

**VERMONT STATE ARCHIVES  
ANNUAL REPORT  
January 30, 2004**

***3 V.S.A. §117(c): The secretary shall report annually to the governor and the general assembly on the state archives program.***

Act #3 of the 2003 session went into effect on July 1, 2003. The act, incorporated into 3 V.S.A. §117, consolidated archival management under the secretary of state and created a framework for cooperation between the state archives within the secretary of state's office and the public records division of the department of buildings and general services.

To begin implementation both retrospective and prospective steps were initiated. Retrospectively, the archives staff, working with public records personnel, began identifying the archival holdings of both divisions. The information was entered into a database allowing, for the first time, a common view of the programs' holdings and providing a means to measure current levels of archival documentation across state government.

Prospectively, the archives and public records launched a joint project to survey the current framework for managing state government records. The initial focus is on reviewing and revising the recordkeeping practices of the secretary of state's office and the department of buildings and general services. This work includes developing uniform practices and schedules for records common to most government entities (financial and personnel records, for example).

Joint projects, combined with an exchange of staff visits, support the goal of better coordination envisioned by Act #3.

Performance measures for the archives, July 1, 2003 to January 1, 2004, can be found in Appendix A.

**The impact of Howard Dean's presidential campaign**

Efforts to implement the new law cannot be understood without reference to the impact of Howard Dean's presidential campaign on the archives' resources. Some measures of this impact can be found in Appendix B.

**Recommendations:**

Four long standing issues need immediate attention: the need for a new archive facility; the need to analyze the quality of current documentation; the need to help agencies better identify records with archival value; and the need to address electronic records with archival value.

**1. There is a pressing need for a new State archival facility.** The current facility in Redstone has inadequate capacity; is subject to leaks during spring run-off and inclement weather; and is inadequately designed for the security and use of archival records.

The archives has spent an average of \$40,000 a year since 1999 to free space by microfilming records, barely keeping pace with on-going acquisitions. As of January 1, 2004 there are only 100 feet of free vault space. This is approximately half the amount of free space available in 1991, suggesting not only the archives' success in making do (often at the expense of acquiring important records), but also the degree it is forced to manage space rather than records. The intent of Act #3, to improve archival management, is impossible to meet without a new facility.

Between May and November 2003 water from rain or Spring snow melt leaked into the rooms on either side of the vault eleven times. The possibility of mold developing is high and would require expensive restoration work.

Water pipes just outside the vault run between the foundation and interior walls where temperatures have been recorded as low as 23 degrees, raising the very real risk of burst pipes.

The original environmental control (HVAC) system for the vault died and a used system was installed in the vault, further limiting space and raising risks.

The researcher room is inadequate and can only accommodate six researchers.

The vault and researcher room are on different floors while the photocopiers are in different locations on the first and second floors. This creates inefficiencies in retrieving and re-filing boxes, making copies, and providing security for records.

Archives boxes weigh from 50 to 75 pounds; carrying boxes up and down stairs increases risk to the staff.

Limited research space compromises researcher confidentiality.

Lack of space forces the archives to store records off-site or decline important archival collections. The 145 boxes of closed Dean records had to be stored within the warehouse section of the record center. Though the archives has legal custody—and responsibility—for those records it cannot monitor their security.

The general assembly has appropriated tens of thousands of dollars since 1985 to study the problem. Those studies repeatedly confirmed the need for a new facility in Montpelier in order to be close to the primary users.

## **2. We must continue to analyze the quality and condition of current archival documentation.**

The archives, working with public records staff, reviewed the 460 archival record series held by public records. Preliminary content analysis was done on 65 of the 460 series that lacked complete descriptive information. Forty-one of those sixty-five archival series lacked clear, or any, information about their creators and were simply designated “archival strays.” Organization of the sampled series varied; some were completely unarranged. Existing series descriptions did not consistently reflect record content, date ranges, or the filing system of the creating office. The condition of the records is varied and most need basic preservation.

As a result these series are largely inaccessible to the public and government. Even the two programs are generally unfamiliar with the content and research potential of these series.

A report on that analysis, compiled by Tanya Marshall, a professional archivist working with the archives staff, is available upon request.

## **3. There is a pressing need to help state agencies identify records that have archival value.**

Archival documentation of government is uneven. The majority of agencies and departments have identified few, if any, archival records. Many existing archival series reflect episodic “file cleaning” rather than a systematic effort to document core functions and activities. The only identified archival records of the *agency of administration* consist of two volumes of staff meetings (1959-63) and one cubic foot of records from a 1961-1962 investigation of the state highway program. There are approximately 44 feet of *agency of transportation* archival records, 41 of which are photographs.

In some cases we know other records have been preserved, though not as archival. Further study is needed. Even with that caveat, it is clear that documentation of state government has been haphazard and inadequate.

Mark Reaves of public records is working with the archives to review the existing recordkeeping practices within the secretary of state’s office and within buildings and general services. The goal is to create models for agencies in identifying and managing their records (see Appendix C for a recommendation based on this work).

The initial survey has been very useful in identifying issues. These include:

- there is a hodgepodge of confusing, conflicting, or superceded series descriptions and disposition orders.

- there is a lack of coordinated management for records common to all agencies, including conflicting retention periods and different descriptive terms for the same records (personnel records are an example). In some cases different departments are spending resources to preserve identical records.

- existing series and disposition orders have not kept pace with changing legal mandates or the implementation of information technologies. Since offices traditionally created series when records overwhelmed office space, few schedule electronic records that consume little physical space.

Though the survey is not complete, several “permanent” series of the secretary of state’s office have been reappraised and given shorter retention periods. This helps alleviate demands on storage and filming costs.

One interesting preliminary finding is the impact of new information technologies on the creation of paper records. VISION, the centralized finance management system, not only lengthened (from three to six years) how long financial records must be retained by the creating agency, but also led agencies to print out and preserve electronic records (partly for legal reasons--some of the data entered into VISIONS comes from signed and dated paper records, partly because business managers wanted a complete paper trail for each transaction rather than rely on a system maintained by another department).

A key concern is how effectively agencies comply with the requirements of 3 V.S.A. §218 (including maintaining an inventory to all agency records and creating justifiable retention periods for those records), as well as the process for scheduling records set out in Chapter 11 of Title 22.

#### **4. Electronic Records**

Electronic records need special mention. The State spends an average of \$50 million a year on information technology without providing guidance on how to manage the records held within computer systems. The problem of preserving archival records is exacerbated by the rapid obsolescence of technology (three to five years) and the need to manage records across software and hardware generations. Efficiency of access and storage guide IT decisions, not the long term management of electronic records in compliance with record laws.

Currently there are few guidelines. Public records, for example, requires a hard copy for records retained more than ten years, but this policy cannot not address the growing number of records “born digital.” The archives is adapting Minnesota’s Trustworthy Information Systems tool for managing electronic records to Vermont law, but this work has not been sustained in the face of the Dean research ([http://vermont-archives.org/records/electronic/er\\_trust.html](http://vermont-archives.org/records/electronic/er_trust.html)).

The desire for guidance on electronic records is suggested by the archives’ website. The entry page to electronic records management section received 3,989 views from June 11, 2003 to January 14, 2004.

The on-going survey will include recommendations for managing electronic records.

## APPENDIX A

### Performance Measures: July 1, 2003 to January 1, 2004

- responded to 2,245 information requests between July 1<sup>st</sup> and December 17, 2003.
- received 460,280 hits on its web site between June 11 and December 24, 2003. Though number of hits does not indicate user satisfaction, it does suggest the broad interest in archival services and the archives' success in using the web to expand access.
- created a collection-level database combining the 460 archival record series at public records with the holdings of the archives. This allows, for the first time, a view of what government archival records have been identified and preserved.
- in coordination with public records, began to review and revise existing record schedules for the secretary of state's office and the department of buildings and general services. To date the secretary's office has shortened retention periods for three record series, creating long term savings by reducing burdens on storage and on public records microfilming program.
- re-arranged the 170 boxes of open Dean records in order to facilitate access. While not a full processing, this work provided savings in staff time in retrieving records through better arrangement and description.
- added a section on public records and the right to know to its web site (<http://vermont-archives.org/records/right-to-know/overview.html>). The site was put up in August 2003 and through December 24<sup>th</sup> had been visited 2,300 times.
- building on an earlier grant program, helped Rutland County's municipal clerks develop individual disaster mitigation and response plans. The ultimate goal is to have a cooperative county-level response plan.
- convened, and participated in, the study committee on municipal records.
- established a partnership with the Snelling Center on Government for the use of graduate student on archives-based projects. One product, based on an intern's research at the archives, was the historical data included in the report on compensating government officials.

## APPENDIX B

### Selected Performance Measures: Dean-Related Research

- 600 hours of staff time to physically combine related files within the Dean records; arrange and describe over thirty boxes of loose records; and create a finding aid.
- Dean-related research visits (exclusive of phone and e-mail requests) occurred on 70% of the workdays from July 1<sup>st</sup> to December.
- They occurred on 95% of the days since December 1st. –research is usually conducted by teams of two to twenty people, who stay from a few days to several weeks.
- daily photocopying requests range from a few dozen to over 3,000 copies, with over 7,000 copies being made in one three day period.
- written or e-mail requests for copies are for whole boxes (an archives box can hold up to 2,500 to 3,000 pieces of paper).
- security, as well as the volume of requests, requires two to six staff members to maintain line of sight control of the records while retrieving and re-filing boxes and making copies.

Beyond the numbers, the high stakes and competing interests of the teams introduce unusual security concerns. The archives received warnings from different teams and other archives with similar experiences about efforts to remove or insert documents. On several occasions staff had to intervene to stop inappropriate behavior. To further illustrate the unusual circumstances, a political website reported on which campaigns visited the archives on a particular day, what they looked at, and on conversations between researchers and staff.

On-going litigation over Governor Dean's use of executive privilege limits further comment at this time.

## APPENDIX C

### **Recommendations For Improving Records Management**

**There is a pressing need to improve the resources available to public records' record management program.** The public records program provides record management services to state and municipal government to assist in complying with recordkeeping mandates, such as 3 V.S.A. §218. Mark Reaves, the information specialist at public records, has done an outstanding job but must single-handedly cover all 246 towns and cities, 47 incorporated villages, special service districts (school districts, solid waste management districts, regional planning, etc), as well as all state agencies, departments, boards and commissions.

Since recordkeeping is often a low agency priority it is important to provide additional certified record managers to actively assist agencies in improving their recordkeeping. Additional professional staff could also support regular training for state records officers.

As the experience of the on-going record survey suggests, assistance in creating or revising record series could significantly reduce the pressure on record center space. The limited survey work done to date has removed about 100 feet of records that would have otherwise been stored or filmed by public records. Additional savings are likely if that work was extrapolated across government.