



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

Maureen Feeney, City Clerk

Archives and Records Advisory Commission

Thursday, February 28, 2019

***Atkins Conference Room
Boston City Hall – 5th Floor
3 PM – 5 PM***

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Meeting Agenda:

- 1. Call to Order and City Clerk Welcome***
- 2. Minutes of November 15, 2018 Commission Meeting
(attached)***
- 3. Staff Reports***
- 4. Data Analytics Software: City Clerk's Office Proof of Concept***
- 5. Rivermoor Storage Space Expansion***
- 6. Colonial Era Records***

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CITY OF BOSTON
Archives & Records Management Advisory Commission

Minutes
Thursday, November 15, 2018, 3:00 P.M.
Boston City Hall – Piemonte Room – 5th Floor
One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Members Present: Maureen Feeney (City Clerk), Patty McMahon (Registry), David Leonard (Library), Henry Luthin (Law), Brendan Haley (Public) and Jill Snyder (Public)

Others Present: Assistant City Clerk Alex Geourntas, Archivist John McColgan, Archivist and Records Manager Christopher Carter, Assistant Archivist Kayla Skillin, Collections Manager Kristen Swett and Archivist for Reference and Outreach Marta Crilly.

Call to order at 3:07 PM.

Chair Maureen Feeney welcomed Commission members and guests

Motion offered by Brendan Haley to approve the minutes of the June 21, 2018 Commission Meeting and seconded by Jill Snyder. All voted in favor.

City Clerk Maureen Feeney informed Commission members that Judith Watkins declined her reappointment to the Commission. Maureen will inform Mayor Walsh of this vacancy.

Archivist John McColgan discussed ongoing efforts relative to Records Management and Retention Schedules with city departments and staff responsible for transferring records to the Archives.

Processing inventory of records at the Archives continues as staff is dealing with space limitations and an inventory slowdown due to the lack of storage capacity. Digitation migration is ongoing as 6000 digital objects have been processed and research continues to increase.

Program Overview by Archivist John McColgan is attached as part of the minutes.

Collections Manager Kristen Swett discussed her continued focus on location management, space allocation and environmental matters as it relates to collections. Each of these areas impact the storage of all collections and her report is attached as part of the minutes.

Assistant Archivist Kayla Skillin continues to work on digitation of photos, City Council Meetings, Fires in Boston, City Hospital photos, Mayor Collins Collections and Law Department files relating to the Democratic National Convention. Her report is attached as part of the minutes.

Archivist and Records Manager Christopher Carter interacted with city departments on Records Management and has provided 125 department consultations. He is also working with APEX on off-site storage management and with Valora on digitation of city records. His report is attached as part of the minutes.

Archivist for Reference and Outreach Marta Crilly indicates that research requests have increased over the past year and there were 800 requests as of November which will surpass last year's requests by the end of the fiscal year. Digital access continues to increase as well on Facebook, Twitter and Tumbler.

Several new outreach initiatives started with the Burke High School, Kennedy Academy for Health Careers, Everyday Boston and Boston Artist in Residence Program. Several collections were digitized including portions of Mayor Collins' filing concerning civil rights and part of Mayor Flynn's collection documenting immigration and refugee resettlement, 2003 City Council recordings, Boston City Hospital photographs and Hyde Park High School photographs. Her report is attached as part of the minutes.

Patrick Mulvey Welch from the Public Facilities Department updated Commission members regarding Archives space allocation and environmental controls. The plan aims to increase storage space and replace shelving by way of mobile shelving. Plans will be ready to include as part of the FY2020 budget allocation.

Discussion ensued relative to colonial records that are situated at the Boston Public Library since the 1970's. These records were moved to the library when the new City Hall was being built at Government Center. David Leonard expressed a willingness to work with Archivist John McColgan and the City Clerk's Office to initiate a process to reach an amicable agreement relative to these records. These colonial records are from 1630 when Boston was a Town through 1822 when Boston became a City.

Commission members expressed a strong willingness to begin efforts to solve this matter to repatriate these records to the City Archives.

Motion to adjourn meeting offered by Brendan Haley and seconded by David Leonard. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 4:35 PM.

ARAC Report - Program Overview by John McColgan

In the City Archives we have skilled, specialized labor uniquely equipped with professional training and experience specific to the archives profession. We continue to build here a municipal archives institution we believe to be on a par with the best of any in the country. I am here going to give you a cursory status overview of our program among our records management, collections management, and access management initiatives. Staff will follow up with reports detailing the Division's accomplishments among these areas of focus.

In records management we continue to assist agencies with carrying out records retention policy and practices. To promote this service, we've mounted an internal website, giving departments direct links to information on retention schedules, disposition procedure, off-site storage, etc. The very exciting news is that in collaboration with IT we have procured the services of the data-mining and information governance firm Valora to develop software infrastructure for the management of the City's digital records. The ultimate goal is ensuring the preservation of electronic records needed for their operational, legal and historical value, and the elimination of costly digital landfills that place the City at legal and financial hazard. Chris will provide more details on this initiative as well as updates on statistics, records center services and department consultations.

In collections management, our work has had to focus more on preservation and processing, and less on accessions due to near depletion of storage space and the inability to accept large accessions. As much as 2 or 3 thousand cubic feet of permanent records stored off-site by the Law Department and Inspectional Services could come tomorrow if we had the space; another thousand from the School department if we had the space; and 6,000 cubic feet of building permit plans heroically rescued from dumpsters and oblivion by the Library four decades ago, if we had the space. The space issue will be dealt with in another agenda item. But despite constraints, we do have tricks up our sleeve to wedge in smaller important accessions Kristen will tell you about. Kristen, Kayla and Marta will also be giving you updates on collection processing, location management, environmental monitoring, media migration and digitization. Our digital repository, Preservica, now preserves over 27,000 digital objects available to the public.

In access management - providing reference and outreach services - we continue to make collections available to a vast range of research - legal, scholarly, genealogical, City department business, etc. Reference volume continues to grow as collections - both analog and (increasingly) digital - attract more research clientele. Marta will provide details on what looks to be a record-breaking year for both reference and social media following. She will also update us on external collaboration, including a neighborhood history project with Boston Public Schools; a community oral history project with the Art Commission; and collaboration with the City's Digital Team, for whom we're providing content for the City's social media outreach.

Report of Kristen Swett, Collections Manager

Since the last meeting, I have continued my work focusing on collection management including location management, space management and environmental management for the main record storage area.

As part of location management, I am working on identifying un-cataloged collections on the shelves and adding location information to the accession records. With recent updates to the ArchivesSpace searching and reports functionality, I am able to do a shelf read for each aisle to see what needs locations, corrections etc. so I am moving along steadily with that.

In terms of space management, we have had to come up with various ways to make more room on the shelves. For example, we recently accessioned Girls' Latin School and to make room for those I had to stack card file boxes 3 high instead of 2 which isn't ideal for access but it did free up enough shelves for the Girls' Latin records. I have completed the rehousing of the Rent Board minutes that were stored in 3 ring binders. I re-folded all of the minutes and disposed of the binders. This reduced the size of the collection by approximately 40 cubic feet. Unfortunately, those spaces were quickly used up by a new accession which is what we seem to run into when space does become available.. We are continuing work on processing the Model Cities Collection which is a large collection of approximately 500 cubic feet and hope to reduce that by a significant amount. My Simmons intern this semester is continuing work on processing Landmarks Commission research files and has made a lot of progress on that collection. And in the coming months, we plan to begin work on processing some other collections to help free up space including Katherine Kane's files relating to Boston 200 etc., Inspectional Services Department correspondence and Printing Department job files.

I have also continued to monitor the temperature and humidity in our collection storage areas on a quarterly basis with the data loggers that were purchased as part of a grant. For the past year and a half, the data loggers have shown that the collections are at risk due to cumulative effects of the temperature and humidity in the storage areas. We are continuing to implement some of the recommendations of NEDCC from that grant. We purchased custom phase boxes for our City Documents series and other records that are in very poor condition. With money in our budget last fiscal year, we migrated to digital form videotapes of the City Council meetings from 1996. Depending on what remains in our budget this fiscal year, we will continue migrating videotapes from 1997. We also migrated a 16 mm film of the widening of Centre Street from 1930 which is a really interesting film to see. Kayla uploaded the files and completed metadata in Preservica for both the City Council videos and the Centre Street film and they are now available to the public on our website. I have also purchased new archival enclosures and storage boxes for panoramic photographs of graduating classes of Boston Schools. The photographs have been removed from the frames and stored in the proper enclosures for their continued preservation.

Finally, I have also continued to work on digitization projects as time permits including city ordinances and Engineering Department photographs and scrapbooks from the late nineteenth century and I have also continued to assist with reference primarily for city departments.

Kayla Skillin, Assistant Archivist

Processing projects:

- Law Department files relating to the Democratic National Convention
- Mayor Collins memorabilia and objects series

Preservica/digitization projects:

- Hyde Park High School photos digitized and ingested into Preservica with complete metadata and made public
- Boston City Hospital oversized photographs digitized and ingested into Preservica with complete metadata and made public
- City Council videos:
 - 1996 (VHS) - digitized files ingested into Preservica with complete metadata and made public
 - 2003 (DVDs) - converted DVDs to digital files, ingested into Preservica with complete metadata and made public
- Fire Commissioner photos - digitization completed, working on finishing metadata in order to make public

Report of Christopher Carter, Archivist and Records Manager

Since the Archives and Records Advisory Commission meeting in May, the City Archives has continued to facilitate records management services. City departments have destroyed approximately 850 cubic feet of records approved by the City Clerk, Corporation Counsel, and the State Supervisor of Public Records. Departments have transferred nearly 4,000 cubic feet to off-site storage. And archives staff have provided 125 department consultations to answer questions or concerns about records management issues.

Over the past few months, I've visited City Departments to help with records management. In particular, I've met with staff members from Fire Prevention and the Inspectional Services Department. The main offices for these departments are both located at 1010 Mass Ave, where there is limited storage space for physical records. I conducted an initial record survey for Fire Prevention and provided recommended actions for the observed record series, suggesting systematic destruction and transfer of documents.

In my meeting with ISD, we discussed their retention policies surrounding building and permit plans. ISD preserves plans on microfilm and as electronic files. ISD is increasingly moving toward born-digital records with approximately 10% of permit plans currently accepted and stored digitally. ISD would prefer to continue in this direction and keep all building and permit plans in electronic format only. We discussed the benefits of microfilm for the preservation of permanent records when compared to electronic files. Creating microfilm from born-digital records would provide a more stable medium for long-term retention, but it may also be feasible to maintain these records in the Archives' Preservica digital repository. As this process becomes increasingly digital, ISD and the Archives should continue to discuss the best approach to provide improved access to these records while ensuring their permanent preservation.

The City currently contracts with Apex record center for off-site storage of non-permanent records. The Archives has received complaints regarding the service of this vendor from a variety of City departments, particularly Boston Public Schools. The contract with Apex ends in June of 2019, and the Purchasing Division contacted the Archives for feedback regarding the responsibility of this vendor moving forward. Based on the observed performance of Apex record center, the Archives may wish to advocate for improved services for the next contract.

John also mentioned the data analytics project with Valora Technologies to address the City's holdings of digital records. This project will begin with a proof-of-concept in the City Clerk's Office. Archives and City Clerk staff have worked together to update their file plan, providing information about the types of records created by this department. Valora's software solution will analyze the contents of network folders and file shares to recommend disposition actions based on the City's retention guidelines. The Archives will monitor the results of this project to ensure proper record classification and disposition. And the pilot project will help to prepare this solution for expansion across City departments over the next year.

Report of Marta Crilly, Archivist for Reference and Outreach

I've given you the Reference and Access report for FY 2018. I'm happy to answer any questions that you have about those numbers, but I'll just share a couple of highlights.

For several years now, our reference requests have always been in the neighborhood of 1600. In FY 2018, we were over 1600. That's a change from the previous fiscal year, in which we had been under.

This year, FY 2019, we're on track to be over. We usually hit 800 research requests at the end of the calendar year. We just hit 800 research requests this week, and we're not yet at the end of November. Part of that is because we had a huge influx of research requests from the Girls Latin School Alumni Association after the Girls Latin School records were transferred to us. But even if you take out those requests, it has been a brisk year so far in terms of research requests.

Digital Access to records has also been brisk. In FY 2018, we had well over 8,000 visitors to our Preservica Instance. Those visitors viewed over 54,000 records. So, we are reaching a wide audience through our digital records program.

In terms of outreach, we still continue to have a strong social media outreach program. Facebook: 5,040 followers; Twitter: 9,310 followers; Tumblr: 13, 850 followers. Our Facebook and Twitter posts regularly are viewed by over 1,000 individuals. We're also providing content to the city's Digital Team for their own social media posts. For example, we don't run an Instagram feed, but we provide content for the City's Instagram feed. Collaborations with the Digital Team have been really fruitful on both sides. We have a lot of eye catching content, especially photographs, that helps them, and conversely, they use their longer reach to publicize our holdings.

I wanted to highlight a few recent and exciting outreach initiatives.

The first is that we are working with two Boston Public School teachers Burke High School and the Kennedy Academy for Health Careers. About 70 students will be writing histories of their neighborhoods and streets using primary sources from the City Archives. This is our first experience collaborating directly with high school teachers (as opposed to the BPS curriculum team), and so far, its going very well. We've provided 'virtual archival boxes' via Google Drive to the instructors, since our location makes a class visit impossible. I'll also be teaching at least 2 classes, possibly more, about using primary archival sources at the schools. This project is an excellent opportunity for us to bring the primary sources to a population that rarely gets inside of our reading room, and its been something that we've been wanting to do for a while, so its exciting to see it actually come to fruition.

Related to this, we're just starting to talk to an organization called Everyday Boston that has a similar neighborhood history program with high school students. Its frankly almost identical to what these BPS teachers are doing. So, I'm planning to re-use a lot of what I've done with and for these BPS classes with this organization.

Another new outreach project has been our supporting the work of Boston Artist in Residence Daniel Johnson, who is working on a community oral history project through the Art Commission. We helped him with the logistics of collecting oral histories – things like consent forms, permissions, etc. And he'll be transferring the oral histories to the City Archives when his project is complete in December.

Recently digitized collections include portions of the Mayor John Collins files concerning civil rights, portions of the Mayor Ray Flynn collection documenting immigration and refugee resettlement, the 2003 City Council recordings, Boston City Hospital photographs, and Hyde Park High School photographs