

## Voice from the Vault

By Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

### The Dog Days of Summer

The "dog days of summer" originally referred to the days when Sirius, the Dog Star, rose at the same time as sunrise. More generally they now refer to the period from July 3rd to August 11th as a period of stagnation brought on by hot, humid weather. This year there is nothing stagnant about the dog days of summer for the new Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA).

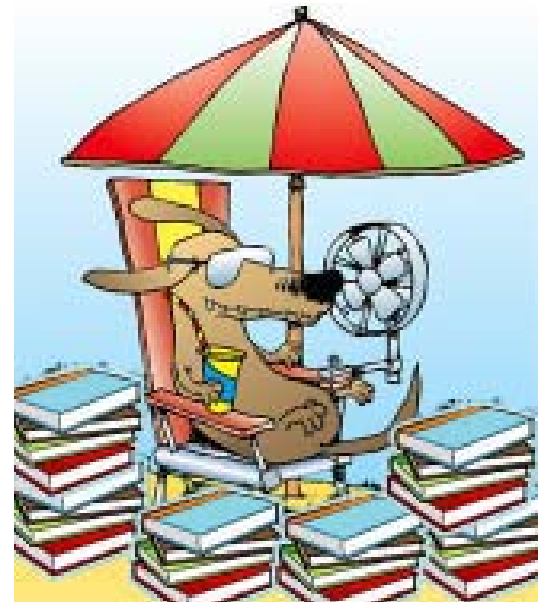
VSARA came into being on July 1st through the merger of the Public Records Division within the Department of Buildings and General Services with the State Archives within the Office of the Secretary of State. This new division within the Secretary's Office is responsible for providing records and archival management services to state agencies. Created through Act 96 of 2008, VSARA's authorities are primarily found in 3 V.S.A. §117 and 3 V.S.A. §218.

We have been spending our days doggedly addressing the myriad administrative details associated with the merger and laying the groundwork for a sustained review of our existing programs and how they further our mission. At the same time we are working with architects and Buildings and General Services on the design and construction of a new archives and reference facility at the Middlesex record center. If all goes well (and that is always a fateful phrase) we will slowly be consolidating our operations at Middlesex as construction moves through several phases. By January 2010 the physical consolidation of our offices should be complete.

Several of you have inquired about what all this will mean for the management of municipal records. Initially there will be few visible changes as we look at our current services. Existing municipal record series and disposition orders will remain in effect. Lisa May and the micrographics unit will continue to microfilm municipal records under the current system.

One immediate change will be that questions on municipal record scheduling and retention should be directed to Tanya Marshall rather than Mark Reaves. Tanya, who is in effect my deputy, is our senior records analyst in charge of appraising records and establishing record schedules on how long records need to be preserved. Tanya can be reached at (802) 828-0405 or at [tmarshall@sec.state.vt.us](mailto:tmarshall@sec.state.vt.us).

Another change is the addition of two record analysts. On July 7th we welcomed Scott Reilly and Katie Sherman to our staff. They will work under Tanya's supervision. The record analysts will directly assist public agencies in identifying what records are produced by what mandates and business processes and what legal, administrative or other requirements govern how long the records should be retained. This more active partnership with public agencies has several goals, most notably in developing a common vocabulary for describing similar business activities and record types. Another goal would be to establish, where appropriate, common retention periods for similar records. This will replace the current, more reactive practice of addressing requests on an ad hoc basis which has led to thousands of disposition orders incapable of supporting a consistent and comprehensive (enterprise) approach to public records.



We have already encountered the pent up desire for more consistent guidance on managing records. To avoid being overwhelmed by hundreds of individual requests we are asking public agencies seeking to update their record management programs to submit requests to our Targeted Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is described on our website at: <http://vermont-archives.org/records/tap/index.htm>.

In other words, instead of trying to address individual requests from 246 municipalities, and thus recreate the failed ad hoc approach of the past, we are asking for municipal clerks or treasurers to identify specific records project, organize a project team, and then submit their request to Tanya. Given the limited resources of municipalities we recommend that TAP proposals be developed in connection with the Vermont Municipal Clerks and Treasurers' Association, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, an active county association of clerks, or some other organization that can help sustain a project. As I write this I understand that the municipal treasurers are exploring a possible TAP request.

When appropriate the Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) of the Department of Information and Innovation will join the partnership for a more complete business/workflow analysis and to add an enterprise approach that may contribute to a more comprehensive application of record management practices, including the management of digital records.

VSARA is also developing training opportunities and tools for those responsible for managing public records. As with most of our initial efforts, the focus will be on state government records officers but we will also develop workshops and other tools for custodians of public records at the municipal level. Many of you may have attended one such presentation, given by Tanya on June 3rd at St. Michael's College.

These are, for VSARA, hardly the lethargic dog days of summer. A lot is going on; a lot remains to be done. We recognize that it will take time to turn our records program in a new direction. To effectively address decades of good faith but ad hoc and even inconsistent approaches we need to proceed in a thoughtful and structured way. We ask for your patience as we seek to improve our services. I believe that by working together we can create a program that will make us all more effective in our jobs while allowing our public records to become a resource for Vermonters.