

THE GOVERNMENT RECORDS SECTION NEWS

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The Government Records Section

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Your GRS Steering Committee:



Front row, left to right: Virginia Fritsch, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Vice Chair; and Deborah Kennedy, King County (WA) Archives.

Back row, left to right: Arian Ravanbakhsh, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD; Paul R. Bergeron, Nashua (NH) City Clerk, Chair; and Randy Jones, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta, GA.

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From where I sit...

Paul R. Bergeron

Chair, Government Records Section

It is undoubtedly clear to all of us that state, county and local archival programs are staring up at budget carving knives. Supplies, personnel, projects, professional education – all are subject to increased scrutiny and possible reductions. In preparation for my own department’s budget defense, I recently collected some “philosophical justifications” as well as some appropriate local anecdotes. SAA’s “Statement on the Importance of Supporting State Archival Programs,” approved by Council this past April, was one of these. Logical, concise, and clearly-written, it is easily adaptable to most government budget situations. The following are excerpts from the Statement:

“State governments throughout the nation are facing severe budget deficits and have been forced to make deep cuts to programs and services. In some states the worst is yet to come, and decisions impacting the lives of many citizens must be made in the immediate future. During this time of crisis, it is crucial that reductions in governmental spending do not disproportionately reduce the funding of archival programs....”

As the fiscal situation in states becomes increasingly desperate, it is tempting to target records management and archival programs because, when compared with public education and social services, preserving and maintaining access to government

(continued page 5)

War in Iraq: Three U.S. Archival Views

[Editors Note: The very recent U.S. –Iraq War has raised, with a multitude of other concerns, archival and other cultural issues. Mr. John Carlin, Archivist of the United States printed a statement in the NARA Staff Bulletin, which he graciously consented to have republished here. SAA Council issued an articulate statement of concern in April 2003. And finally, Mr. Alan Ginsberg wrote a “letter to the President, in response to SAA’s statement. All three are worthy of the attention of those concerned with Government Records]

A Salute to Our Staff in Uniform

**By John W. Carlin
Archivist of the United States**

Most of us watched the war in Iraq unfold on TV or in the newspaper and have been touched in some way by the stories that make it from the deserts of the Middle East into our living rooms around the country.

The images have now become a part of our country’s history... the tears of relief of the families of rescued American POWs... the determination of U.S. Marines moving to surround Baghdad... the flag-draped coffin of a fallen American soldier... the Iraqi people’s first, bittersweet, taste of freedom amid destruction... the rubble of Iraq’s national museum, library, and archives.

As history has unfolded in Iraq over the past weeks and months, it has become even clearer the important role that records play in any government. For throughout history in times of crisis, documentary evidence takes center stage. It is the proof of how governments have treated their citizens and it holds those governments accountable for their actions.

The records of Iraq tell the story of the Iraqi people, just as the records we care for here at NARA tell the story of the American people.

In those nations where people are denied “unalienable rights;” where dictators decide who suffers, who

prosper, who lives and who dies; where governments are not “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” but of the few, by the few, and for the few, records that document the actions of public officials are considered dangerous and incriminating.

While democracies go to great lengths to protect their documentary heritage, the leaders of dictatorships rush to hide or destroy that which can incriminate them.

The difference is strikingly clear.

Here in the United States, the American people are able to inspect for themselves the record of what their government has done. The actions of Government officials are documented, and those officials can be held accountable to the citizens they serve. In this way, records form the very foundation of our democracy.

In 1952, President Harry Truman spoke in the Rotunda of the National Archives in Washington, DC, when the Charters of Freedom were first enshrined there. He said, “Whether we will preserve and extend popular liberty is a very serious question, but, after all, it is a very old question. The men who signed the Declaration faced it. So did those who wrote the Constitution. But each succeeding generation has faced it, and so far each succeeding generation has answered it in the affirmative. I am sure that our own generation will give the same affirmative answer.”

Today our country is facing the same question that President Truman pondered more than 50 years ago, and we have again answered in the affirmative. I am very proud of the role NARA and all of us who care for records play in defending democracy, for our work is vital to the future of our country.

S.A.A. Statement on Iraqi Archives

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) is deeply

concerned by several recent news reports that suggest that contemporary and historical records in Iraq are threatened as a result of the current conflict in that country. SAA urges that the protection of Iraq's documentary heritage be made a priority during the reconstruction of Iraq.

Accounts in the news media suggest that there have been deliberate attempts to destroy the records of oppression in order to hide evidence of past crimes. Other stories highlight the destruction of records in order to remove evidence of property ownership, citizenship, or nationality. Still others describe random acts of violence that threaten the cultural history of the country.

For Iraq to become a stable, democratic, and prosperous nation, its documentary heritage must be managed and preserved. Government records safeguard the rights and freedoms that citizens enjoy and are vital to the health and well being of a nation.

When a society allows its government to operate in secret, basic freedoms are gradually eroded. In South Africa, records of the apartheid regime were consciously destroyed in order to hide evidence of wrongdoing. In the former Yugoslavia, many documents were destroyed in the process of "ethnic cleansing," making it almost impossible for rightful owners to assert their claim to property. The rights of every Iraqi are at risk today and long into the future by the loss of records.

We all share Iraq's culture and history. Written records first appeared in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, the cradle of Western civilization. The loss of this heritage would not only hurt the Iraq people; it would also make it harder for Americans to understand our culture and values.

Every effort should be made to locate and preserve in secure custody all documents and archives relating to the Iraqi state, its security forces, the daily operation of the government, and the history of the nation. Emergency measures should be taken to recover

records that may have been discarded, abandoned, looted, or abused. Such an effort will assist in the prosecution of former officers of the Iraqi regime as well as provide a firm legal foundation for future economic development.

The new government of Iraq will also need a professionally managed archival system. SAA urges that reconstruction efforts include funds to rebuild the archives of Iraq. Once a stable archival program is in place, any documents that may have been secured for the purpose of short-term preservation should be returned to Iraqi archivists.

Without records, Iraqi officials cannot be held accountable. Without records, citizens cannot exercise their rights. Without records, a stable economic environment cannot emerge. And without records, the Iraqi people as well as the citizens of the world lose an important part of our shared cultural heritage. Immediate and substantial efforts must be made to protect and reconstruct Iraq's documentary infrastructure. America should cooperate with the International Council on Archives, UNESCO, and other international organizations working to preserve Iraq's cultural heritage.

—Approved by Council, April 2003

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For other Iraq Archives links, please go to:
http://archivists.org/news/iraqi_archives.asp

Editor's Corner

The "Editor" encourages, no, imploringly solicits, articles from those interested in issues related to Government Records. We will be happy to publish items that may be controversial, and we welcome responses to published articles. In the meantime, many thanks to Chair Paul Bergeron, Mr. John Carlin, SAA Council, Mr. Alan Ginsberg, Dr. Conley Edwards, and Mr. William LeFurgy.

Iraqi Archives: A Dissent
By Alan Ginsberg

I was somewhat reluctant when I was asked if this

newsletter could publish the text of an e-mail I sent to SAA President Peter Hirtle, concerning SAA's "Statement on Iraqi Archives." I had not written the message for publication; both the style and content of the e-mail reflect this. Furthermore, I wrote it almost immediately after reading the Statement; had I waited before pressing "send," I am sure that I would have made changes.

I have decided to have it published here. The only changes from the original are corrections of typographical errors.

Dear Mr. Hirtle:

I am both dismayed and disappointed by SAA's statement on Iraq. It goes far beyond calling on the occupying forces to meet their obligations under international law with respect to the cultural heritage of Iraq. It takes political positions that I find to be wholly inappropriate.

SAA stated:

"For Iraq to become a stable, democratic, and prosperous nation, its documentary heritage must be managed and preserved. Government records safeguard the rights and freedoms that citizens enjoy and are vital to the health and well being of a nation."

SAA has no business endorsing a "stable, democratic ... nation" in Iraq. Whether Iraq is maintained as a stable state, or whether Iraqi Kurdistan becomes wholly independent is none of SAA's business. I personally think that the nature of the Iraqi state should be decided by the people there, but I wouldn't want SAA to endorse my political perspectives.

SAA further stated:

"Emergency measures should be taken to recover records that may have been discarded, abandoned, looted, or abused. Such an effort will assist in the prosecution of former officers of the Iraqi regime as well as provide a firm legal foundation for future economic development."

I don't think SAA should be commenting on assisting "prosecution of former officers of the Iraqi regime." Similarly, I would not want SAA to make statements concerning the prosecution of present officers of the American and British regimes.

The statement says:

"The new government of Iraq will also need a professionally managed archival system."

With the U.S. Government now occupying Iraq, I think that organizations in the U.S. should refrain from telling Iraqis what they "need." An SAA statement could have simply addressed issues related to obligations of occupying powers, efforts of UNESCO, etc. Instead the SAA has chosen to take sides on any number of political issues related to Iraq. It should not do so.

Furthermore, the positions it has taken can easily be viewed as supporting the campaign of the U.S. Government to "reconstruct" Iraq. Again, I would personally call for the withdrawal of US/UK forces from Iraq, and oppose the "right" of the U.S. Government to reconstruct or determine the nature of the government there. But I would oppose any effort to have SAA endorse my personal political views.

I hope that Council seriously considers rescinding the SAA statement.

Sincerely,
Alan Ginsberg
Union Theological Seminary
New York, New York

(From where I sit – continued from page 1)
records may appear to be simply a cultural enrichment rather than an essential service...Archives are a vital government service that should be supported even in times of financial hardship."

If you haven't read the complete statement, please do.

Maybe you will find something here that can strengthen your arguments in defense of your own budget:

www.archivists.org/statements/statearchives.asp.

Which brings us to SAA in LA...

Los Angeles 2003 Annual Meeting session information is now online. Having talked to a number of Government Records Section members over the past few weeks, I know that travel dollars are tight and that many are making decisions now as to which conferences they can or will attend in the coming year. Be sure to consider SAA in LA.

The LA program's session content looks exciting, pre-conference workshops are varied, tours look like fun, plenty of museums within walking distance of the hotel, shuttle buses to area dining and entertainment – and, yes, the Dodgers are in town, too!

The *Government Records Section* will hold its business meeting on Thursday, August 21, 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. The session will open with section reports and the nomination and election of new steering committee members, including the vice chair/chair-elect. Nominations are being sought for a local, state and federal representative to serve on the steering committee. If you have an interest in serving, please contact me. Following the business meeting, a panel composed of representatives from federal, state and local governments will examine the practical ways that historical records are being – or will be – used during the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial for exhibits, online presentations, cooperative ventures, grant opportunities, education, and more. Titled, "Using Government Archives to Celebrate the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial," the discussion will look at the Bicentennial Celebration of Meriwether Lewis' and William Clark's journey across the North American continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. During the Bicentennial Celebration (2003 – 2006), institutions across the nation will draw upon their historical records to celebrate this anniversary.

The Local Government Records Roundtable will meet on Friday, August 22, from 4:45 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Following a brief business session, the Roundtable will engage in a panel-led discussion titled, "Collections Policies in Local Government Archives," relative to guidelines for developing an Acquisition Policy that is intended to provide direction for making acquisition decisions and allocating resources in local government archives. The session will consider to what extent, and by what means, local governments can recover, compulsorily or otherwise, public records that are currently held privately, and to what extent local government archivists should accept, or seek to acquire, private or commercial material for their communities' archives.

We will include more information about the 2003 conference in our summer newsletter, including information about GRS-endorsed sessions.

Paul R. Bergeron, CMC

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Help Wanted

WEB LIAISON NEEDED

After several years of spectacular service, Anita Taylor Doering, Archivist at La Crosse (WI) Public Library, is stepping down as GRS Web Liaison. Regretfully the Section is seeking a new colleague to fill this important role in the Section's organization.

The time commitment is approximately 30 hours per year. Web page templates are already set up. The web liaisons have access to the SAA server and upload directly via FTP. The web site is: <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/gov/index.asp>

For further information, please contact Paul Bergeron at bergeronp@ci.nashua.nh.us

Cutbacks to State Government Records Programs

[Editor's note: As Chair Paul Bergeron noted, "state, county and local archival programs are staring up at budget carving knives." Dr. Conley L. Edwards, State Archivist, Commonwealth of Virginia, very kindly provided a copy of a memo detailing cutbacks to the Library of Virginia. The memo is perhaps representative of cutbacks being implemented in other states.]

Library of Virginia Service Reduction Summary October 2002

The Library of Virginia – the Commonwealth of Virginia’s official research library and archival repository serving government officials, state and local agencies, public libraries, college faculty, students, historians, and genealogists – has experienced several rounds of budget reductions during the past two years. The cumulative effect has been a 28 percent permanent reduction in the Library’s overall general fund appropriation (22 percent of that occurring with the 7 and 15 percent reductions this fiscal year). The Library has had to absorb a disproportionate amount of these cuts internally rather than pass them on in full measure to localities and other state agencies that receive funding through the Library’s budget. Thus, the net effect of the past two years (including the 15 percent reduction announced by Governor Warner this week) has been a loss to the Library’s operating budget of a staggering 39 percent.

Among the painful outcomes of our current fiscal situation are the

Layoff of 23 full- time staff (out of a maximum employment level of 216) and 17 part-time staff, with an additional 19 vacant positions that will not be filled – leaving a total staffing shortfall of 59 valued individuals.

Reduction of collection development budget (purchasing of books, manuscripts, journals, and databases) by 45 percent.

Reduction of hours of operation in the reading rooms by one day per week. The reading rooms will be open to researchers Tuesday through Saturdays (with limited staffing on Saturdays), but will be closed to researchers on Mondays.

Elimination of the Digital Library Program, which has allowed the Library to make heavily-used

collections available to researchers through the Library’s web site.

Elimination of the Imaging Services Program, which for decades has conducted all preservation microfilming for the Library, its patrons, and numerous local agencies.

Elimination of the Virginia Center for the Book Program.

Elimination of all state funding for the Infopowering the Commonwealth initiative, which provides citizens and libraries access to a wide array of key information databases.

Elimination of Educational Programs, including teacher workshops, tours for K through 12 students, and other activities that open the Library’s resources to a younger audience.

Elimination of the Publications Division as a separate organizational unit, with key editorial functions and staff consolidated within another division.

Elimination of *Virginia Cavalcade* magazine, the Library’s award-winning quarterly magazine published continuously since 1951.

Elimination of all planning for 2007 related projects.

Elimination of the Building and Construction Grants program and consulting services that have supported and assisted local libraries with planning and oversight of major construction initiatives.

Reduction by 22 percent of state funding for local libraries, which is administered through the Library of Virginia’s budget. This will have a serious impact on the hours, book buying, and staffing of local libraries across the Commonwealth.

Significant reduction of the State Documents Depository Program, which provides citizens

with access to state publications through local libraries.

Significant reduction in services to state agency libraries.

Significant slippage in archival processing targets addressing the collections backlog.

Significant delays in processing photo duplication orders and on-line research and reference requests for researchers.

The Library staff is committed to maintaining fundamental services to our many users.

This difficult budgetary situation unravels much of what has been accomplished during the last decade, and further reductions will erode the agency's ability to function effectively as the reference library at the seat of government, archival agency of the Commonwealth, and advocate for Virginia's library community.

Other Cutbacks in State Archival and History Programs

1. Massachusetts. Budget of the Massachusetts Cultural Council cut by 62 percent (from \$19.1 million in fiscal 2002 to \$7.3 million in fiscal 2003).
2. Washington State Historical Society expects a cutback of 14 percent. The Washington State Library will receive a cut of 60 percent.
3. Arizona. State agencies, including the historical society, state library, and archives. Cuts of 10 percent. Steeper cuts in 2004.
4. Wisconsin. Governor recommends reduction of \$1.5 million dollars, and 30 positions. Constitutes a cut of 15% of the budget, 24% of positions. Combined with staff reductions of last year, the current proposal results in 45 out of 140 tax supported positions being eliminated over a 12 month period.

5. South Carolina. Cut of 5.5%, or \$250,000.00. Since 2001 the Department of Archives and History has suffered a 25.2% reduction.
6. Maryland. Archives Budget is being reduced by 12 percent.
7. Minnesota. State Historical Society budget will undergo a 15 percent reduction.
8. Florida. Governor Jeb Bush has proposed removing the state library from the budget and transferring library collections to a private institution.
9. Texas. The Texas Historical Commission faces a budget reduction of about half.
10. New Jersey. Governor McGreevey's proposed budget for 2004 would eliminate funding for the New Jersey Historical Commission.
11. Connecticut. Governor Rowland's proposed budget would replace the Connecticut Historic Commission with a new Commission on Arts, Culture and Tourism.

Compiled from David Darlington, "State History Programs in Crisis," in Perspectives. Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association, Vol.41, No. 4 (April 2003), pages 9 – 12; and "History Under Attack in the States," in Organization of American Historian's (OAH) Newsletter, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May 2003), page 8.

PDF-A: A New Digital Preservation Format

William G. LeFurgy, U.S. Library of Congress*

*The author is reporting from the perspective of a member of the PDF-A committee and is not presenting any official position of the U.S. Library of Congress.

A committee of government, business, and academic representatives is exploring a promising approach to long-term preservation of text-based digital documents. Sponsored by The Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and The

Association for Suppliers of Printing, Publishing and Converting Technologies (NPES), the committee is working to establish an archival standard for Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF). Known as PDF-A, the potential standard intends to specify a limited, stable subset of PDF for text-based documents that must remain valid for a number of years. The effort has been underway since 2002, and the ultimate aim is to have PDF-A endorsed and owned by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

The need for digital formats specifically designed for long term preservation is compelling. Few practical standards are now in place for the untold millions of electronic records and other files produced every day around the world. Inevitably, this will lead to problems finding and preserving even a small portion of these files for more than a few years. Computer hardware, storage, and software operating systems are rapidly evolving, as are individual file formats. Only the most determined user could, for example, locate and open many documents produced on personal computers from just a decade ago. Even if such documents can be opened, their integrity and authenticity may also be open to question, as current computer technology likely will render them differently from how they were originally presented.

Archivists have, of course, known of these problems for quite some time. Other groups are now also becoming aware as a result of expanding demands for electronic submission, Internet search and retrieval, and other functions that drive production and use of digital documents. As government and business switch to electronic recordkeeping some long-term solutions are needed to ensure that digital documents remain accessible for long periods of time—in some cases as permanent archival records.

In the case of text-based electronic recordkeeping, a digital preservation format must address three basic requirements.

1. The needs of document producers. Files must be easy to create, compatible with workflow processes,

and flexible enough to include images, sub-documents, and other components.

2. The needs of document users. Files must be reliable, appropriately functional, and discoverable from different approaches (e.g., index terms and full text).

3. The needs of archives. Files must be based on non-proprietary and stable technology and suitable for recordkeeping guidelines issued to producers (e.g., guidance for records creation, maintenance, and disposition). In addition, files must support metadata for access, provenance, and preservation.

PDF addresses many of these requirements. It is widely deployed and has been integrated into many work environments. The format is popular with users both for retaining the exact formatting and appearance of documents as well as for information search and retrieval. Based on a published specification, PDF permits independent development of tools for creating and reading documents. By publishing the specification, Adobe has managed to avoid a key preservation problem with most other commercial software: barriers (technical as well as legal) for users to decode information content contained in files. The format retains the appearance and other features of digital documents that may be deemed as significant properties (such as layout, dimension, and "look and feel"). Retention of significant properties is critically important to preserve the authenticity (is it what it claims to be) and integrity (has it changed in a meaningful way) of electronic records. The most recent PDF version also offers a rich metadata capability known as the Extensible Metadata Platform (XMP), which based on the Extensible Markup Language (XML) and Resource Description Framework (RDF) specifications.

Despite its advantages, PDF itself is not suitable as an archival format. Adobe controls its development and is under no obligation to continue publishing the specification for future versions. The format can

include some features that are incompatible with current archival requirements, such as encryption. PDF documents also are not required to be self-contained; certain fonts may be drawn from outside the file, for example. The work of the PDF-A committee is to define a basic subset of the current PDF standard that meets the needs of producers and users while excluding features that will hinder archival viability.

Properly implemented, PDF-A could have important uses for recordkeeping. Agencies might require that public electronic submissions conform to the format.

Internal agency workflows could also rely on it, possibly to include the conversion of other formats to PDF-A. XMP metadata, which is currently under consideration for inclusion in the standard, would provide for broad and flexible characterization of documents for maintenance and disposition. From the perspective of archival institutions, XMP shows much promise for purposes of description, provenance (e.g., history and context), preservation, and administration. There are also some key technical advantages of XMP for digital preservation: metadata is embedded in each file as plain text, which both lessens the possibility of loss and simplifies access to the metadata.

If all goes well, PDF-A will be approved as an ISO standard by 2005. For more information, please check the AIIM website at:

<http://www.aiim.org/standards.asp?ID=25013>.

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