

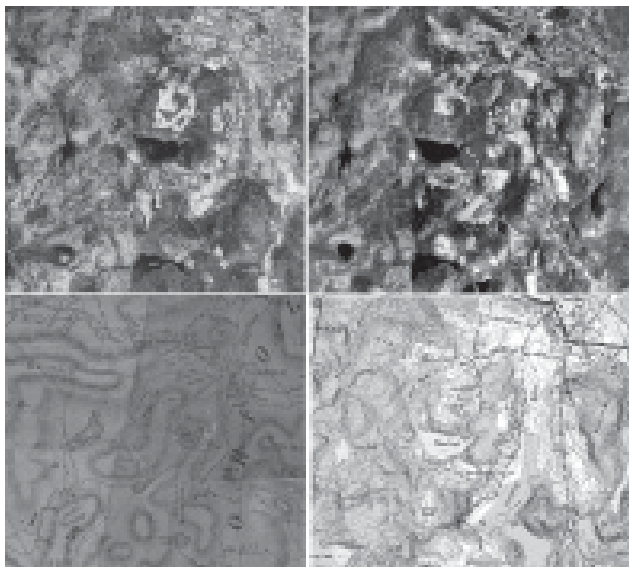
THIRTY YEARS OF FUNDING ARCHIVES AND RECORDS

QUIETLY HIDDEN IN PUBLIC LAW 88-383, the legislation that authorized the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC) to begin awarding grants for publishing projects, is a clause that broadened the mandate of the agency. The 1964 bill spells out the authority to make “grants to State and local agencies and to nonprofit organizations and institutions, for the collecting, describing, preserving, and compiling and publishing (including microfilming and other forms of reproduction) of documentary sources significant to the history of the United States.” While the NHPC initially focused on supporting documentary editions and microfilm projects, the foundation had been laid for the records program that developed over the next decade.

And what a decade it was. During the 1960s, a number of initiatives greatly expanded the Federal Government’s role in support of culture. A year after the Commission began awarding grants, legislation was passed creating the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act established the National Register for Historic Sites, widely credited for increasing public awareness of the need to establish our historic spaces. By the early 1970s, the archives community was looking for a similar program for historic records, and indeed, Charles Lee, president of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) put forth “The Proposed National Historical Records Program” in the *American Archivist* in July 1972.

With the grassroots advocacy of the archival field and through the example of other Federal agencies, Congress passed legislation, P.L. 93-536, that created the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, authorizing the expanded agency to receive \$4 million in appropriated funds. Funds were made available the following fiscal year, and in October 1975, the first records grant was awarded to the Society of American Archivists to support publishing and distributing a series of manuals on archival practices.

The Commission quickly determined three areas for priority consideration: 1) endangered records deteriorating because of poor storage facilities or about to be destroyed as an economy measure; 2) cooperative projects within and among states, organizations, and institutions for collecting, housing, describing, preserving, and copying documentary sources; and 3) the development of new or improved archival techniques, with an emphasis on providing information or assistance to archivists and curators nationally. For the past 30 years, these principles have influenced the grantmaking, policy, and structure of the “records program” at the NHPRC. To this day, the Commission supports a **national-state partnership**; basic **historical records and archival projects**, particularly those seeking to preserve and make accessible endangered and vital records; and research and development in new archival techniques, particularly **electronic records**. In the 30 years (*continued on page 4*)



Four types of geospatial records of Norfolk, Connecticut, showing the kinds of electronic records that can be saved through the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University. Clockwise from the upper left are: a 1934 air photo; 1995 air photo; 1895 topographic map; and 1997 topographic map.

since the mission was expanded, the Commission has awarded more than \$72 million in support of records projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories.

THE NATIONAL-STATE PARTNERSHIP

Key to the success of the new program were the states, but the states managed archives and records through a number of discrete agencies—from state archives, to historical societies, and in various administrative setups across the country. Taking a page from the newly emerging State Humanities Councils, the NHPRC invited the governor of each state to establish a State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB), composed of archivists, historians, records managers, libraries, government officials, and other professionals. Each governor was also asked to appoint as the head of the SHRAB a State Historical Records Coordinator, who could be either the state archivist or the director of the state historical society.

The SHRABs were designed as a state-level review body for grant proposals from individual states, but they rapidly became the central advisory bodies for historical records planning and for Commission-funded projects developed and accomplished within a state. The Commission's regulations specify that

Boards may perform such duties as sponsoring and publishing surveys of the conditions and needs of historical records in the State; soliciting or developing proposals for projects to be carried out in the State with NHPRC grants; . . . developing, revising, and submitting to the Commission State priorities for historical records projects; promoting an understanding of the role and value of historical records; acting in an advisory capacity to the state archives and other statewide archival or records agencies.



Daguerreotype portrait of Alice James (1848–1892) as a young child. Alice was the younger sister of the novelist Henry James and the philosopher William James. Part of a collection preserved at Harvard University.

Furthermore, the establishment of the State Historical Records Coordinators, who head the SHRABs, has created a network of state government leaders who influence state archives and state historical programs and projects beyond those related to the NHPRC. The Coordinators have become a force to shape the nation's archives through their work in individual states and their combined efforts at the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC), a national leadership organization founded in 1989. In conjunction with the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA), the Council has been instrumental in providing leadership, encouraging partnerships and sharing best practices, and in analyzing the state of historical records in America.

With the Coordinators, the SHRABs, and our partners at government archives and records centers in the states, the NHPRC has fashioned, over time, a loosely affiliated national network of archives. At several stages over the past 30 years, budget con-

straints—including the possibility of zero funding at the NHPRC—have slowed its growth. In the early years of the program, grants went to help SHRABs assess the state of state records programs, then plan for growth, and finally implement strategies that solidify collaborative programs within individual states. In 1987, the Commission began awarding “regrants” awards to state agencies enabling, in that first year, Pennsylvania and Hawaii to receive multiyear funds for making a series of smaller grants to local archives. In Pennsylvania, for example, \$187,000 was directed at the state's colleges and universities for institutional archives and records management, and a dozen institutions were assisted. Hawaii took a different tack, awarding \$150,000 in regrants for surveying and collecting ethnic records and the establishment of the Basic Conservation Care Workshops held on every major island throughout the Aloha State.

Regrant projects are true partnerships because they involve NHPRC funds with

matching non-Federal dollars, and these grants do more than help preserve and make accessible individual collections of historical records. In states such as Florida, Texas, South Carolina, and Maine, regrants have cemented statewide programs. In Kentucky and New York, regrants have helped establish local government programs that continue to this day. Along with collaborative projects among states, the regrants program has been limited to those states with the necessary infrastructure. Discussions are underway among the members of COSHRC, NAGARA, the SAA, and others to develop a consistently and Federally funded network, with the NHPRC as its hub, to support archives and records programs in all 50 states and other special jurisdictions.

HISTORICAL RECORDS AND ARCHIVAL PROGRAMS

Concurrent with the birth of the SHRABs and those first tentative steps toward building a national network, the NHPRC also made direct grants to institutions seeking to preserve and make accessible historical records and for basic archival programs. Indeed, the first records program grant, in the amount of \$21,000, went to the Society of American Archivists for the preparation of five pamphlets for basic archival techniques.

By the first full year of the program, the number of grant applications for records projects rose dramatically—some 179 requests totaling \$4 million arrived in Washington for the cycle, more than the total budget for both publishing and records projects. Nevertheless, the Commission awarded 60 grants, including programs at the Municipal Archives and Records Center of the City of New York to salvage 40 million city financial documents from the 19th century; archival training throughout rural Minnesota; and the establishment of an archival microfilm center and consulting service at the New England Document Conservation Center in Andover, Massachusetts.

Over the 30 years since the Records Program began, the NHPRC has awarded more than \$50 million for archives and records-

related projects. Preservation of historic records has always been at the heart of the program, and both public and private institutions have saved precious collections as the result of NHPRC funding. From photographs documenting life in the 19th and 20th centuries to genealogical records to the important archives of American colleges, universities, and industries, the array of projects spans the country. In any given year, the roster of grants is astounding. Take 1990, for example, the NHPRC enabled the Julliard School in New York to establish its archives for the performing arts; set up a records management program for the Sierra Club through the University of California, Berkeley; preserved the visual collections of Appalshop, a Kentucky organization serving the people of Appalachia; and enabled Little Big Horn College in Montana to preserve 1,500 cubic feet of records of the Crow tribe. Or more recently, in 2003, Fisk University in Tennessee was able to preserve five manuscript collections documenting its African American roots. The University of California earned a grant for its Women Political Activists project, and the American Foundation for the Blind began its 16-month project to arrange, describe, and rehouse its Helen Keller Archives.

Local government archives have been another important component of the grants strategy, and the NHPRC has provided support for archives and records management programs in communities large and small. Major U.S. cities such as Boston; Chicago; Houston; Tucson; Portland, Oregon; Birmingham, Alabama; and Sacramento, California have been able to preserve municipal archives, as have small towns and rural communities such as the Logan County Historical Society in Guthrie, Oklahoma; the City of Kingsport, Tennessee; and Sedgewick County, Kansas. In conjunction with regrants and other statewide programs, the NHPRC is able to stretch the federal dollar to serve hundreds of American communities.

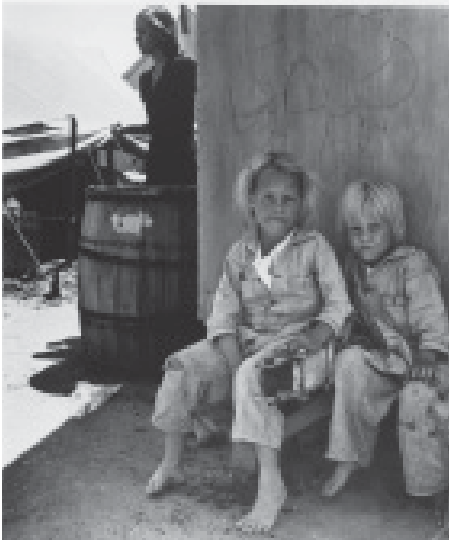
Direct support for specific archival projects is augmented by NHPRC grants for research and development in records management techniques and systems. Just three years after expanding its mission,

the Commission adopted a “Statement of National Needs” for historical records in the United States that identifies the need for more programs for the preservation of historical records; surveys of records not in archival repositories; guides to records in U.S. repositories; education and training of archivists and records administrators; system-wide records programs at the state and local levels (including private records-creating organizations); and improved techniques and tools.

Without exception, the work of the Commission has been to meet those needs. Funding for education, training, and research and development began in 1975 and continues to this day. In its most recent round of grants, for example, the NHPRC awarded a grant to the Society of American Archivists to enable them to provide scholarships for up to 15 Native American/Tribal archivists to participate in the SAA annual meetings in 2005 and 2006, with a goal of expanding their knowledge and establishing a peer-assistance network to enhance their effectiveness in preserving and managing records held in tribal archives. All of these efforts are designed to help build and strengthen the archival and records management field.



Prospector James Wortham and companion. Part of “Rich Mining: Documents from Alaska’s Gold Rush Era,” an online exhibition supported through the Alaska Department of Education, Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums.



Two children from a Texas migrant family at a makeshift camp in Edison, California, 1940, as photographed by Dorothea Lange. A grant to the University of California's Bancroft Library went to support a collection-level catalog for the 3.5 million images in its Pictorial Collections.

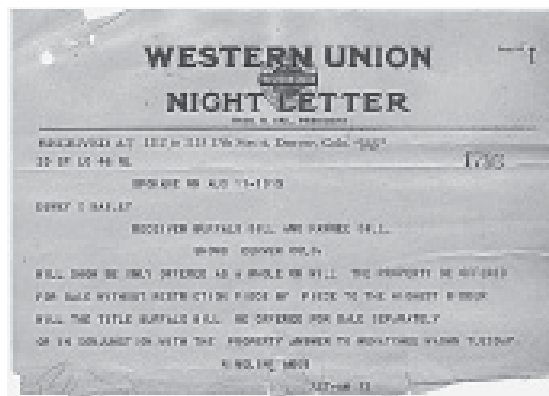
ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Perhaps the greatest research and development challenge to archivists and records managers is what to be done about electronic records—both those “born digital” (created via electronic media) and those “reborn digital” (digitized from analog formats). As early as 1979, the Commission awarded funds for a machine-records project in Wisconsin, the first electronic records grant in its history. Over the course of the 1980s, it became increasingly clear that new technologies could not only help preserve records but also make them accessible beyond the confines of a single archive. In 1982, with the sponsorship of the NHPRC, the *Midwest State Archives Guide Project*, a computerized system for the description of public records in three midwestern states, was completed, and it marks the first multiyear test of interstate archival compatibility through a shared database and platform.

With the growth and expansion of the Research Library Information Network and the Online Computer Library Center, and with the creation of compatible software platforms for archivists and records managers

across the country, the Commission and the professional field continued to look for more systemic ways of addressing the electronic records needs. At its February 1990 meeting, the Commission endorsed a report on electronic records issues that recommended five categories for support of projects that: 1) include archival components as part of larger systems designed to assure preservation of historically valuable information; 2) involve archival and research communities in the development of standards for digital management and preservation; 3) strengthen archival capabilities for electronic records systems; 4) address topics such as technology forecasting, records appraisal, documentary editions in electronic form, and the connection of Federal and state information policy; and 5) enable surveys, acquisition, preservation, and access to older data sets or systems in danger of loss.

Since 1990, dozens of projects address these basic needs. One of the early grantees, the Minnesota Historical Society, conducted a series of meetings to identify research needs in electronic records, and a three-year grant to the University of Pittsburgh brought together government records managers and others to provide analysis of the nature and significance of electronic records management problems, especially to determine how these problems affect



Telegram from Ringling Brothers to Dewey Bailey, court receiver charged with public sale of assets from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. A grant to the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida, went to develop an archives and records management program for its extensive collection of manuscripts and records relating to American circus history.

specific constituencies (such as historians, the press, scientists) and the general public. The Pittsburgh initiative also endorsed a public advocacy campaign to raise general awareness about electronic records issues.

As the decade unfolded, the Commission funded two broad types of electronic records projects—grants to state archives or large institutions to solve particular electronic records needs, and grants for more theoretical approaches to large-scale challenges. As an example of the former, the Vermont State Archives, Montpelier, received funds in 1994 to enhance the state archives' participation in the development and implementation of a Vermont Information Strategy Plan (VISIP) for the entire state government. The goal of the plan is to develop and share data across state agency organizational lines, thereby changing the nature, use, and context of the state's records. Similar statewide projects were funded in Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Kansas, South Carolina, Georgia, Iowa, Missouri, Montana, Wyoming, Alaska, Rhode Island, Maine, Mississippi, Delaware, and Ohio. The City of Philadelphia Electronic Records Project received three years of support to develop comprehensive recordkeeping policies and standards for the city's information technology systems. WGBH in Boston was awarded funds to develop a Universal Preservation Format for audio and video digital recordings, and the Commission supported the University of North Carolina's Managing the Digital University Desktop project.

Not surprisingly, university-based research projects have proliferated. The NHPRC has funded Indiana University, Syracuse University, and Cornell University for electronic records research projects, and over the past several years, it has been a major sponsor of the State University of New York-Albany's leadership of InterPARES (International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems), a multinational effort for Long-Term

Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records. The National Archives (NARA) is also part of the InterPARES team, and the NHPRC grant goes to the non-NARA elements of the U.S. research cadre.

Research at the San Diego Supercomputer Center, sponsored by the Commission, has led to several projects, including Methodologies for Preservation and Access of Software-dependent Electronic Records—Toward an Archivists Workbench, which focused on long-term preservation of and access to software-dependent data objects. A subsequent project, Preservation of Electronic Records Stored in an RMA (PERM), is focusing on considerations early in the life of electronic

records that can support preservation over the full lifecycle. A third project, entitled the Persistent Archival Testbed, is wrestling with the question of how to integrate the distinct collections so that they can be accessed as one collection, even though they may initially appear to have nothing in common.

Other projects are taking different approaches to specific electronic records challenges. Two projects—the Maine GeoArchives and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University—are tackling the difficulties involved with geospatial records. The Minnesota Historical Society is using XML language to preserve

the records of the state legislature, building off a previous grant called Educating Archivists and Their Constituences through workshops on the eXensible Markup Language (XML) and metadata as they apply to archival concerns.

As the Commission begins its fourth decade of supporting records projects (and its fifth decade of grants for publishing), the concerns of the field persist. How do we create a national network in support of archives and records so that all people, wherever located, can have access to their records? How do we ensure that vital history is not lost? What tools and techniques can be developed for the mind-boggling amount of electronic records created in the past 20 years? And finally, as for the NHPRC, how does it best combine the two programs—publishing and records—to reflect the true nature of what we seek to preserve and make public? Perhaps it is important to return to first principles and the inextricable link between publishing and making the record available.

After receiving the first two volumes of Ebenezer Hazard's *Historical Collections*, a record of our early legislative history, Thomas Jefferson wrote back to the former U.S. postmaster:

I learn with great satisfaction that you are about committing to the press the valuable historical and State papers you have been so long collecting. Time and accident are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices. The late war has done the work of centuries in this business. The last cannot be recovered, but let us save what remains; not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident.

By keeping the records available to the public eye, we place the primary sources of our history beyond the reach of accident. ■



Molded staggered tooth gear and worker from the Mesta Engineering Company. A grant to the University of Pittsburgh helped to preserve records in the Archives of American Industrial Society.