

COOPERATION,
COLLABORATION AND
LEADERSHIP

A STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE
CONNECTICUT STATE HISTORICAL
RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD

(HARTFORD, 1996)

1. INTRODUCTION

The following document presents a plan of action for the Connecticut State Historical Records Advisory Board (CSHRAB), a citizen body serving under gubernatorial appointment and assisting the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). The plan is a culmination of a decade of studies, recommendations and planning activities, beginning with its 1982-83 statewide historical records assessment project funded by NHPRC. The report of findings and recommendations issued in 1983 still constitutes a benchmark of the historical records landscape in Connecticut.

In 1983-84, the Board issued recommendations for program enhancements as part of the State Librarian's Archival Program Planning Committee. Three years later the Board submitted its *Recommendations for a Five-Year Expansion Program for the Historical Records Program of the Connecticut State Library* to the State Librarian. In it, the Board essentially repeated and updated its priorities for strengthening the State Archival program, the Conservation Lab, the History and Genealogy Unit and the Public Records program.

In 1990, the Board suggested revisions to the State Librarian's draft five-year strategic plan to make certain that it included the State Archives and Public Records programs as well as Connecticut's other historical records repositories.

In 1991 the Connecticut Preservation Task Force, which included a CSHRAB representative as well as other Board members, published, *Connecticut's Preservation Crisis: Final Report and Recommendations of the Connecticut Preservation Task Force*. This document treated historical records issues as a part of the larger concern over the preservation of all types of documentary material in Connecticut repositories. The Final Report recommended cooperative and facilitative approaches to preservation including information sharing and technical assistance, special projects, common standards, and training programs.

In response to new NHPRC guidelines for state boards requiring strategic planning for every decade, the Board began work in early 1993 on the plan which follows. Although NHPRC provides money for state planning grants, CSHRAB decided not to use Federal funds for this process, preferring to use that money for records projects themselves.

The steps followed by the Board in producing a work plan appear as the introduction to Section 5 below.

There are many persons no longer serving on the Board who engaged in the development of this report. The Board expresses its appreciation to each one for his/her contribution. They are June Eiselstein, who left Connecticut to become Supervisor of General Library Services at the Boston Public Library, and Dr. Randall C. Jimerson, who went to Western Washington University to become Director of its Graduate Program in Archives and Records Management. The following persons live and work in Connecticut and though not on the Board, they have maintained their interest in the identification, accessibility and preservation of Connecticut's historical records: Dr. Bruce Clouette, Dr. Hal Keiner, Edward J. Friedeberg, Douglas Stein, Richard Szary, and Elizabeth Woods.

Current membership on the Board serving under gubernatorial appointment includes the following: Patricia Bodak-Stark, Rev. Dr. Robert G. Carroon, Eunice G. DiBella, Catherine Keene Fields, Joan M. Hyde, Dr. Herbert F. Janick, Jr., Dr. Mollie Keller, Sharon B. Laist, Paul C. Lasewicz, Dr. Freeman Meyer, Dr. Bruce Stark, Robert W. Storm, Dr. Christine Weideman, Dr. Everett C. Wilkie, Jr., and Mary Witkowski. As Coordinator and Chair of the CHSRAB, I would like to thank each person mentioned above.

The Board wants to acknowledge the assistance of the Connecticut State Library in producing this report. The report represents the findings and conclusions of the Board and not necessarily of the State Librarian or Connecticut State Library Board.

The entire Board is responsible for this report. On behalf of members and individuals cited above, I present it in the spirit of the abiding conviction of everyone who has served on the CSHRAB that Connecticut historical records warrant attention because they are an invaluable, one-of-a-kind information resource for current and future generations of this state.

Dr. Mark H. Jones
State Historical Records Coordinator
March, 1996

2. THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CONNECTICUT'S HISTORICAL RECORDS

Connecticut's historical records programs operate in a vastly different world in the 1990's. The Board's 1983 Assessment Report, for instance, urged increased staff and funding, confident of an ever increasing resource base; we cannot assume that additional resources--or even current--will exist. Information management technologies have advanced dramatically since 1983, promising greater potential for historical records services; a statewide directory to Connecticut's historical records, long supported by the Board, is now feasible via the World Wide Web on the Internet. Obviously, the current economic and technological environment presents substantial challenges to the way archivists work and is forcing them to find ways of doing more with less.

ECONOMIC REALITIES

Since 1983, the regional economy has remained in a disastrous, protracted business depression that has caused long-term shifts in population and spending power. Between 1989 and mid-1992, the state lost 158,000 jobs and has recovered only 16% of them. This is the lowest rate of the New England states, and experts estimate a net loss of 168,000 people in the 1990's. The recession hit the state's largest cities hardest with Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford among the fastest shrinking cities in the nation.

Lost jobs and population have resulted in less money for historical records programs across the state. Archives are open fewer hours with less staff and are less able to identify and acquire historical records, let alone care adequately for their existing collections.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Over the past half decade, new technologies have profoundly changed the ways in which we create, store, retrieve and dispose of information. In historical records repositories nowadays, it is no longer just genealogists and academics who bring laptops to the research table.

Connecticut repositories and professional organizations are striving to keep up with the machine readable workplace. The Connecticut Town Clerk's Association is searching for safe and legal ways to use optical imaging for land records. A recent amendment to the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act set wider parameters for citizen access to electronic public records, and the State Public Records Administrator and the State Archivist, responding to numerous requests from state and local governments, have issued two General Letters outlining policy for the implementation of optical imaging systems and for the retention and disposal of E-mail.

The Connecticut State Library Board's 1994 "Prospectus for a National Information Infrastructure Readiness Program for the State" called for a Connecticut Historical Information and Resources Database "that would become an integral part of the Connecticut Library Network." And in June, 1995 the State Library and Office of the Secretary of the State introduced the State Information Server as a Home Page on the World Wide Web. Jointly developed by the Connecticut State University, the University of Connecticut and the State Library, the server is currently a demonstration project and a prototype for a Web site that will provide comprehensive access to Connecticut state and local government.

Clearly technology promises much and is reshaping the historical records landscape. The very volatility of that technology, however, means that serious questions about technical obsolescence, the legality

and admissibility of electronic records, and maintaining easy access to the public will continue to arise.

MULTICULTURALISM

The national interest in the history and contributions of particular groups is evident in Connecticut as well. Currently the Mashantucket Pequot are planning a state-of-the-art museum and archive documenting the history of Southern New England Native Americans. The Hartford Studies Project at Trinity College is using its 4,000 image archive for local newspaper features and classroom projects centering on Hartford history. The Charter

Oak Cultural Center and Connecticut Historical Society are raising funds and soliciting artifacts, manuscripts, photographs and ephemera for a major exhibition on Hartford's Black history to open on March 30th, 1996. In 1994, five historical societies in New Haven---the Connecticut African-American Historical Society, the Irish Historical Society, the Jewish Historical Society of Greater New Haven, the Ukrainian Historical Society and the Italian-American Historical Society of New Haven---formed the Ethnic Historical Archives Center of New Haven, Inc., and have recently secured a home on the campus of Southern Connecticut State University. As groups such as these become aware of their history, they will also recognize the importance of collecting, preserving, and opening historical records.

3. ASSESSMENT OF CONNECTICUT'S HISTORICAL RECORDS REPOSITORIES

Connecticut's historical records reside in a variety of institutions including historical and genealogical societies, museums, public libraries, academic libraries, and business archives and libraries. These private and public historical records programs are blessed with an abundance of materials and are committed to educational development and inter-institutional cooperation. Unfortunately many of these programs still lack adequate facilities, professional archivists or even basic training for their staff, financial support, and access to a records network. The Board can point to piecemeal efforts to increase educational opportunities (Board and New England Archivists sponsored workshops), to support historical records programs (Board advocacy), and to bring professionals together (the Connecticut River Archives Group), but there is no statewide organization such as the Connecticut

Library Association to serve the needs of Connecticut's records caretakers.

Government records programs are hampered by a general lack of understanding of and commitment to records management principles and practices. This deficiency hinders the identification, acquisition and retention of government historical records by the State Archives.

Additionally the Office of the Public Records Administrator and State Archives lacks resources to run a sufficient number of workshops for public officials and employees about sound records management and archival techniques.

4. ASSESSMENT OF CSHRAB'S EFFECTIVENESS

The Board's Statement of Scope and Function defines it as the central clearing house for records programs in the state with a mission to facilitate communication and cooperation among Connecticut's repositories, as well as acting as the review board for NHPRC's records grants programs. No state statutes, regulations, Executive Orders, or other enabling documents provide legal authority for CSHRAB; federal regulations are sufficient.

The Board does not have direct federal or state

financial or administrative support. The Coordinator's hat is just one of many that the State Archivist wears. While this means low visibility for the Board and NHPRC in Connecticut, CSHRAB has nevertheless produced a model Statement of Scope and Function, satisfied all federal requirements for qualifications of appointed members and Board composition, served as the only statewide advocate for historical records programs, and constituted an educational resource for its membership.

5. BOARD WORK PLAN TO THE YEAR 2001

INTRODUCTION

Formulating a work plan involved the Board and constituent groups and included examination of other state plans. A Subcommittee on Planning prepared a summary history of CSHRAB studies and planning, a draft introduction, and five proposed goals (based on NHPRC's own strategic plan), and in April, 1993, added a Board-approved statement of Scope and Function which incorporated the most recent NHPRC guidelines.

On June 17, 1993, the Board met for a planning day at the G. W. Blunt White Research Library at Mystic Seaport, Inc. A Board member trained in the Nominal Group Technique coordinated and led the day's activities. What emerged was a list of prioritized objectives and tasks under five broad goals: Preservation; Access; Documentation; Advocacy; and Communication.

In mid-October, the Coordinator sent copies of the

draft plan to the following for comment: the Connecticut State Librarian, the Connecticut State Historian, the Association for the Study of Connecticut History, the Association of Connecticut Municipal Historians, the Center for Connecticut Studies at Eastern Connecticut State University, the Institute of Local History at Manchester Community College, the Connecticut Historical Society and New Haven Colony Historical Society, the League of Connecticut Historical Societies, the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Connecticut Museum Association, the Connecticut Town Clerk's Association, the Connecticut River Archives Group, the Connecticut Coordinating Committee for the Preservation of History, the Connecticut Humanities Council, the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council, and the Center for Oral History at the University of Connecticut. Each also received an invitation to a public discussion of the draft to be held on November 17 at the Connecticut

Department of Transportation's Research and Materials Testing Facility in Rocky Hill. The location was chosen because it is in the middle of the state with good highway access, parking facilities, and meeting space. Representatives of the Association for the Study of Connecticut History and the Connecticut Society of Genealogists made comments on the plan at that meeting.

From then through July, 1994, the CSHRAB monitored planning activities in other states and studied additional NHPRC requirements for state plans. On July 21, the Board confirmed its decision not to apply for a planning grant and voted to meet in October to discuss the newest version of the draft plan. These suggestions were incorporated into the draft approved by the Board in August, 1995.

What follows is a work plan that addresses both urgent historical records issues in Connecticut and the Board's role in assuring that Connecticut's historical records will be accessible to current and future generations.

GOAL 1: ACHIEVE PROGRESS IN PRESERVING CONNECTICUT'S HISTORICAL RECORDS.

The physical preservation of Connecticut's physical historical records is the *MOST VITAL* goal. Neglect and potentially disastrous storage conditions threaten our state's documentary heritage. Public and private repositories desperately need facility assessments, preservation surveys of holdings, and actual hands-on preservation work. The disasters that have occurred in Connecticut's public records offices and private archives point up the need for statewide disaster preparedness training and the adoption of a disaster recovery plan, two as yet unmet goals of the Connecticut Preservation Task Force.

Objective One:

Increase the level of knowledge of archival preservation principles and techniques.

Task One:

Assist in sponsoring, running and publicizing workshops on preservation principles and techniques.

Task Two:

Encourage and support formation of preservation programs and initiatives.

Task Three:

Support efforts by the State Library to make its Office of Library and Archival Preservation a statewide clearinghouse of information.

Objective Two:

Promote the development and implementation of standards for records creation by the private and public sectors using the most preservation-friendly formats.

Task One:

Encourage compilation, development, and dissemination of information about preservation issues in the creation of historical records by new technologies.

Task Two:

Assist in developing guidelines for public officials on electronic records issues.

Objective Three:

Assist local historical repositories in preserving their historical records.

Task:

Identify and/or provide funding sources for preservation projects.

Objective Four:

Promote and strengthen the authority and resources of the Office of the Public Records Administrator and State Archives within the State Library so that they may better regulate and coordinate the creation, maintenance, disposal or preservation of Connecticut's public records.

Task:

Analyze current Connecticut State statutes pertaining to public records and the authority of the Public Records Administrator and State Archivist and recommend revisions to the State Librarian.

Objective Five:

Encourage and support formation of a statewide disaster preparedness and recovery plan for historical records repositories.

Task:

Assist the State Library in preparing a statewide disaster preparedness and recovery plan for historical records repositories.

GOAL 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO AND USE OF CONNECTICUT'S HISTORICAL RECORDS.

The Board's 1983 Assessment Report stressed that Connecticut's home rule tradition hampers the formulation of statewide solutions to problems facing all historical records administrators. Since 1983, members have monitored and participated in efforts to increase the use of Connecticut's repositories with little success. The Board intends to lead future efforts.

Objective One:

Increase access to records in the State Archives of the Connecticut State Library.

Task One:

Assist the State Library in planning and obtaining the funding for a pilot project to convert bibliographic data of State Archival collections into MARC-ame records and enter them into the statewide reQuest library bibliographic data base.

Task Two:

Encourage and support efforts by the State Archives to place information about its records and access to them on the Connecticut Home Page World Wide Web Site.

Objective Two:

Create of a directory of Connecticut historical records repositories in electronic and print formats.

Task One:

Endorse the State Library's program to encourage Connecticut's historical societies to place information about their repositories on the Connecticut Information Server.

Task Two:

Monitor and assist planning by the New England Archivists to produce an electronic regional directory of historical records repositories.

Task Three:

Investigate and discuss the feasibility of a Board grant providing money to historical records repositories to connect to the Connecticut Information Server.

Objective Three:

Assist Connecticut's regional and local repositories in processing previously inaccessible historical records.

Task:

Identify and/or provide funding sources for processing previously unavailable historical records.

GOAL 3: ENSURE DOCUMENTATION OF NEGLECTED AND EMERGING AREAS OF CONNECTICUT HISTORY.

Most Connecticut archival repositories reflect a traditional scholarly focus on the state's Colonial and Revolutionary history, and are, therefore, ill-equipped to handle the issues of gender and ethnicity, work and community

currently under discussion by scholars, policy makers, and Connecticut residents. While a few groups have begun collecting materials that document their own past (most notably, the Mashantucket Pequots, Polish-Americans and Jews), documentation of most of the groups that make up Connecticut's present social, cultural, and political mix, remains problematic.

CSHRAB acknowledges that it cannot identify every under-documented group or topic in Connecticut's history. However, the Board recognizes that it is imperative to publicize the problem and help develop documentation strategies for the 21st Century. The following objectives and tasks reflect the Board's sense of its own limitations in this area and assume that historians, curators, archivists, and librarians will work with leaders of ethnic and community groups to achieve this goal.

Objective One:

Promote recognition of under-documented periods and groups in Connecticut history and twentieth century urban, ethnic, gender, social and labor history.

Task One:

Plan and assist in running a conference composed of historians, historical records professionals, and group leaders that would identify problems in and strategies for collecting modern Connecticut historical records.

Task Two:

Disseminate the findings and recommendations of this conference of statewide historical organizations, making sure that any report is also posted on the Internet.

Task Three:

Support and promote efforts by archivists and historians to reach leaders of Connecticut ethnic groups, Native Americans, and other under-documented groups.

Task Four:

Encourage historical records repositories and museums to post their collecting policies on the Connecticut State Information Server.

GOAL 4: GENERATE SUPPORT FOR ACCESSIBLE CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL RECORDS.

Connecticut's cultural organizations are competing for ever-dwindling financial resources. In this climate of economic scarcity, the state's historical records repositories are finding it more difficult to continue to provide wide and free access to their collections. The Board intends to use its statewide connections and influence to publicize the importance of records in a democratic society, and to lobby for funding to keep them available to all our citizens.

Objective One:

Improve communications among CSHRAB and the creators, users, and administrators of Connecticut's historical records and with major resource allocators.

Task One:

Publish and distribute CSHRAB's strategic plan to all officials and groups that the Board invited to attend its public hearing.

Task Two:

Publish and distribute a CSHRAB newsletter in print and electronic formats and establish a listserve/home page for records keepers in Connecticut.

Task Three:

Encourage the establishment of a Connecticut Archives Group to serve the needs of those responsible for records of enduring informational value in this state.

Objective Two:

Increase public awareness of issues and potential strategies for providing greater access to Connecticut's historical records.

Task One:

Develop alliances between CSHRAB and professional affinity groups.

Task Two:

Sponsor a Connecticut Archives Week.

6. CSHRAB FUNDING PRIORITIES

The following are priority areas that the Connecticut State Historical Records Advisory Board considers most important and the kinds of projects it would encourage applicants to think about. Potential applicants should also consult NHPRC Guidelines for the types of projects given high priority by the Commission.

1. Preservation

- Educational workshops teaching basic archival principles and techniques.
- Institutional preservation self-evaluations or other pilot efforts leading to establishment of preservation programs.
- Preservation microfilming.

2. Access and Use

- Arrangement and description of previously inaccessible collections of historical records, using both electronic and print formats.
- Conversion of State Archives descriptions to MARC records for entry into statewide reQuest bibliographic database.
- Public education about issues involving access to historical records in any format.

3. Documentation

- Arrangement and description projects linked to the development of collecting policies and actual accessioning of historical records pertaining to neglected topical areas and/or under-documented groups in Connecticut.
- Conference of historians, archivists and community leaders to develop strategies for collecting modern Connecticut historical records.

4. Advocacy

- Public exhibitions utilizing archival materials to demonstrate the role of historical records in a representative democracy.

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

At its last meeting of every year, the board assesses its success in accomplishing the objectives and tasks it had set itself the year before and then sets its goals for the next twelve months. CSHRAB will continue to operate this way for the duration of this planning period.