

The Future of Historical Records in Northeast Massachusetts

March 14, 2007 - 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

at

Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System
(NMRLS) in Danvers

Agenda

Facilitator: Carolyn Noah, Central Massachusetts Regional Library System

- Welcome and Introductions
- Review History and Activities of Historical Records Council (HRC) of the Essex National Heritage Commission, Bill Steelman, Co-Director of Heritage Development, Essex National Heritage Commission
- What activities are still needed in the region?
- What activities are not needed?
- Are there other activities needed in the region?
- Who might carry on with needed activities?
- Prioritize activities
- What is the best way to organize these functions?
- Solicit volunteers to take on assignments to move forward

Attendees

Historical Records Council Members:

1. Lori Foley, Council Chair, Director of Field Service, Northeast Document Conservation Center
2. Lorna Condon, Curator, Library and Archives, Historic New England
3. Bonnie Hurd Smith, Principal, Hurd Smith Communications
4. Greg Pronevitz, Regional Administrator, Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System (Danvers)
5. Mary Rhinelanders McCarl, Historical Collections Consultant
6. Bill Steelman, Co-Director of Heritage Development, Essex National Heritage Commission
7. Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, Preservation Specialist, Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
8. Bill Whiting, Board Member, Topsfield Historical Society

Stakeholders:

1. Sidney Berger, Phillips Library Director, Peabody Essex Museum,
2. Patti Bruttomesso, Local History Coordinator, Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities
3. Priscilla Foley, Director, Archival Operations, National Archives and Records Administration
4. Annie Harris, Director, Essex National Heritage Commission
5. Brenda Lawson, Curator of Manuscripts, Massachusetts Historical Society
6. Rob Maier, Director, Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
7. Sunny Vandermark, Regional Administrator, Metrowest Massachusetts Regional Library System (Waltham)

Facilitator:

1. Carolyn Noah, Regional Administrator, Central Massachusetts Regional Library System (Shrewsbury)

Other Invitees who were unable to attend:

1. Michael Comeau, Assistant Archivist, Massachusetts Archives
2. Mina McCandless, Director of Grant Programs, Massachusetts Cultural Council
3. Nora Murphy, President, New England Archivists
4. Ann Russell, Executive Director, Northeast Document Conservation Center
5. Kate Viens, Executive Director, New England Museum Association

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Summary

Review History and Activities of Historical Records Council (HRC) of the Essex National Heritage Commission, Bill Steelman, Co-Director of Heritage Development, Essex National Heritage Commission

Bill's Notes

- Most comprehensive regional program in New England and beyond
- Unique among heritage areas
- Define ENHA/ENHC

Origins

Summer 1999. Vilma Hunt, a Gloucester constituent of Congressman John F. Tierney, contacted the Congressman's office after a frozen pipe caused damage to historical records in Gloucester Town Hall. The congressman contacted the ENHC, which commissioned a feasibility study.

Feasibility Study/Report – "Preserving the Archives of the Essex National Heritage Area"

- Goal to assess the needs and issues re: preservation, storage, and access in ENHA
- Phone and written surveys, site visits, research into available services and funding
- 56 organizations contacted
- Recommended creation of Historical Records Initiative to include Historical Records Council, repository directory, training conference, communications

Historical Records Council to:

- Provide leadership to historical records community
- Serve as umbrella and clearinghouse
- Advocate for funding and best practices
- Identify funding opportunities
- Provide professional assistance

Work Plan

- Developed over one year period 2002-2003
- Mission Statement - *The Essex National Heritage Commission/Historical Records Council will assist and educate public officials and records custodians of the Essex National Heritage Area in identifying, acquiring and preserving historical records and making them available to the public.*
- Goals (5) – Awareness, Education, Management, Collaboration, Funding
- Objectives (16) & Tasks (40)
- Charted Priority, Status, End-User Focused/Repository Focused, Web activity, ENHC Staff/HRC Member

Conferences (4 total)

2000, 2001, 2002

- Salem State (1) and Merrimack College (3)
- ENHC hired consultant to organize and manage
- Keynote speaker and breakout sessions
- Attendance 64-85

2003

- Statewide archives conference
- Collaborated with MHRAB and SOS/Mass Archives – Bill Milhomme
- Workshops and “booths”
- Celebrating Anniversaries – Harley Davidson archivist as keynote speaker
- Attendance 300

Workshops (13 total)

- 2000-2006
- Two per year, spring and fall
- Two hour to half-day
- Mostly midweek evenings at various locations, including NMRLS
- 2000-2004 (7) Attendance declined from the beginning with 35 down to 10
- 2004-2006 (6) Changed to daytime format and made sessions longer -1/2 to 3/4 day
- Attendance 44 to 20, with average of 34, equaling max of previous format

Survey Grants (21 total)

- ENHC funded with help from a \$25K Fidelity Foundation grant – Over \$50,000 total
- First round - conducted using NPS staff from Boston-based museum services unit
- Later rounds - ENHC procured/contracted with consultants on behalf of repository
- Millie O’Connell, Melissa Mannon, Cynthia Swank/Peter Parker of InLook Group
- Applicants applied for either an archival or preservation survey
- One or two day on-site investigation/consultation plus report preparation
- Valued at \$2500

ENHC Partnership Grants (11 total)

In 2004, integrated survey “grants” into existing ENHC Partnership Grant Program

Finding aids, archival/preservation surveys, photos, conservation treatments, archival supplies

What activities are still needed in the region? (number of votes for high priority)

Professional skills and practice – training (9)

Greater regional awareness/coordination (1)

Finding aids – thorough and public – circuit riding specialists (6)

Better knowledge of inventory

Board education re: roles (5)

Continued awareness

Appropriate facilities – preservation

Disaster planning resources

Examples of success

Better communication between agencies and organizations

Integration of holding institutions

Technical standards and best practices (10)

Planning

Finding and motivating volunteers (4)

\$ -- qualified professional staff, new technologies

Training for staff re: records

Marketing training (and marketing for/to repositories, end users, and legislators) (13)

Increased access and use – audience development (1)

Cultural shift (1)

What activities are not needed? (or accomplished)

Created structure for leadership

Contact list – 4,000 people

Local cable contacts

Needs identified

Baseline for workshop content

Are there other activities needed in the region? (number of votes for high priority)

Develop local leadership

\$ \$ \$ \$ (13)

Comprehensive catalog of regional holdings (12)

Ensure forward compatibility of technologies, standards, digital preservation (2)

Regional preservation facility (NEDCC?)

Continue formal discussions (coordinating group and leadership) (13)

Coordination between types of repositories, focus on town clerks (2)

Partnerships – funders, organizations, legislators, seek local contacts (9)

Continue workshops (3)

Expand to other counties (6)

Prioritize activities

Money

Outreach

Legislation

Convince internal decision makers

Awareness of existing funding in communities that have approved community preservation funding

Coordination

Leadership

Discussion

Information about the structure of communication

Group discussion

Provide people to assist and do outreach (e.g., on records inventory)

Expand to other counties (legislation)

Marketing

Sell legislation

Seek credit for collections when cited

Press kit for local production

Build identity -- Branding

Policy templates to prepare for additional traffic

Best Practices

Direct to existing documents

Share vocabulary

Tools

Processes

Educate

Study successful communities

Next Steps

Who might carry on with needed activities?

What is the best way to organize these functions?

Solicit volunteers to take on assignments to move forward

Sequentially – “eating the elephant one bite at a time”

Coordination – expand the group in Essex County and beyond

Invite NMRLS non-members to relevant training events

Council participation in NMRLS community, e.g., Special Libraries Committee

Use more electronic communications, conference calls, listservs

Adopt a committee structure

Identify needs, new members

Seek institutional commitment for staff and resources, e.g., director sign off

Consider that some repositories can already hold private records

Greg will convene a meeting to continue this process, identify a chair, committee chairs, and other stakeholders

Draw on past work and work plan (attached)

Identify parallel groups

Could the Digital Commonwealth help to pull people together?