular cleaning of space and materials**

Regular cleaning of shelving, bound volumes and boxed materials both in the reading room and storage areas has not taken place in years. Accumulated dust is evident everywhere. It is our understanding that the Department of Public Properties is responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of City Hall and its associated offices within that building. The City Archivist with the support of the City Clerk should discuss the importance of a regular cleaning schedule with the Director of Public Properties, and the archivist should supervise the implementation of a cleaning schedule, advising the cleaning crew as to proper procedures for carrying out their task.

### **Restrict copying of fragile material and consider a copying machine that does not strain bindings**

Generally speaking, a great deal of damage to materials has occurred in copying bound materials either through the use of improper equipment or due to handler misuse. The current copying machine in the archives is not designed to handle fragile material. Patrons in libraries have been known to press bindings onto the glass, in many cases cracking the bindings. Large atlases and insurance maps are also difficult to copy and can be easily damaged in the process. The commission recommends that only archives staff be allowed to copy materials and that maintaining the integrity of the document be the highest priority when considering a request to photocopy. Where possible, the commission recommends the purchase of microfilm/fiche or CD copies of insurance maps, vital records and city directories be considered for patron use in most cases.

### **Consider off-site storage for paintings**

Currently, the archives has no adequate way of storing the valuable collection of paintings under its care. Proper storage options must be considered as soon as practical to avoid further damage to the paintings or their framing. Secondly, the commission recommends a conditions survey and the identification of funding sources necessary to repair, clean, and stabilize this important collection.

### **Consider limiting use of scanners**

Scanning documents, particularly manuscript material can cause damage to the material scanned and, as such, the archivist should limit use of this device as part of patron use policy.

### III. Operations/Management

#### **Develop and/or update job descriptions for all city archive personnel**

The approval of the city's Home Rule Charter in 1980 formalized the establishment of a "division of archives and history" for the City of Providence. Article VI, Title 601 of the Charter provided for supervision of the archives by an individual "trained in history, archival management, library science or some combination thereof" and with five years' experience in these fields. The charter provision also gave the archivist supervisory authority over other city departmental noncurrent records transferred to the archives. Prior to passage of the charter, the city had already committed to the supervision of the division by a professionally trained archivist and had added the positions of assistant archivist and clerk/typist. Several years ago a fourth position was created within the archives division, however, recent financial constraints resulted in the elimination of that position.

The expansion of city government during the past three decades has resulted in a corresponding increase in the responsibilities of the city archivist and the complexities of his/her duties. *It is important, then, that the City Clerk renew the city's earlier commitment to a professionally trained archival staff.* The commission recommends that job descriptions be created for each position—Archivist, Deputy Archivist and Archival Assistant. Minimum standards for the archivist should require a Master of Library Science Degree from an accredited Library School, with course work in archives administration and/or a minimum of five years' experience as an archivist/librarian, with a preference for those experienced in the conservation of archival/library materials. The above-mentioned position requirements offer a further refinement of professional experience as detailed in the city charter. Further, a recent action has placed the City Archivist position within the bargaining unit of city Local 1033. Since this position performs clearly management functions (as specified in the City Charter), the commission recommends that this decision be reversed and that the City Archivist position return to non-union status.

*Records management is a critically important function of the city archives. The commission urges the city to designate the Deputy Archivist with the primary responsibility for supervising the city's records management functions.* We are certain that, by centralizing this function once again, within the city archives, that the program will operate more efficiently, saving the city money in reduced storage costs and preventing potentially valuable records from being lost (see further discussion under storage considerations).

The Archival Assistant should be realigned as an administrative assistant to the City Archivist. He/she could also be given the responsibility of supervising activities within the reading room.



### **Develop tracking system for document retrieval**

Currently, no policy is in place when archival materials are retrieved from storage areas. Lack of a paper-based tracking system similar to those used at the Rhode Island State Archives and other special libraries opens the possibility of materials being mis-shelved or stolen. The commission recommends that a tracking system be instituted as soon as possible.

### **Purchase microfilm of atlases & other records**

Purchase of microfilm copies of fragile or large format printed records such as Sanborn Insurance maps, vital records and/or city directories will help preserve original copies. Funds for purchase may be available from the state Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

### **Re-establish accessioning system for incoming records**

An accessioning system for incoming records was established when the archival program was established in 1978. This is standard practice at virtually all special libraries and archives. Accessioning provides vital data on when records arrive, their relative volume, their point of origin and basic condition. At some point after 1984 this practice was apparently discontinued. The commission recommends that the maintenance of an accessioning record be re-established immediately.

### **Make use of pencils standard in the reading room**

Again, this is standard practice at most archives and all visitors to the reading room should be required to take notes using pencils.

### **Develop a disaster plan**

The commission's interview with former archivist Susan Chapdelaine revealed that a disaster plan for the archives was written sometime around 1980. The present archivist, however, was unaware that such a plan existed. That plan should be found, reviewed, and where necessary, revised to reflect current conditions as well as incorporate and coordinate any municipal change in policy regarding disaster preparedness. The State Archivist can assist the archives staff in a review of the disaster plan. The state also has an online "D-Plan" that can be a useful tool in updating the city's disaster plan.

### **Consider using library school students to conduct a system-wide inventory of existing records and their condition**

During the formative period of the City Archives, the staff effectively utilized various programs including the federal CETA jobs program, the Retire Senior Volunteers Program (RSVP), the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) as well as high school and college interns for a variety of tasks. Many of these resources are still available today and could be utilized for a system-wide inventory and condition survey of existing archival records, basic conservation of materials, development of finding aids, grant writing, document cleaning to name a few. Work in the city's archives could provide valuable experience to library school students with the added benefit of being able to apply newly learned principles in a real life environment.

### **Consider valuable paper insurance**

Theft and/or damage to valuable and in most cases unique historical documents present another risk management policy decision. A system-wide inventory of records should prioritize those items of particular historical value and these items should be, if possible, placed in an optimal environment to ensure their preservation. The city should consider a blanket insurance policy that could help defray the costs of disaster recovery and/or restoration of damaged archival materials. The city archivist should consider coordinating disaster planning and insurance issues with the State Archivist and the Historical Records Advisory Board.

## **IV. Security**

Security is another major concern. Currently, there are two means of egress into the archives. The main entrance had double metal doors with glass panels. Another entrance connecting the phone operators' room is usually left open during business hours, presumably as a second means of exit during emergencies. Each entrance presents its own security risk; in the case of the main entrance its glass doors. The rear door is hidden behind stack areas and is not visible by archives staff. Visitors are currently allowed to bring back packs and briefcases into the reading room. Visitors are not required to show identification, but must simply sign in. Some are allowed access to shelves. The copier is presently in the rear of the stack area. When the archivist makes copies, he/she cannot observe researchers in the reading room which could present an opportunity for theft of materials. Control slips are not filled out in order to access materials. There are currently no security cameras in the room.

**Install lockers and require that patrons visiting the reading room secure all bags, briefcases etc. in the locker area**

Again, this is common practice in most special libraries and archives. Lockers could be located in the outside hallway at the top of the stairway. The lockers would contain keys. Patrons would be responsible for securing their belongings in the supplied lockers. Only notepads, laptops and cameras (with prior permission) would be allowed within the reading room. A coat rack should also be installed adjacent the lockers.

**Consider Having Patrons Show Photo Identification as a Condition for Use of Materials**

In addition, signature on the identification card could be checked for a match on the sign in sheet.

**Move forward with installation of security cameras in the reading room. You may also want to consider a second camera near the second entrance**

In a further effort to prevent theft of materials, the commission recommends that security cameras be installed at both the main entrance to the reading room and above the door that separates this room from the telephone operators' center. The commission wishes to make it clear that this suggestion is made in order to enhance security and not monitor the activities of archives staff. Consequently, cameras will restrict viewing to public use areas, as well as surveillance of doors and stack areas. The request for cameras has been approved by the city and it is hoped that the Public Works Director can carry this out as soon as practical.

**Cover glass panels or consider a gated entrance**

**Move copier closer to reading room desk**

The photocopier and reader/printer are currently located in the southeast corner of the reading room. In its present location, staff members making copies are unable to view activities of patrons at the reading/research table. The commission recommends that the equipment be moved to allow staff to view patrons while at the machine. Only staff should be permitted to perform copying duties.

## Records Management Considerations

Records management has become an increasingly important function of the city archives. For several years after the establishment of the archival program, the City Archivist worked closely with various city departments in coordinating the storage of current records, advising on records retention issues and, in some cases, overseeing records destruction. In the early 1980s, a location within the archives was designated as a records management center, however, it was not long before space issues forced the city to secure offsite storage for non-permanent records. Since that time, the supervision of the city's records management program has been diffused, and issues regarding records destruction, retention and storage have been left to individual departments. At this writing, it was discovered that two city departments—Planning and Development and the Water Supply Board—had submitted bid documents for records destruction. The State Archivist had not received documentation from either department detailing what documents were to be destroyed as required by RI General Law.

The commission's preliminary analysis also found that actual costs for records storage are hard to determine and there does not seem to be a clear actionable policy for destruction of records whose retention period has expired. Paying for the storage of municipal records whose retention period has expired represents an unnecessary cost for the city. It is estimated that currently there are 4,000 boxes of stored records at the NOVA storage facility. Other records from the police and fire departments are stored in the former Police Academy on Chad Brown Street. Little is known regarding the volume of records there, storage conditions, or whether finding aids exist.

The analysis also found that there are currently three separate contracts for records storage at the NOVA Records Center. "City One" account budgets storage funds for the City Clerk's Office, Controllers Office, Inspections and Standards, Vital Statistics, "Housing," Police-Narcotics, Payroll, Personnel, Planning and Development, Retirement, and the Law Department; "City Two", Probate Court, and "City Three" Recorder of Deeds. The original contract was apparently secured on a no bid emergency basis in 1990 (with Capital records now NOVA) after a flood in the basement of City Hall threatened to damage records stored there. Recent efforts to renegotiate City Account 1 by the City Clerk have resulted in a nearly \$14,000 annual savings. Currently, record storage fees in the City One Account are paid out of the City Clerk's budget. Non-City Clerk expenses for records storage should be charged back to their respective departments. **The commission is confident that additional savings can result from a thorough review of all contracts with NOVA and, where possible, a renegotiation of fees and/or make use of the State Master Price Agreement for records storage and services.** The commission also recommends that the City Archivist review all records stored at that facility in an effort to determine which records, if any, are eligible for destruction under current records retention schedules. This could result in additional savings for the city.

The commission also considers it extremely important for the city archives to adopt a more pro-active position in coordinating records management with all city departments. Some activities could include advice on proper records storage, encouraging participation in workshops conducted periodically by the State Archives, coordinating the negotiation of vendor contracts for storage, and generally being a resource for all issues relating to municipal records. The commission urges the city council to pass an ordinance that formalizes the role of the city archivist as supervising the retention and disposition of all municipal records.

We found it difficult to estimate future growth projections for archival storage that could give us a better understanding of future space requirement. We suggest that the archives staff, with the possible assistance of the State Archives, conduct such an analysis.

## **V. Funding**

Commission members are fully aware of the financial constraints imposed on the city due to the severity of the recession and the consequent need to conserve municipal fiscal resources. Although it is clear that an investment is required to stabilize and preserve the city's valuable archival records, provide adequate space for growth, and provide a safe, clean, and environmentally controlled environment for both records and those who work and use the facilities, it is equally clear that the City Clerk and the Archivist must pro-actively explore other means to financially sustain a professionally viable archives program. Several possible funding sources became apparent during our investigation.

Recently, the City Clerk along with commission member Paul Campbell met with staff from the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) to determine the likelihood and extent of local sources of grant funding for city archives operations. RIHPHC staff was gratified by the concern being expressed by city officials and expressed eagerness to support efforts to improve overall operations. Specifically, they pointed to four possible funding sources for grant support:

1. **Preserve America Grant** – This National Parks Service Grant is awarded to the state annually. It appears that this program may be refunded this year. Last year the state received \$150,000 to distribute via the RIHPHC. The City Archives could apply for grant support up to \$20,000 for preservation of historically valuable documents.
2. **Annual Local Government Grants** – In total approximately \$53,000 is distributed statewide to support records preservation and other programs.
3. **Save America's Treasures Grants**—This program is administered by the National Parks Service in conjunction with the NEH, NEA and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Grants awarded to preserve collections of national significance. Grant amounts range from \$25,000 to \$700,000 on a 1 to 1 matching basis. Deadline is May 2010.
4. **Downing Grants**—Administered by the National Trust Regional Office in Boston. This grant could be used for a conditions analysis of the collections.

Other possibilities include:

#### **Institute of Museum and Library Services**

- **Statewide Planning Grants** – Can provide assistance in collaborative planning and to help provide safe conditions for collections, developing an emergency plan, assigning responsibility for collection care etc.
- **Statewide Implementation Grants**—Among other areas, to provide safe conditions for collections.
- **Conservation Support Grants**—Help institutions develop a comprehensive approach to caring for collections. Provides support for surveys, training, and environmental improvements.
- **Conservation Assessment Program**—Provides funding for a general conservation assessment, environmental conditions etc.
- **American Heritage Preservation Program**—A partnership between the IMLS and Bank of America Charitable Foundation to help preserve fragile collections held in the nation's small archives and museums.

#### **National Endowment for the Humanities**

- **Preservation Assistance Grants**—Awards grants of up to \$6,000 on a non-matching basis to support preservation of materials in smaller libraries, archives, museums and historical organizations. Could include training and/or a conservation survey.
- **Preservation and Access Grants**—This grant encourages the use of digital technologies to preserve and make collections available to a wider audience. Specific activities could include digitizing collections, preservation reformatting and deacidification of collections.
- **Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections**—This new grant program includes state and local governmental agencies and offers financial support for preventative conservation measures including managing relative humidity and temperature levels in collection spaces, providing protective storage enclosures and systems for collections, and safeguarding collections from theft and fire. Grants of up to \$40,000 are available for risk assessment.
- **Implementation Grants**—Up to \$400,000 to implement a preventive conservation project. Specific activities underwritten by the grant include HVAC and humidity control upgrades, collections rehousing, protecting collections from flood, fire or other disasters. Grant can cover renovation costs.

## National Historical Publications and Records Commission

- **Archives—Basic Projects**—One or two year grants of up to \$200,000 for basic processing, preservation planning, and collection development.
- **Detailed Processing Projects**—Preservation of collections of national significance, have high research demand or represent substantial preservation challenges. Provides for document flattening, de-acidifying, copying and encapsulating if necessary among other activities.
- **Digitizing Historical records Grants**—Grants up to \$150,000 to digitize historically significant collections. Match of 50% is required.
- **Electronic Records Projects**—One to three year grants of up to \$300,000 to create electronic records archives that preserve records of “enduring historical value.” (Closing date for applications is June 3, 2010.

Possible local grant support includes:

- The Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities
- The Champlin Foundation
- The Rhode Island Foundation

## Private Grants

The clearinghouse for private grant support for libraries, museums and archives was created as a collaborative effort by the Library of Congress and the Foundation Center. The 2010 edition of their publication, **Foundation Grants for Preservation in Libraries, Archives and Museums**, contains information on 2,270 grants of \$5,000 or more awarded by more than 500 grant makers. See also the Foundations web site [www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org) The Foundation also has a subscription based resource called Foundation Directory online.



## CLOSING REMARKS

The members of this commission would like to take this opportunity to thank the City Council for taking the initiative to propose this study of the city archives and the storage of municipal records. It is our hope that this report and its recommendations will serve as a basis for a renewed commitment by the city in preserving and making available to the public its written, printed, and visual history.


Respectfully submitted this 27th day of April, 2010 by the Special Commission to Study Archival Storage.

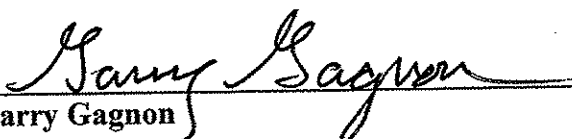
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Anna M. Stetson, Chairperson

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
R. Gwenn Stearn, Vice Chairperson

And members:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
John Myers, City Archivist

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Paul R. Campbell

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Garry Gagnon

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Charter of the City of Providence**

#### **ARTICLE VI. HOME RULE CHARTER**

##### **TITLE 601. City Clerk**

###### **Section B Division of Archives and History:**

“There shall be a division of archives and history, which shall be a responsibility of the city clerk and shall be part of the department headed by the city clerk. The division of archives and history shall be headed by a city archivist, appointed by the city clerk, who shall be a person with at least a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, who shall be trained in history, archival management, library science or some combination thereof, and who shall have at least five (5) years’ experience as an archivist, manager of records, or equivalent training or experience. The city archivist will serve at the pleasure of the city clerk and shall be responsible for the custody, management and preservation of all historical records of the city and of such noncurrent records as shall be transferred to the division by the city clerk or any department or agency of the city. The city archivist shall make provision for access to the materials in the custody of the division, under appropriate conditions and safeguards, to qualified individuals desiring to make use thereof.”

## APPENDIX II

EFFECTIVE WITHOUT THE MAYOR'S SIGNATURE

THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE  
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

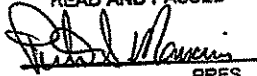
### RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

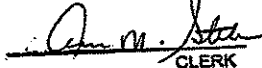
No. 258

EFFECTIVE ~~APPROVED~~ June 1, 2009

RESOLVED, That a Special Commission to examine the necessity of the city's storage of records, documents and books in the custody of the city; the "Special Commission to Study Archival Storage" shall be comprised of five (5) members, two shall be members of the City Council, or their designee(s), the City Archivist, The State Archivist, and one (1) member shall be a public member with knowledge of the storage and preservation of documents; all members of the commission shall be appointed by the President of the City Council, is hereby established.

IN CITY COUNCIL  
MAY 21 2009  
READ AND PASSED

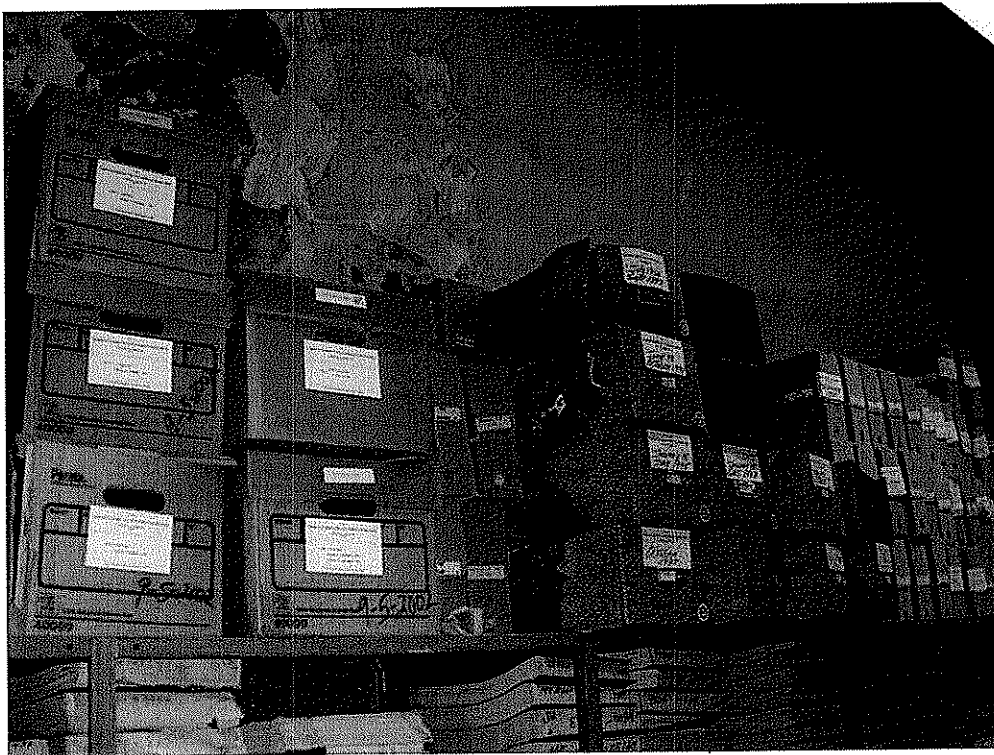
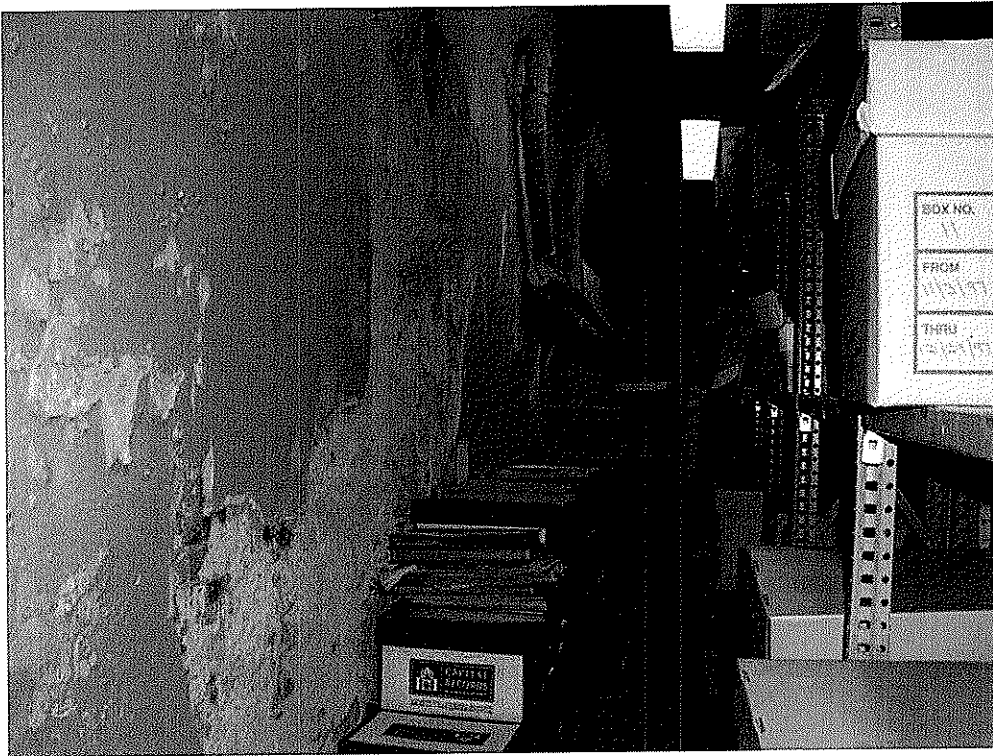
  
PRES.

  
CLERK

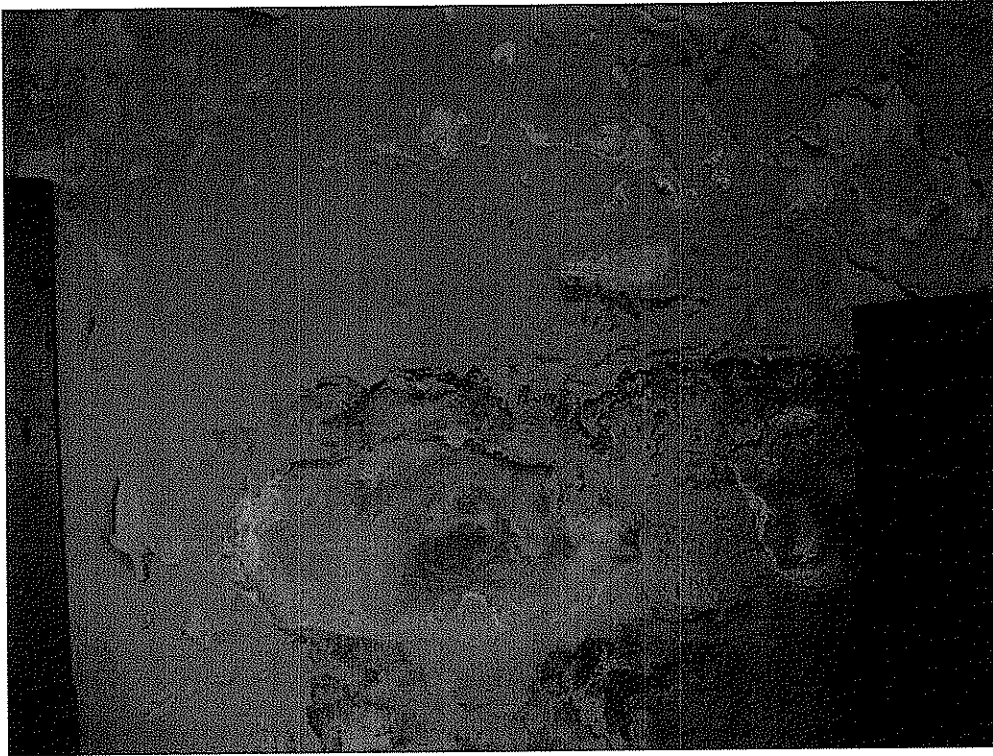
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Mayor's Signature:

  
Anna M. Stetson  
City Clerk

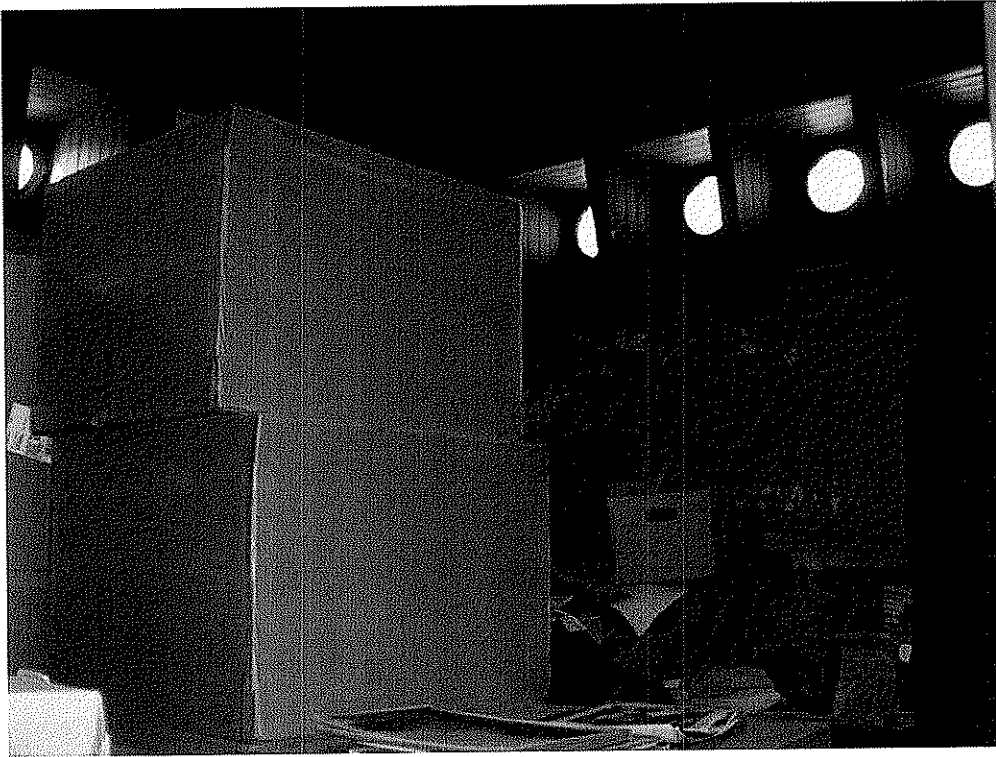
APPENDIX III  
MEZZANINE



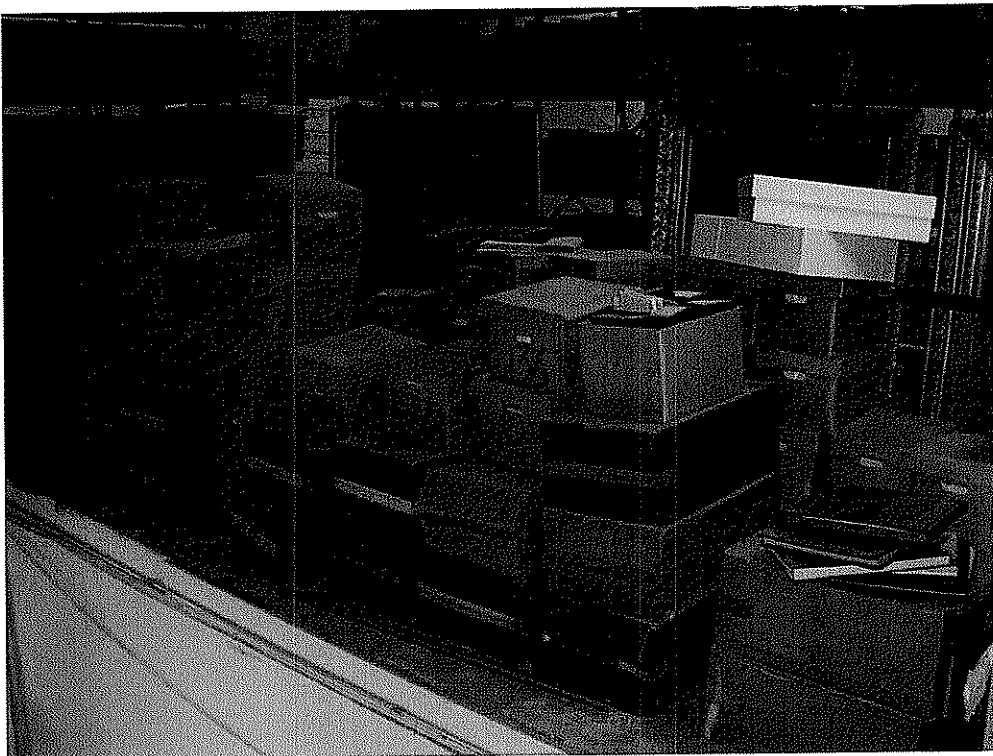
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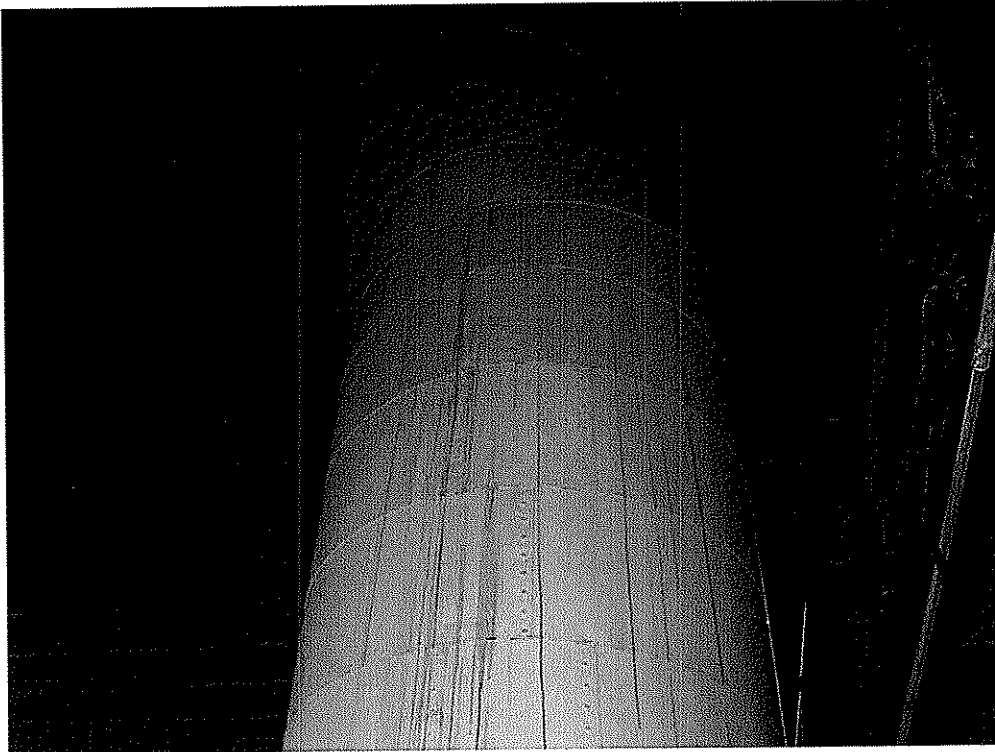


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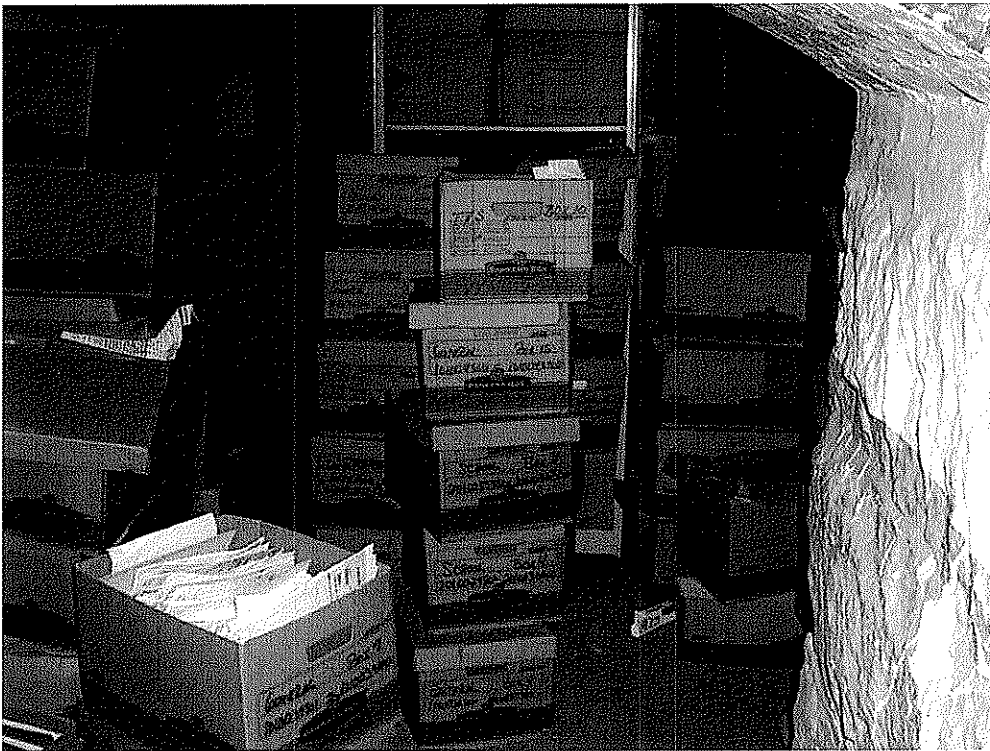
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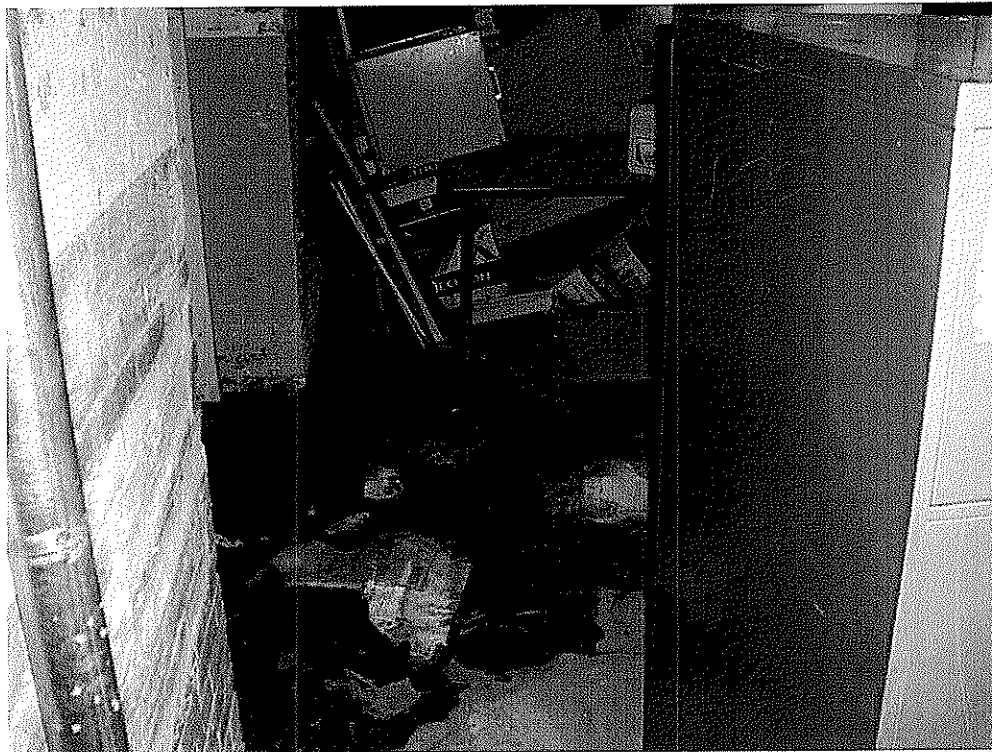
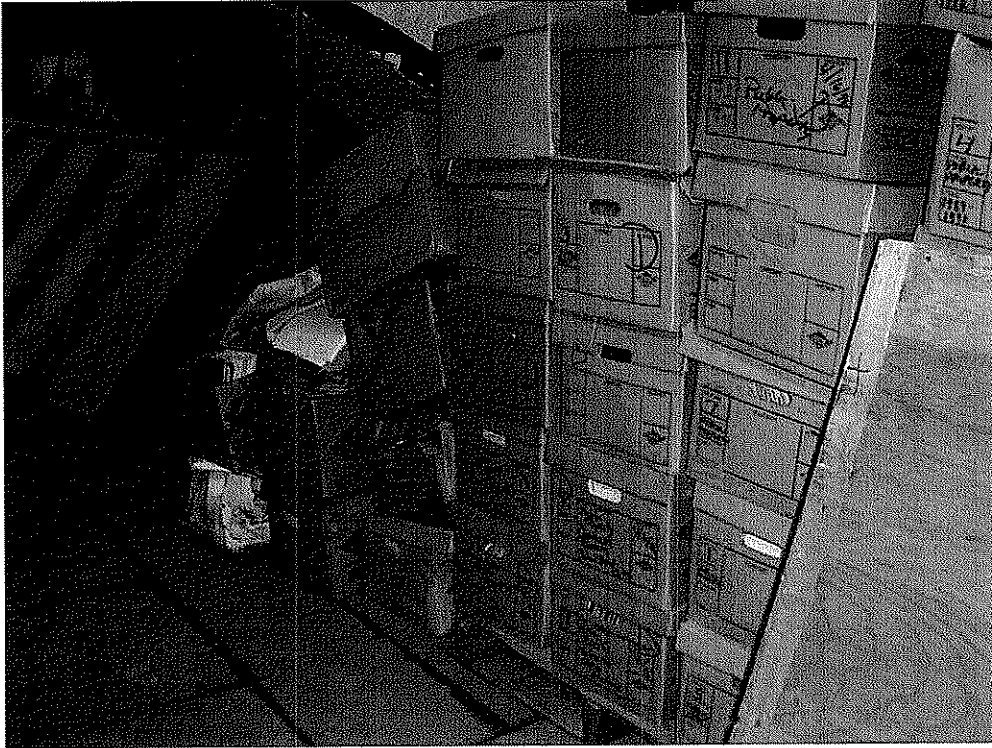
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## MEZZANINE



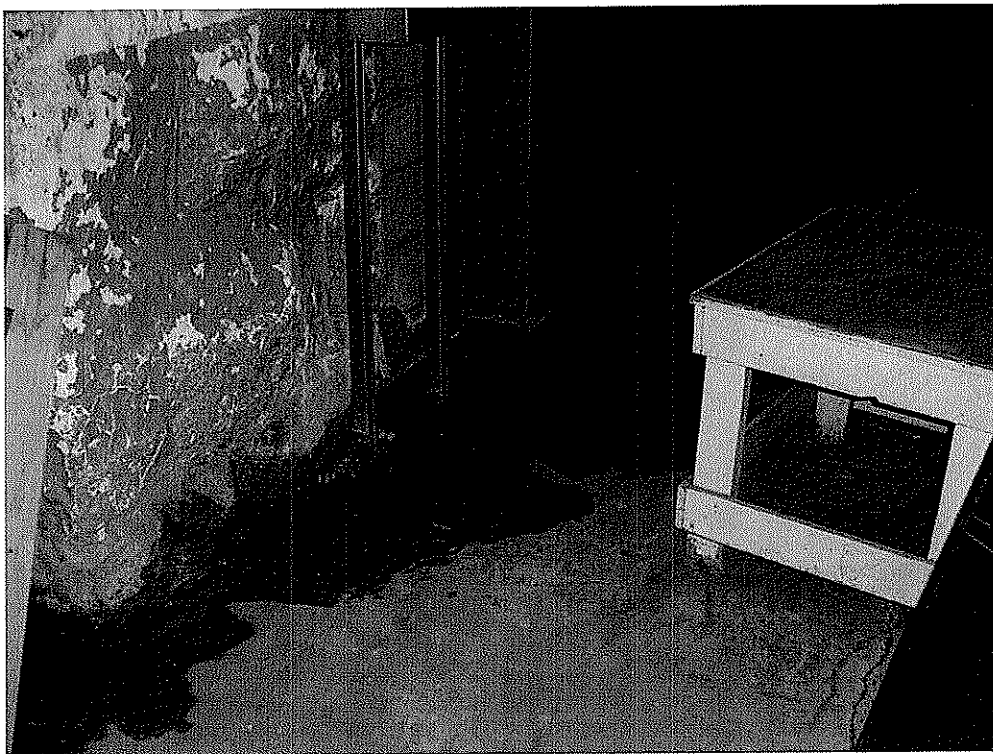
## BASEMENT



BASEMENT



BASEMENT



BASEMENT









DOME

