

Voice from the Vault

By Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

A Record Year

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, photocopiers were running as candidates joust. As I write this on Christmas Eve we have, in the last two days, retrieved, copied, and re-filed over 6,000 records for research related to Howard Dean's presidential candidacy.

It is, perhaps, a fitting way to end a year in which public records have had such a prominent role in our public dialogues. In recent columns I have discussed some of the record issues that gained attention in 2003. Now, on my desk, is a final draft report of the Study Committee on Standards for Municipal Land Records. The report notes that through November, real estate sales generated \$26,633,225 in state property transfer taxes. It references a twenty-two town study by Milton Town Clerk John Cushing that found 161 volumes of land records were created (averaging 645 pages per volume) in the final five months of 2002. The average volume contained \$4,700,000 in mortgage financings and \$2,500,000 in property sales.

Acknowledging that none of these property transfers could occur without good municipal recordkeeping, the report also notes the pressures this incredible volume of recording has had on municipal records and those who use them. This volume of economic and recordkeeping activities help drive increasing demands for technological approaches to the recording and accessibility of municipal records.

The study committee's recommendations call for a more structured way to prioritize and address recordkeeping, as well as resources more commensurate to the value of economic activity supported by that recordkeeping.

The report's recommendations, combined with continuing issues of privacy, electronic recordkeeping, etc promise to bring further attention to public records in 2004. It should be an exciting year and I look forward to working with all of you.