



The CONNservator

Newsletter of the Office of the Public Records Administrator

August 2001

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- Eunice G. DiBella, Public Records Administrator
- Dean Nelson, Director, Museum of Connecticut History
- Mark Jones, State Archivist

Grants Reception Held

On Tuesday August 7, 2001, the State Librarian and the Public Records Administrator hosted a reception in Memorial Hall of the Connecticut State Library celebrating the first awards from the Historic Document Preservation Account. Approximately 100 persons attended. Guests included town clerks, first selectmen, a number of legislators and their staff members, and professional genealogists as well as State Library staff.

Attendees received their checks after a light brunch buffet and remarks by State Librarian Kendall Wiggin, Public Records Administrator Eunice DiBella, State Archivist Mark Jones, and President of the Town Clerks Association Beverly Brown.

The State Library received one hundred five applications in the first grant cycle and awarded \$332,384 back to the towns.

(Continued on page 5)

Notes from the Public Records Administrator

(The following is a transcript of remarks made by Eunice G. DiBella, Public Records Administrator, at the reception in honor of the first grant recipients)

Today marks an historic event for the public records program, an historic event for the Connecticut State Library, and an historic event for the municipalities of the State of Connecticut.

The Connecticut State Library, Office of the Public Records Administrator is the Public Records Office for the State of Connecticut. This has been the case for about 100 years.

In 1899, the Connecticut General Assembly created a Temporary Commission on Public Records to survey town clerks, probate judges and churches on the condition of historical records. In 1903 the General Assembly created the post of Temporary Examiner of Public Records, and in 1909 the General Assembly authorized the State Librarian to accept any public records for permanent preservation. Finally in 1911, the General Assembly created the post of the Permanent Examiner of Public Records as an assistant to the State Librarian. George Godard, State Librarian at that time, wrote to Lucius B. Barbour on June 16, 1911 announcing that

the State Library Committee had approved his appointment as the Permanent Examiner of Public Records. In his letter to Mr. Barbour, Mr. Godard says "...the legislation recently passed ought to enable you to do most important and valuable work for the state and its several towns."

The relationship between the State Library and the municipalities has been long and close. It is founded on both law and tradition, and like any other enduring relationship it depends upon trust, respect, and mutual goals and objectives.

I am the fifth individual to hold this position. I knew three of my predecessors. Each left their mark and made a unique contribution in developing and shaping this public records program.

Lucius Barbour is well known in genealogical circles as the compiler of the monumental Barbour Collection of Vital Records, a state-wide index of vital records, birth deaths and marriages from colonial times going up to 1850. This index has facilitated research in the area of family and local history, and has been a valuable resource to scholars as well.

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Grant Awards	3
State Archivist Comments	5
Position Announcement	5
Save This Date	5
Photographic Record	6

Public Records Administrator

(Continued from page 1)

I began my career at the State Library in the 1970s working in the Archives, History and Genealogy Unit. At that time I met Harold Burt, a professional genealogist, long retired from his day job as Examiner of Public Records. I remember Mr. Burt very well as a modest man who went about his business in a quiet way. In my work in the Archives I often came upon little bundles of town records tied up in red string (the ubiquitous red tape) that Mr. Burt had acquired during his tenure in the 1930s and 1940s.

When visiting towns, he would find local historical records that were not properly cared for, housed in substandard storage conditions. As the Examiner of Public Records, Mr. Burt had the authority to rescue these records and bring them into the State Library for safekeeping. Hence, he is credited, in part, with acquiring the vast collection of local records that are now in our custody.

Rockwell Harmon Potter Jr., Mr. Burt's successor, was the son of Rockwell Harmon Potter Sr., a prominent Hartford minister. Mr. Potter came to work at the State Library in the late 40s after a distinguished tour of service in the Second World War. His first assignment here was appropriately in the War Records Department. The vestiges of that department, that is the records that were maintained by the War Records Department, are found in both the Archives and the History and Genealogy Units at the State Library.

Mr. Potter was appointed Examiner of Public Records in the 1950s. After World War II the profession of records management began to develop on its own. Mr. Potter was aware of this, and worked to change and modernize legislation that defined, strengthened, and increased the visibility of this program.

Mr. Potter was the first Public Records Administrator for the State of Connecticut. The job title changed as part of legislation passed in 1967 creating a Department of Archives and Public Records Administration at the State Library. Mr. Potter was also instrumental in the formation of the Northeast Documents Conservation Center.

In the early 1980's, Dominic Persempere succeeded Rockwell Potter after Mr. Potter retired. Mr. Persempere passed away on July 31st, a week ago today. He was a kind and wonderful person, who was dedicated to the principal of public service. He was always there when you needed him. He responded to every record disaster, and he worked tirelessly with municipalities to improve records storage conditions and build new improved vaults. Dom retired in 1989 when I assumed this post.

As I said at the beginning of my comments, each person has brought his or her own personality and point of view to this job, but we all have shared the same goals, to improve the condition of historic records. We all have shared the same frustration, a lack of adequate resources to do the job. We all have recognized one basic fact: town clerks and other municipal officials need assistance and resources to deal with the many complex issues surrounding the management of current records and the preservation of historic documents.

The records preservation fund is not unique to Connecticut. There are several, though not many, models out there. The question was, what plan was the right one for Connecticut, and how could we get support to get one written into law. In the early 1990s, we began working seriously to reach this goal.

Many different groups had input into the passage PA-146. I would like to mention these groups and recognize their contribution.

The Connecticut Council of Professional Genealogists was one of the first groups to come on board and actively lobby for such legislation. Warren Buchanan, a former president of the council, worked tirelessly toward this objective, although he died before he could see this bill passed. Dr. Robert L. Rufford, the council's current president, introduced Warren to Senator Timothy Upson. Warren met several times with Senator Upson (now Judge Upson) about the need for legislation to support historic preservation activities. Senator Upson introduced a version of

a preservation bill early in the process. Warren and Donna Siemiakoski, another past president of this organization advocated, educated, and actively lobbied for passage of this legislation. Regrettably Donna passed away yesterday, Monday, August 6, 2001, of cancer. Her obituary, which appears in today's Hartford Courant, stated, "She worked for legislation in support of access and preservation of Connecticut vital records and funding for the State Library."

The legislative committee of the Connecticut Town Clerks Association spent many hours lobbying for this bill, and testified in the legislature in its support.

We need to recognize the entire legislature for passing the bill and Governor Rowland for signing it into law in the year 2000. Representative Steve Fontana made it his mission to see this bill passed. Representative Fontana, a title searcher by profession, saw up close and personal the need for funding for the preservation and maintenance of the towns' valuable records.

We also must acknowledge the hard work on the part of Kendall Wiggin, State Librarian for the part that he played during the process, and for his continued advocacy for this program.

We all recognize that this legislation changes and strengthens the relationship that the State Library and the Public Records Administrator have regarding the preservation of the historic records of Connecticut municipalities and its citizens. It also provides us with the means to make a real change in the condition of these valuable resources.

I began my remarks by stating what I believe to be the fundamentals of any relationship: trust, respect, and common objectives. This has been the thread throughout the long relationship that the State Library and the towns have shared. I will continue to work with you in the coming years to strengthen that relationship and to improve the condition of the historic records of the State of Connecticut and its citizens.

Thank you.

Historic Documents Preservation Program Cycle I 2001-2002 Grant Recipients

Town	Category	Amount	Town	Category	Amount
Andover	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Farmington	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Ashford	Preservation Survey	\$2,500	Franklin	Paper Conservation	\$2,255
Avon	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Glastonbury	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Bristol	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Goshen	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Brookfield	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Granby	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Brooklyn	Preservation Survey	\$2,500	Griswold	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Burlington	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Groton	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Canaan	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Guilford	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Cheshire	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Haddam	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Clinton	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Hamden	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Colchester	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Hampton	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Columbia	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Hartford	Paper Conservation	\$7,380
Coventry	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Hartland	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Cromwell	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Hebron	Paper Conservation	\$2,243
Darien	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Kent	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Deep River	Paper Conservation	\$2,250	Killingly	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Derby	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Ledyard	Paper Conservation	\$1,958
Durham	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Litchfield	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
East Hampton	Paper Conservation	\$2,475	Madison	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
East Hartford	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Manchester	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
East Haven	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Mansfield	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
East Lyme	Paper Conservation	\$2,400	Marlborough	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
East Windsor	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Meriden	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Eastford	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Middlebury	Paper Conservation	\$2,461
Ellington	Paper Conservation	\$1,927	Middlefield	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Enfield	Preservation Survey	\$3,000			

(Continued on page 4)

Grant Recipients*(Continued from page 3)*

Town	Category	Amount	Town	Category	Amount
Middletown	Preservation Survey	\$3,786	Sherman	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Milford	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Somers	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Monroe	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	South Windsor	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Montville	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Southbury	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Morris	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Southington	Preservation Survey	\$3,200
New Britain	Paper Conservation	\$4,950	Sprague	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
New Hartford	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Stafford	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
New Milford	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Stamford	Paper Conservation	\$7,500
New Milford	Disaster Recovery	\$2,505	Sterling	Preservation Survey	\$2,500
Newington	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Stonington	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Newtown	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Stratford	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
North Branford	Preservation Survey	\$2,500	Thomaston	Paper Conservation	\$2,300
North Canaan	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Vernon	Paper Conservation	\$4,997
North Stonington	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Voluntown	Paper Conservation	\$2,375
Norwalk	Paper Conservation	\$4,980	Wallingford	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Orange	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Washington	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Plainville	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Waterbury	Paper Conservation	\$7,500
Preston	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Watertown	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Prospect	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	West Haven	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Redding	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Westbrook	Paper Conservation	\$2,442
Ridgefield	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Weston	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Rocky Hill	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Wethersfield	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Roxbury	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Willington	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Salisbury	Preservation Survey	\$2,500	Wilton	Paper Conservation	\$2,500
Seymour	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Windham	Preservation Survey	\$2,500
Sharon	Paper Conservation	\$2,500	Windsor	Paper Conservation	\$5,000
Shelton	Paper Conservation	\$5,000	Woodbury	Paper Conservation	\$2,500

Leave Things a Little Better Than You Found Them

(The following is a transcript of remarks made by Mark H. Jones, State Archivist, at the reception in honor of the first grant recipients)

While I was growing up, I belonged to the Boy Scouts and Explorers. My Dad, who was an outdoorsman all of his life, indoctrinated us with one important axiom: "Leave a campsite as good or better than you found it." In my adult years, I have found his commonsense to be a worthy goal for one's life. "Leave things a little better than you found them."

As we give out money today, we should remember the people who have gone before us who have tried to improve the conditions of records while on their watch. Three people are worthy of mention. Dominic Persempere, who was Public Records Administrator until his retirement in 1989, passed away this last week. He was joyful in his work. He loved traveling the state to advise and consult with town clerks about their problems. Sometimes, the job tired and frustrated him. After getting back to the office from a trip, I heard him exclaim, "This is too 'damn' much work for one person to do!!" However, he would not remain in a "funk." The next day he would come in smiling and enthusiastically leave for another trip.

Warren Buchanan played a major role in beginning the legislative initiative that resulted in P.A. 146. He loved Connecticut and the State Library. I appreciated his words of encouragement in difficult times. He was the type of person who would stand close to you and ask rhetorical questions with great intensity and irony: "Why can't the richest state in the union allocate more money for the preservation of its public records?" He never saw the passage of this bill. However, he was always looking to the future and would tell me, "Well, we'll try again next session. We're getting closer." Warren would have enjoyed today's ceremonies. Donna Holt Siemiatkoski, who passed away yesterday, battled cancer for three years. In spite of her pain and suffering, she continued to press for more money for the State Library and passage of this bill. She was a juggernaut in organizing and mobilizing opinion. She once told me that such advocacy put into practice what she had learned in American Government at Columbia. Though discouraged at times, she never gave up telling me that we would get it passed next time. Donna would have been at home at a reception like this. I can imagine her "working" Memorial Hall on this day on behalf of History.

These three will be missed. They were

three in a line of countless persons who have contributed to the preservation of and greater access to Connecticut's public records. It did not matter what these persons did. They worked under limitations just as we do. Some could do more than others. Those who preceded us, however, made their contributions sharing a common concern with us. **Whatever they did made a difference!** Many of you town clerks have fought the good fight without fanfare or funding support. Now, after approximately one hundred years of concern for local government records, the State of Connecticut is making money available so that you can do more for these treasures.

It is so much better to give out money than quoting regulations and giving "you should do this" advice. We at the State level have heard the same rhetorical question many times: "When will the State give me the resources to care for the records?" Today marks the first time that the State has answered this question positively and substantively.

This is a great day! Congratulations on getting these grants! I know that this money will enable you to make a difference so that you can leave the town's public records better than when they became your responsibility.

Grant Program Specialist Hired

The State Library is pleased to announce that LeAnn Johnson has been promoted to the position of Public Records Grant Program Specialist with the Office of the Public Records Administrator. Ms. Johnson will oversee the Historic Documents Grant Program in compliance with Public Act 00-146 [An Act Concerning Real Estate Files and the Preservation of Historic Documents] and advise Connecticut municipalities on records management issues relating to their records.

LeAnn joined the State Library staff in January 1995 as Supervisor, Records Services for State Agencies. Prior to that, she served as Assistant Town Clerk

and Records Manager for the Town of Wethersfield and the law firm of Reid and Riege in Hartford. Ms. Johnson is an honors graduate of the Business Administration Program at the University of North Dakota. She is also a Certified Records Manager.

Grants Reception

(Continued from page 1)

Ninety-five towns applied for preservation grants. Nine towns applied for preservation surveys. One town applied for a disaster recovery reimbursement grant. A complete list of grant recipients is included in this issue.

Save This Date

Reformatting Documents

Instructor: Steven Dalton,
Northeast Document Conservation
Center

Holiday Inn, Cromwell, CT

October 10, 2001

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sponsored by the Connecticut State Library with proceeds from the Historic Document Preservation account. Workshop brochure and registration materials will be mailed in September.

NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ADMINISTRATOR

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This newsletter is published quarterly by the Office of the Public Records Administrator. Please send submissions to the Public Records Administrator, CSL, 231 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106-1537 (edibella@cslib.org).



l-r. Kendall Wiggins, State Librarian; Tanya Lane, Town Clerk Westbrook, Eunice G. DiBella, Public Records Administrator, Sen. Eileen M. Dailey, (D-33d District); Rep. Brian O'Connor, (D-35th District)



Guests enjoying the buffet line.

Reception, August 7, 2001 in Memorial Hall



l-r. Joan Locke, Town Clerk Brookfield; Dr. Robert Rafford, President, Connecticut Professional Genealogists Association, Joseph Camposo, Town Clerk Manchester



l-r. Patrick O'Sullivan, Town Clerk Orange; Alan Jepson, Town Clerk Milford; Elizabeth Leary, Town Clerk, East Haven