

PROVIDENCE CITY ARCHIVES

ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

During the period from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 the Providence City Archives carried out its basic mission to acquire, preserve, and make available town (prior to 1832) and municipal permanent records for use by both city departments and the general public. The City Archives also supervises the citywide records management program for non-permanent records and works closely with the Rhode Island State Archives in ensuring that records retention schedules are observed by various departments of city government. The City Archives functions as a division of the City Clerk's Office. Paul Campbell has served as Archivist since June 2010. Caleb Horton was hired in October 2013 to fill the position vacated by the resignation of Reference and Multi-Media Administrator Nathan Lavigne.



Archives Reading Room

Horton, had worked here for several months as an intern and in 2013 graduated from the University of Rhode Island with a Master of Library & Information Science degree. During

2013 the position of Deputy Archivist became vacant due to the injury of Claire Bestwick, and in December of that year Britni Gorman, a senior at Rhode Island College was retained on a monthly basis to maintain service levels and given a small stipend. Mr. Horton excelled in his position in reference, and in June 2013 was elevated to the position of Deputy Archivist when it was learned that Ms. Bestwick would not return.

Facilities Management

The archives contains approximately 24,000 cubic feet of records spanning the period from 1637 to present. The archives are located on the 5th floor of City Hall and we are open to the public five days per week. In April 2013 the archives extended their hours to include two Wednesday evenings per month. In early 2014 the evening hours were moved to Thursday nights to conform with the building being open for City Council meetings. Archival records are stored on the 5th floor, in a large basement area (non-permanent records), and at a record storage facility in West Warwick. Additional unprocessed records can also be found at Chad Brown Street (police and fire department records), the City Engineer's Office and the Traffic Engineer's office.

During this past year, we continued to work closely with the mayor's office in seeking out a new location for the archives. The impetus for this action was based on an offer made by a prominent philanthropist to provide the funds necessary to find a more suitable, environmentally controlled facility for the city's archival records. Several potential sites for the facility were considered including a site adjacent to the Roger Williams Park Museum and the former Boy Scout Building on Broad Street. Basic feasibility studies were conducted on each site by the architectural firm Torrado Architects of Providence. Action is still pending.

We continued to execute a plan to reduce the volume of records stored in the basement of City Hall and last year more than 500 boxes of non-permanent records were shredded. Also, records of former mayor David Cicilline, left in the basement, were beginning to show the effects of moisture damage, and we began to relocate them to the 5th floor. New shelving was installed in the atrium storage area on the 5th floor and in the Graphics Room where staff are in the process of reorganizing the collections there, as well as painting walls and the floor.



Graphics Room Before & After Renovation

Space for storage of materials and for accommodating researchers and the general public continues to be an issue as does the lack of environmental controls and the deteriorating physical plant. Walls along the second level mezzanine area continue to degrade. Many area walls are peeling and cracking and occasionally small chunks of plaster can be heard falling to the floor. Roof leaks, however, appear to be contained. Archives staff completed a disaster or “D” plan and attended workshops on disaster preparedness.

Records Management and Cataloging

The City Archives supervises the records management program for the City and its various departments and the staff works closely with departmental personnel on storage, retrieval, and records destruction. Working in conjunction with the State Archives, our staff occasionally conducts workshops designed to train municipal employees in proper records management and storage techniques. The archives fulfill requests made via the Access to Public Records Act (APRA) and have noticed a clear trend in the rising number of request made via this option. Lack of space requires the archives to store more than 6,000 cubic feet of records in an off-site storage facility in West Warwick. Deputy Archivist Caleb Horton spends much of his time carrying out the administration of the records management program for the city.



19th Century Writs & Warrants

Approximately 85% of the records currently generated by the city are non-permanent and, as such, have a limited shelf life. Archives staff utilizes Retention Schedules developed by the State of Rhode Island in determining the minimum length of time that records must be retained by the city. A smaller group of records (approximately 15%) are permanent and become part of the archival collections. During the past fiscal year, the archives destroyed 479 cubic feet of non-permanent records and received 268 cubic feet of new non-permanent records. Staff continues to conduct a review of records stored in our off-site facility with a view towards reducing the volume of boxes stored there.



Franklin D. Roosevelt's Motorcade in Providence

Making archival records available for research and access by various city departments is a major focus of the city archives. With the assistance of a number of volunteers we were able to make substantial progress in organizing 19th century City Council and Board of Aldermen records, our photo and slides collections, and approximately 44,000 judicial writs and warrants dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Nearly 1,000 historical photos have been scanned and uploaded onto our web site's Flickr Page and selling high resolution images has become a modest but growing source of new revenue for the archives. Earlier this year the City Archives joined a consortium of area college, university, and special libraries who operate a pooled on line cataloging platform. Soon we will begin cataloging archival collections into this shared on line catalog.

Digitization of records and documents allows nearly universal access to city records and during the past fiscal year the archives scanned more than 16,000 military discharge index cards making it much easier for the public to access these important records. In addition, more than 85,000 "Field Cards" (assessment cards) were digitized and are now included as a data set in the city's new Socrata on line platform. Next year we hope to begin scanning the City Council's Final Papers files.

Gifts both financial and archival helped strengthen the overall quality and quantity of our collections. Our ongoing close collaboration with the Rhode Island Genealogical Society bore fruit once again in the form of a \$2,000 donation to help preserve our early volumes of **Providence Town Meeting Records**. Genealogist Cherry Bamberg provided us with another gift of \$750 to preserve the archives' early census books. Evelyn Murray, a descendant of former police chief John A. Murray, in December 2013 presented the archives with a gift of artifacts belonging to the former chief that included equipment, his police captain's cap dating from the 1880s as well as photographs and other printed items. Dr. Patrick T. Conley donated a collection of Fabre Line passenger steamship posters, post cards, schedules etc. The Providence Preservation Society transferred 33 boxes of plans and surveys, some dating as early as 1851 that

were part of the business records of Title Guarantee Title Company of Providence. These records would have been lost without the city archives' intervention. Other smaller gifts were also acquired.



Police Cap Part of Murray Gift

Interns and Volunteers

The City Archives greatly benefitted from a large corps of volunteers and college interns that assisted us with a wide variety of projects. Justin Taber, a client of the West Bay Collaborative and a participant in the Rhode Island Transition Academy, provided part-time work throughout the year in processing our Writs and Warrants Collection. Justin will continue to work with us again this year. Britni Gorman, a senior and history major at Rhode Island College, spent a semester here organizing the Aldermen Papers, and another RIC student, Justin McCullough performed admirably in compiling an index to memorial squares in Providence. This project was part of a larger initiative to recognize and acknowledge the contributions of area service veterans. Tom Baer, attending URI helped process former mayor Paolino's photo archive and began organizing the Providence Police archive. He was assisted by Katelyn Henderson of Providence College. Another PC student, Julie Mathieu, applied her considerable skills in history in performing her 90-hour internship processing 19th century city papers. 12 students from Professor Johnson's Public History class at PC also participated in 12-hour internships working on a variety of projects. Retired teacher Ed O'Donnell continued his work in identifying and cataloging photos in our graphics collection. As we enter the new fiscal year, we are confident that these collaborations with our local colleges and universities will continue, providing us with valuable assistance in preserving and organizing city records thereby making them available to a wide audience. The internships also provide a valuable "hands on" experience for area students.



Intern Justin Taber



Providence College Student Interns at Work

Preservation of Archival Records

An essential part of our mission involves not only acquiring permanent municipal records, but also preserving them for future use. In carrying out this portion of our mission, we are greatly aided by funding from the Rhode Island Historical Records Trust Fund. This fund has allowed us to purchase acid-free boxes, folders, map and blueprint storage boxes, mylar photo sleeves and other materials designed to protect records from a variety of threats. The archives currently engage three area bookbinders in carrying out preservation book binding and repair. Some bound volumes repaired this past year include a portion of our **Street Plat** series, **Marriage Intentions** volumes from the late 19th century, **Vital Record** ledger books, **Street Courses** and **Streets Received** volumes, among others. A generous grant from the Rhode Island Genealogical Society provided partial funding for the restoration of volumes 1 and 2 of the **Providence Town Council Meeting Records**. These town records, dating from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, were conserved by the Northeast Documents Conservation Center in Andover, Massachusetts.



Restored Marriage Intentions Books (Right)

The year 2013 also marked the successful completion of a 2-year project to repair and clean 13 mayoral portraits. More than \$25,000 was raised from the private sector to fund the initiative, which was carried out by art conservator Alice Miles. In April, 2014 the archives initiated an effort to raise funds to carry out mayoral portrait commissions on those mayors who do not have an official portrait. That month, an archives hosted reception raised \$14,000 to fund commissioning an official portrait of former Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. A 5-member

committee has been established to solicit Rhode Island based artists that would be interested in being awarded the commission. The archivist has also approached Mayor Taveras regarding his official portrait. Providence arguably has the most complete collections of mayoral portraits of any city in America and, with continued support from the private sector, we can continue to enjoy that distinction.



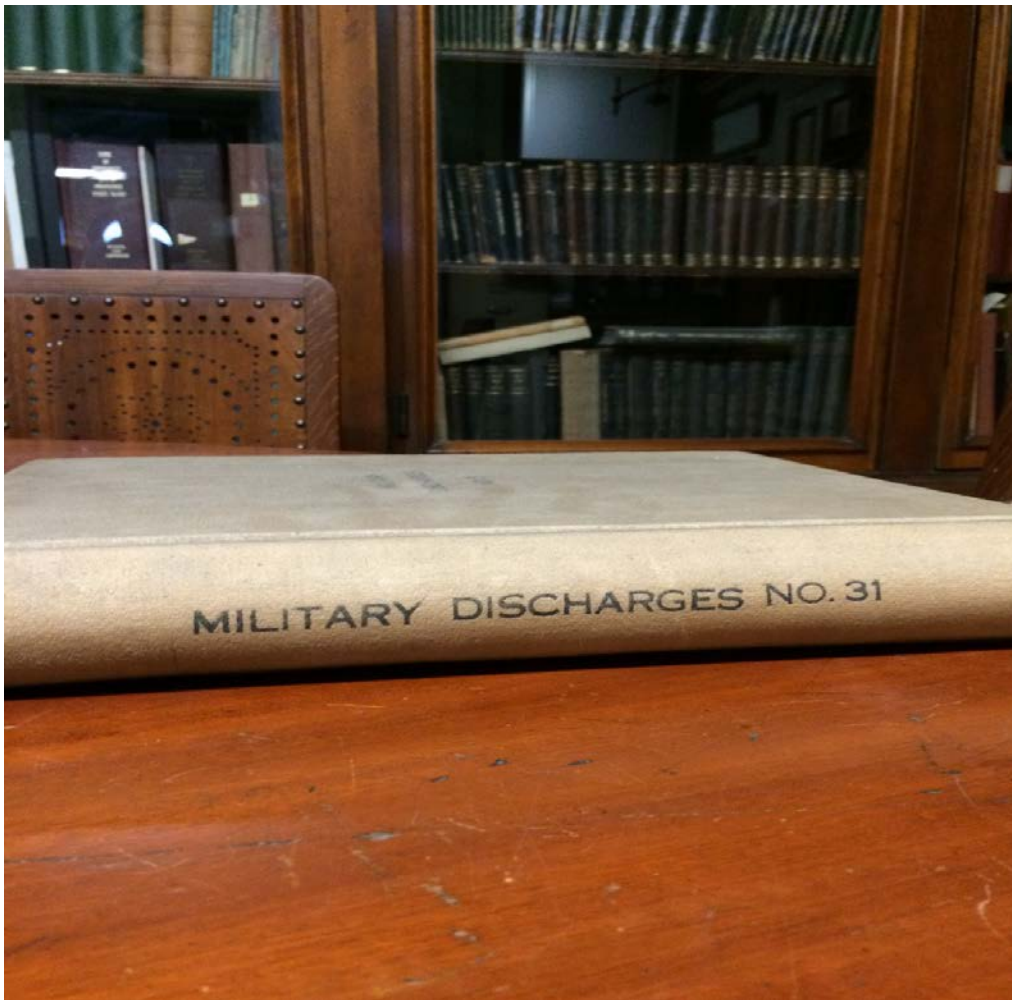
Before and After Mayor McGuinness Portrait



Art Conservator Alice Miles at Work

Digitization of archival records offers a two-fold benefit in electronically preserving unique records and making them available globally via. an online software platform. In 2013, the archives carried out its first large scale digitization initiative by scanning more than 85,000

Assessor's Field Cards dating from 1939-1940 and placing the digitized file as a data set on the city's new Socrata software platform. Also scanned were more than 16,000 Military Discharge index cards. Making this card set available online will save staff time and facilitate accessing the discharge records by the general public. We are currently planning a new digitization initiative that will eventually result in the scanning of one of the most important and often used archival record sets—the City Council Final Papers. We have also applied to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) for a \$191,000 federal grant to help preserve and catalog six major archival records collections.



Military Discharge Volume

2014 also marked the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Providence Police Department, and we have begun an effort to relocate, preserve, and organize police archival records currently stored at a facility on Chad Brown Street. In this effort we have been assisted by retired officers John Glancy and George Pearson who have dedicated countless hours in saving these artifacts from the ravages of time.

Outreach

The municipal archives provide daily service to various departments of city government, especially in the area of records management and/or retrieval, as part of its core mission. The

archives is also experiencing increasing daily use by the general public . Our current user profile includes students, genealogists, architects, title examiners, historians, documentary film makers, house researchers, lawyers and urban planners. Part of the growing popularity of the archives is a result of an ongoing effort to utilize social media, carry out public events, and create on line research tools such as finding aids to facilitate research.

The archives' web site continues to evolve with the addition of new finding aids, news posts, and historical essays. We continue to upload historical photos onto the site's Flickr page and these images have begun to provide a new source of revenue to the city in the form of fees for photographic reproductions. Nearly one thousand photos have been uploaded thus far. The archives Facebook page has proved a huge success with more than 1,000 individuals counted as "liking" the site. The "Mystery Monday" feature has proved particularly popular.



First Floor Historical Photo Panels

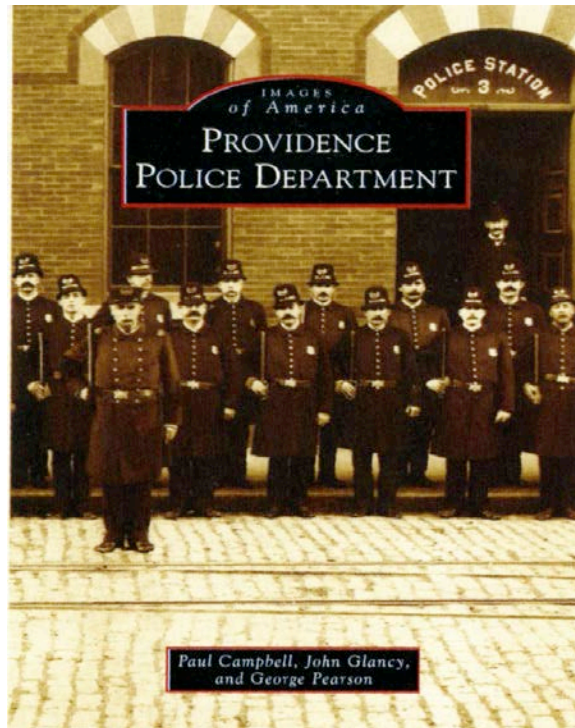
The archives, working in conjunction with Alan Sepe, Director of Public Properties, installed a gallery of framed historical photos with explanatory captions along City Hall's first floor corridor walls. Tourists and visitors to City Hall are now routinely seen viewing the images and reading the captions. Currently, the archivist is in the process of writing new mayoral biographies which, after being completed, are being framed and placed adjacent their respective mayoral portrait. Twelve framed biographies have been installed to date. Archives staff worked closely with their colleagues in the Arts, Culture and Tourism office to commemorate the sacrifices made by our local war veterans by installing a special exhibit on memorial squares dedicated in their honor. Archives staff, ably assisted by Rhode Island College student, Justin McCullough, conducted research on the memorial squares and their namesakes and compiled a Memorial Square index to help ensure that the veterans' place in our history is not lost. A small

exhibit was also installed on the first floor detailing the history of the Fabre Steamship Line and State Pier Number 1.



Mayoral Portraits and Accompanying Biographies

August 2014 marks the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Providence Police Department as a professional force. In April 2013 a committee was established by Police Colonel Hugh Clements to develop plans to celebrate this milestone. Archivist Paul Campbell participated in the committee meetings and archives staff are playing a critical role in the celebration. Campbell, along with former retired officers John Glancy and George Pearson, have authored a new history of the department and delivery of the book is expected in August. Archives staff, in conjunction with staff at the Providence Public Library, will mount a historical exhibit at both the library and at City Hall. The archives is also in the process of organizing the Providence Police archives and will develop finding aids to the collection which will serve as a lasting legacy to the 150th celebration.



New Providence Police Department History

During the year both the archivist and his deputy, Caleb Horton, conducted numerous tours of the archives and City Hall, spoke before public gatherings, and appeared on radio. Staff fielded a number of requests for information from around the U.S. and several foreign countries. In providing this high level of service, we were aided greatly by nearly 30 volunteers and interns who performed valuable service in making our vast collections available for use. These records, some inaccessible for more than two centuries, will, when analyzed, give us new insights into our storied past. I would also be remiss if I did not thank City Clerk Anna Stetson, who recently retired, for her steady support and encouragement as we worked to enhance service levels and professionalize staff. Council President Michael Solomon also recognized the value of the municipal archives and he, along with Councilman Terrence Hassett, could always be counted on to provide the resources necessary to preserve and make available these irreplaceable manuscripts, books, photographs and other objects that chronicle our city's past. Despite the challenges of limited space and resources, we look forward to the future with a great deal of optimism and renewed commitment to serve both the city and all who seek to learn more about our city, its people, and its development.



Archives Staff (left to right) Paul Campbell, Caleb Horton and Britni Gorman

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul R. Campbell
City Archivist
December 1, 2014