

# Final Narrative Report

## NHPRC Project #RC-10135-13

July 1, 2012-June 30, 2014 (Extended to June 30, 2015)

This project consisted of :

- Paying two years of annual Board dues of \$2,500 to the Council of State Archivists; and
- Transferring \$2,500 each year to History Day in Connecticut for brochures and medals; and
- Producing two Archives Month posters at \$2,500 each; and
- Presenting a series of 3 workshops providing hands-on instruction in current archival management standards and best practices for cultural heritage organizations; and
- Implementing a Traveling Archivist Project

This project was affected by several circumstances beyond its control at the beginning that threatened its successful completion. Fortunately, we overcame these impediments, adjusted the work plan and results and fulfilled the altered project work plan.

The project got off to a slow start due to delays completing the Board's previous SNAP grant. The award letter was not received until November 2012, five months after the start date for the grant. In addition, the Connecticut State Library had recently transitioned from having in-house fiscal personnel to utilizing centralized staff at the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services [DAS]. This led to a miscommunication over the creation of the receivable account for the grant funds. The original Project Director, Mark Jones, was under the impression that no receivable account had been established with the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services [DAS]. It was not until July 2013 that the State Library's fiscal officer confirmed the account number and coding for the funds allowing the Project Director to authorize the grant activities to begin.

Connecticut State Archivist Mark Jones, the original Project Director, retired in May 2013. Mark's successor as State Archivist, Paul E. Baran, was appointed SHRAB Coordinator on July 15, 2013 and assumed the role of Project Director. Paul and Deputy Coordinator Lizette Pelletier worked together to move the grant forward. Most of the grant work was completed within the original timeframe, but it was necessary to request a 12 month extension in order to complete the 24 Traveling Archivist site visits which did not start until April 2014.

Unfortunately, Paul Baran passed away unexpectedly in January 2014. Deputy Coordinator Lizette Pelletier took on the role of Acting Project Director. The State Library did not receive permission to refill the State Archivist's position from the Office of Policy and Management until June 2014. The position was finally filled in October with the appointment of Lizette Pelletier as State Archivist. She was appointed SHRAB Coordinator in November.

### **Completion of Projects**

**Projects 1 and 2:** The project paid the 2013 and 2014 Council of State Archivists (CoSA) dues. The State Library stepped in and paid the dues for 2012 out of its Historic Documents Preservation Fund due to the fiscal administrative issues outlined above. The project paid for the 2012 and 2013 History Day in Connecticut brochures and awards. The CT SHRAB and NHPRC were acknowledged on the brochure and in other program materials.

**Project 3:** The Deputy Coordinator, worked with the Archives & Special Collections, University of Connecticut Libraries to create and distribute two Archives Month posters for 2013 and 2014 utilizing

the themes of *Connecticut at Work* and *Connecticut Answers the Call* respectively. Archives & Special Collections provided the image for 2013 poster. A number of smaller repositories across the state also contributed images of photographs and documents for the 2014 poster in celebration of the World War One centenary. These include the Gunn Memorial Library and Museum, Washington, CT; Hill-Stead Museum, Farmington, CT; Knights of Columbus, Knights of Columbus Museum, New Haven, CT; Middlesex Historical Society, Middletown, CT; New England Air Museum, East Granby, CT; Russell Library, Middletown, CT; Archives & Special Collections, University of Connecticut Libraries, Storrs, CT; and Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Copies were mailed to all state and territorial archivists, 170 town clerks, 225 public libraries / universities / colleges, and 240 local historical societies and museums. The envelopes purchased by the project included the following statement on the front at the bottom: "Connecticut Archives Month, October, YYYY Funding provided by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Washington, D.C."

Additional copies of the posters were made available to groups and individuals visiting the Museum of Connecticut History which is part of the State Library. Both posters were published electronically on the CT SHRAB page on the State Library's web site and on the CoSA site. The 2014 poster was also highlighted in an article on page 8 of the State Library's newsletter, *The CONNector*, <http://ctstatelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/connector2014V16n4.pdf>

The Project Director obtained gubernatorial proclamations designating October of 2013 and 2014 as *Connecticut Archives Month*. The gubernatorial proclamations were also published on the State Library's web site.

**Project 4:** The goal for part 2 of the Archival Assessment Project was to address the two areas of greatest need identified in part 1 of the Archival Assessment Project (SNAP Grant, 2009-2011): instruction in current archival management standards and best practices and the basics of archival processing and arrangement for cultural heritage organizations. We met this objective through a series of workshops and hands-on training. The advisory committee from our previous Archival Assessment Project, a sub-group of the CT SHRAB, continued in this capacity for this grant and also served as workshop presenters/trainers.

The project included two distinct, but inter-related, components designed to provide program participants with a strong foundation in the fundamentals of archival management: a **three-part workshop series** with hands-on instruction in archival management and the **Traveling Archivist Program**, which provided free half-day site visits from a professional archivist. A symposium that was planned as part of the original grant proposal was cut when the amount awarded was less than the amount requested.

Professional archivists in Connecticut, well-respected for their knowledge and expertise and for their experience as workshop instructors, led the **three workshop sessions**: *Getting Your Archives in Order*, *Tackling the Backlog*, and *Making Your Archives Accessible*. The three principle instructors were Barbara E. Austen, Connecticut Historical Society, Leith Johnson, Wesleyan University, and Linda Hocking, Litchfield Historical Society. All three are also members of the CT SHRAB.

We were fortunate that our workshop presenters donated their time and talents even those who were not SHRAB members. In addition, all but one of the host sites donated their meeting spaces for the workshops. Consequently, we were able to take advantage of the grant period extension to offer a second round of workshops during the grant period at no additional cost. A total of 56 individuals from 41 institutions participated in the archives workshop series from April 2014 through March 2015.

Program participants received instruction in the fundamentals of archival management including collection management, appraisal, accessioning, processing, arrangement, and description following current best practices in the field.

- **Workshop #1:** *Getting Started - Collection Policies, Appraisal and Accessioning of Archival Materials.*

Participants learned why a collection management policy is important for collection development and how to apply the policy to determine if an archival collection should be accepted, including ownership issues, donor restrictions, etc. Participants also learned the difference between processing museum and archival collections and why there is a distinction. This was important because the majority of the workshop participants came from museums and historical societies and worked primarily with artifacts. This point was repeated throughout all three sessions to ensure that the participants understood the idea of documents, photographs, ephemera, etc. having context within a collection rather than as individual items. The program also emphasized the benefits of having a procedure manual. Collection management policies and procedures manual templates were provided so that workshop participants could begin drafting their own policies.

For the two hands-on components in this workshop, participants worked on updating their collections management policy and they learned to appraise archival collections. Participants were encouraged to submit a copy of their mission statements and collection policies for review. For the appraisal section, participants were given copies of documents, photographs, and other materials in a mock collection (with a few odds and ends thrown in). They broke into small groups to determine whether or not the collection fit the sample collection policy they were given.

- **Workshop #2:** *Getting it Done -- Arrangement and Description of Archival Collections.*

Participants learned the difference between museum and archival arrangement and description. They also learned when to apply More Product Less Process [MPLP] to a collection to make it available to researchers sooner and when more processing is required.

For the two hands-on activities participants learned the value of keeping collections together and respecting original order, and arranging and describing an unprocessed collection using a collection from the host site's archives. The participants were split into small groups and paired with a participating SHRAB member to complete a processing worksheet.

- **Workshop #3:** *Getting it Out There – Making Your Archival Collection Accessible*

The session addressed the ups and downs of providing public access to archival collections. Presentation topics included a review by workshop presenters of the previously submitted collections management policies and mission statements discussing their strengths and weaknesses; sharing finding aids; using the institution's website to make its archival collections accessible; how to

upload finding aids to Connecticut Archives Online <http://library.wcsu.edu/cao/>; preservation and storage of archival collections; and working with researchers and safe guarding collections.

We originally intended to have a hands-on component at this workshop to have participants enter a finding aid into Connecticut Archives Online. However, we learned that the audience did not know their collections well enough and did not have enough technical background to create a finding aid.

Due to frugal fiscal management, funds from a small workshop registration fee collected not only covered the cost for supplies, food and beverages, but we also were able to provide each participating institution with a set of archival supplies, including a document box, acid-free letter size folders, sheets of Permalife bond paper, a Magic rub eraser, a pair of cotton gloves, and poly label holders for use on the acid-free boxes.

Prior to the workshop series, participants received, via email, an online pre-test designed to assess their current understanding of basics archival management concepts. The workshop presenters used the information collected to tailor their presentations to the audience's needs.

At the end of each workshop session, program participants were asked to fill out an evaluation. We had a terrific response rate. Participants rated the overall program, including content and presentations, as excellent. The Project Manager shared the evaluation data with the workshop presenters after each session which provided them an opportunity to revise content and presentation style as necessary.

Finally, the workshop participants were sent an on-line post-test consisting of a series of open-ended questions in a survey format at the completion of the series. The purpose was to gauge how well they had learned and integrated the information presented. While the post-test response rate was low, the data collected demonstrates that there was a marked improvement among the responding program participants in their understanding and ability to apply archival principles to their collections.

One participant in the archives workshop series responded, "I learned more about the preservation and arrangement of archival documents, photos, how items should be logged, the importance of various documentation such as keeping some form of log of donated items, deed of gifts, keeping collections together, finding aids. The analysis of our collections management policy by [Barbara Austen from Connecticut Historical Society] was very helpful and the TAP site visit was a great culmination of the workshop series in that I had a better sense of direction and urgency in which I should proceed with all the above aspects." The responses also demonstrate that more institutions now understand the importance of documenting their collections and creating finding aids for the collections in greatest demand.

Additional statistics illustrate the improvement seen from pre-test to post-test:

- 30% increase in the use of mission statements to determine which donations to accept into the archives
- 27% increase in the number of collection management policies that reference the archives collection and what it collects.
- 17% increase in the use of deed of gifts.
- 32% increase in the number of institutions respecting original order/keeping collections together.

- 28% increase in the number of institutions evaluating archival collections to determine the level of arrangement needed.
- 29% increase in the number of institutions no longer describing each item in an archival collection.
- 35% increase in understanding what a finding aid is and how to create one.
- 24% increase in the creation of finding aids.
- 18% increase in providing online access to finding aids.

**Project 5:** A professional archivist was hired using grant funds to serve as a Traveling Archivist. The objective of the Traveling Archivist Program [TAP] was to provide free, half-day site visits to museums, historical societies and public libraries with local history collections, to assist them in addressing what they felt was their greatest areas of needs. This might include assistance with processing their archival collections, tackling the backlogs at their institutions and learning to create finding aids so that researchers can know about their collections.

The structure of each site visit varied between sites, but each involved a physical survey of the collections, and discussion with staff regarding current policies and practices for the accessioning, arrangement, description, preservation and sharing of their archival holdings. For institutions without written policies and formal procedures, the visit focused on an assessment of the repository and its holdings, followed by discussion with staff that reinforced the basic requirements for managing an archive and highlighted the key issues to be addressed moving forward. For institutions with written policies and formal procedures, the visit focused on an evaluation of all policies, procedures and forms, followed by discussion with staff, and (when applicable) hands-on demonstrations for processing, housing and creating catalog records for archival holdings. For those sites that also participated in the three-part workshop series, the Traveling Archivist helped these sites apply what they learned at the workshops to their own collections.

Following each site visit the Traveling Archivist completed a formal report summarizing her findings and providing recommendations for continuing the projects she worked on with staff/volunteers on site. Our post-TAP evaluation shows that these reports were shared among staff, board members and volunteers. Three-months after the site visits, the Traveling Archivist followed up via phone/email to determine progress and help solve any problems. She also encouraged the participants to report their progress and invited them to ask for additional assistance or advice for following these recommendations. Thirty-four organizations participated in TAP, thirteen also participated in the three-part workshop series.

Following the conclusion of the Traveling Archivist Program, the Project Manager sent an online evaluation to all the participating institutions. The evaluation results show that 43% of participants rated the program as excellent, while 36% rated it as very good. We were delighted to see that 100% of participants reported that the Traveling Archivist Program met their expectations, with overwhelming praise for the professionalism of the Traveling Archivist and the reports and recommendations she provided.

The TAP application provided a checklist of possible archives related topics that could be addressed during the site visit. Those requests broke down as follows:

- 90%+ policies and procedures; access
- 85% archival appraisal and accessioning
- 78% archival arrangement and description; storage
- 70%+ collection databases; creating finding aids

There were a number of things that we learned from this project that we will apply to our upcoming Board Grant. For example, it turns out some individuals who manage archival collections from cultural heritage institutions are extremely attached to and more protective of individually numbering items within their archival collections and separating collections by type than we expected. Many of our program participants didn't understand that an item could be located without it being individually numbered. Many have spent lots of time, sometimes years, processing their collections their way and thought they needed to redo everything that was already done, despite reassurances to leave well enough alone and apply the learned standards to incoming collections – for now. While this project began chipping away at these closely held practices, there is still work to be done to win these individuals over to current archival practices for arrangement and processing.

The Traveling Archivist Program definitely needs to be adjusted. Based on our observations from the first round and the Traveling Archivist's recommendations, participation in either the previous workshop series or in the upcoming roundtables will be a pre-requisite for an institution to receive a site visit. For a site visit to be effective, the institution's paid and/or volunteer staff must have some basic knowledge of archival principals. The current Traveling Archivist also recommended that to make the Traveling Archivist's time on-site more effective, we need to collect more information from participating organizations prior to the visit. The Advisory Board working with the Project Manager will create an online survey that will provide a clearer picture of an accepted applicant institution and its needs when this program is offered again beginning in late 2015.

We have also decided that for the next grant, the Traveling Archivist will actually be a team of professionals rather than a single individual. The team member assigned to a site visit will be matched to the institution's needs based on the team member's area of expertise. We are seeking potential team members who understand how small and emerging museums, historical societies and libraries work and who have persuasive teaching skills that will win our participants over to current best practices.

In conclusion, the program was successful overall and received high praise from the participants despite the challenges we faced along the way. We were able to reach twice as many individuals than originally anticipated. We will apply the lessons learned from this grant to our next grant and continue in our efforts to provide educational opportunities for the dedicated staff and volunteers at Connecticut's diverse cultural heritage institutions.