

# Voice from the Vault

By Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

## A Moving Experience

It has been noted that as an interior decorator I tend to follow an early compost style. To my everlasting chagrin on more than one occasion a visitor to my office has felt moved to observe, "I thought an archivist would have a neat office."

Consequently as I pack up my office in anticipation of moving to Middlesex I am constrained to become something of an archeologist, working my way through layers of stuff. Why am I packing? The Redstone staff of the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration will be relocating to our new offices at the old record center in Middlesex.

This is part of the ongoing construction and renovations that are occurring at Middlesex and will unite the Redstone and Middlesex staff in a single location. While the construction of the new vault will not be done, pending funding, until November 2009, the renovation of the office spaces and reference area will be completed by mid-February. The move includes the record analysts (Tanya, Scott, and Katie); Louise, our Administrative Procedures Act clerk who doubles as our Legislative Clerk processing original acts and resolves; Kathy our notary supervisor/reference room supervisor; Christie, our reference/processing person; and myself. To avail yourself of those services you will now go the Middlesex office starting the week of March 16th.

Since we will not be able to move the records from the Redstone vault until the vault work is completed later in 2009, access to those records will be by appointment. As plans are tightened we will provide information through our website (<http://vermont-archives.org/>).

All that, as I write this column, is in the future; right now I have to deal with the detritus of over 20 years at Redstone. In some ways my office cleaning traces the evolution of VSARA. For example, crowded on my bookshelves are volumes such as **Beneath the Footnote** and **Words Into Type** that are vestigial remnants of the days when this was the State Papers Division and my job title was Editor of State Papers. In that former world the office was primarily engaged in the annotation and publication of 18th century government records. These books will be left behind.

There are also a few scattered volumes on paper conservation. These books date to the 1970s when the publication program was largely set aside in favor of conserving our 18th century records. There used to be a small conservation lab as well, but that was dismantled as we ended the item by item conservation of documents. Now those books will be left behind as well.

More book shelves are weighted with professional archival literature, studies and journals, reflecting our transformation into the State Archives. These tomes will make the trip and provide useful information and context for managing archival records.

Stepping across the hall for a moment are shelves containing disposition orders and other records capturing the expansion of the Archives into VSARA. The records are primarily associated with the old Public Records Division and provide documentation of the decisions of Public Records' records management activities. Though under VSARA new approaches are being implemented for records management the legacy records help document the over 4,000 record series and 10,000 disposition orders established by Public Records,



which will remain until superseded, and provide a limited but still useful view of the world of agency records.

Returning to my clutter, the remaining shelves hold an overflow of reference books. These include Vermont Reports, which hold Supreme Court decisions, various biographical compilations, mostly from the 19th century, of government officials, and some reports from previous records projects, such as the indices to newspapers and town records generated by the Work Progress Administration during the New Deal.

While we don't hold newspapers (they can be found at the Department of Libraries), the indices are occasionally useful in researching an issue, providing, for example, dates for when certain events may have occurred. There are additional reference materials relating to our records, including studies of government and of topics such as glebe lands. We are not a reference library but the reference books are helpful to staff in developing context and meaning to certain records. There is also a small collection from my own reference library providing national contexts for things like voting and the evolution of women's rights. Almost all of these will make the trip to Middlesex, though it does force a rethinking of the purpose of our reference library and what is really needed, and by whom.

What usually attracts the visitor's eye is the jumble of boxes scattered around the walls of the room. These are projects, some done, some in progress, and some halted because of an immediate lack of resources, usually time. All of these will be organized, appraised, and where appropriate moved.

Left behind will be memories of over two decades of working here: Sitting with the late Cola Hudson as he shared memories of legislators captured in our photo collection. Watching Kim Royar develop a census of wolves and other animals by going through old bounty records or Charlie Cogbill building a database on pre-settlement forests by noting what trees were blazed as part of old town surveys. Working with Peter Comart to develop a project for the Redstone grounds that helped launch the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps or watching Dick Mallery carefully and wonderfully puzzling through the visual clues in a farm scene photograph to give a likely date for when the picture was taken. Some memories have become well-burnished stories, like my standing argument that the vault door was not four hour fire-rated. I finally noticed a metal tag at the bottom of the door saying it was two hour rated. The triumph was short-lived as two workmen arrived and changed the label to say four hours.

It has been fun; there is much of Redstone I will miss. This is off-set by the prospect of moving to a facility that can finally accommodate our vault needs, improve our reference space and allow our new division to work together at a single site. I look forward to acquiring new memories and spinning new stories. And I look forward to seeing you at Middlesex.