

Managing Documentary Resources Independence National Historical Park

On June 28, 1998, Independence National Historical Park (INHP) celebrated the 50th anniversary of the signing of its enabling legislation by President Harry S. Truman. The park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Independence Hall and Independence Square are designated a World Heritage Site. Independence Hall, the First Bank, and the Second Bank are National Historic Landmarks. During its 50 years of operations, the park accumulated a significant body of research, management and site project records.

In 1983, INHP created a central research repository for these archival records which reflect the development of the park and its resource management activities. The archival project team shelved the collections in a locked stack in the library and compiled a preliminary inventory, *Guide to the Archives of Independence National Historical Park*, which still serves as the primary physical and intellectual key to the collections.

Although the archival center was established some time ago, until recently there was only minimal provision for program management. At the time, responsibility for curatorial care and reference use of the archives was assigned to the library technician, under the supervision of the chief historian, the administrative niche it occupies today.

In the intervening years, the park lacked the resources to address many conditions related to standard appraisal, holdings maintenance, accessioning, processing, cataloging and descriptive finding aids, reference and use. **Recognizing the value of the archives and documentary resources, the Cultural Management Division hired a professional archivist to manage its archives and manuscripts and supervise the library in 1995.**

Today the archives contains nearly 500 linear feet of materials in all archival formats including slides, negatives and prints; drawings and plans in all media; audiotapes and reels, videotapes and film; electronic formats; and microforms. Other associated archival and manuscript collections, which pre-date the organization of the park and relate to the park's historic buildings and museum collections, reside in the museum collections under the management of the Museum Branch. These records, along with the cultural resource management materials in the archives, reflect a seamless

continuum documenting the park's history for over 200 years and shaping its identity.

In 1995, the archives implemented its archival program by establishing an access policy and printing a brochure describing its holdings and services. To promote use of the photograph collections, the archivist reorganized the Photograph Reproduction Services program, in partnership with Eastern National Park and Monument Association, establishing policy and procedures for use of images. The fiscal year 1998 statistics show that the archives served 409 researchers and processed orders for 725 photographs, a 20% increase in use over the previous year.

During the past three years, INHP Archives has made considerable progress toward integrating its resource documentation records into the museum management program according to guidance in the *Museum Handbook*, 1994, and Part II, Appendix D, 1997. Support for projects to implement museum standards and accountability came from a combination of NPS Museum Management Program funding and the INHP Cultural Resource Management Division's budget.

The archives recently completed a retrospective accessioning project to identify the processing and cataloging backlog which currently has an estimated 533,000 items. Prior to 1995, records deposited in the archives were not accessioned. The backlog includes the collections listed in the 1983 guide as well as field collections transferred to the archives since then.

In 1996, the Museum Collections Preservation and Protection (MCP) program, funded the preparation of a Collection Management Plan (CMP) and Action Plan of priorities and recommendations for managing the park's archival collections. The accompanying records survey of park buildings and offices identified nearly two million items for appraisal and disposition, clearly revealing the need for a records management program.

Two processing projects awarded Backlog Cataloging funds produced Automated National Catalog System (ANCS) records and finding aids for eight of the park's most significant pre-park records collections. These collections relate to the individuals and organizations pivotal to the establishment of the park in the 1940s and to the development and management of Independence Hall as a



The original stack in the library is full; an adjunct storage area has been created at the Second Bank to house new acquisitions until the move to the Philadelphia Exchange.
Photo courtesy Tawny Nelb, Nelb Archival Consulting, Inc.

National Museum by the City of Philadelphia, from 1860 to 1950.

Three projects funded from the park's History Branch budget address thorny issues related to preservation and access to the park's voluminous body of site construction records, 1950 to date. In 1997, an architectural archivist consultant prepared

Recommendations and Processing Guidelines for the Architectural Project Records. Using these guidelines, an archivist processed, cataloged, and created a finding aid to the Office of Architect's research records, 1938-1993.

In 1998, a student prepared a preliminary inventory for more than 4,200 architectural drawings and plans. Phase II of the project will inventory the remaining estimated 2,500 drawings in 1999. With MCPP funds, the park bought flat files to store the drawings and plans rehouse by these projects.

While making progress to implement NPS museum management standards, improve accountability, and provide access to archival materials, the archives established procedures for new accessions and transfer requests from park offices. Park staff, informed of the opportunity to transfer non-current records to the archives, readily cooperated with the archivist in shipping appropriately appraised files according to the procedures.

From 1994 to 1997, INHP was involved in developing a new General Management Plan (GMP). The GMP calls for construction of a Gateway Visitor Center, a new Liberty Bell complex to replace the current pavilion, the Independence Park Institute and a National Constitution Center as part of the development of Independence Mall over the next five years. Concurrently, construction design and projects to rehabilitate the park's historic buildings will generate mountainous piles of reports, drawings, photographs, and construction records for upwards of 20 years.

To deal effectively with these records, the archives devised an innovative, pro-active documentation strategy for documentation deliverables from these projects. The plan appraised construction project reports, drawings and photographs, submittals and correspondence as archival records at the time of creation. Rather than

capture it all somewhere down the road, creators of these records are advised to send them to the archives at mutually agreed upon times. This is an approach in line with the National Archives and Records Administration's strategic plan to identify federal records of permanent value at the front-end of the record life-cycle.

When the above projects are completed in the next decade and beyond, the volume of resource management documentation generated will more than double the quantity of park records archived to date. For a fuller discussion of this strategy see the article entitled "Building Project Records at Independence" by Karen Stevens in *CRM*, Vol. 21, No.2 (1998): 26-27.

In one phase of the building improvement program at INHP, a new library and archives facility will be included in the Philadelphia Exchange rehabilitation project within the next five years. The archivist has been working with NPS Denver Service Center staff to design a facility which meets NPS museum preservation standards and the park's archival program and storage needs for 25 years.

Several important planning projects still need to be addressed before full implementation of an archival program at INHP is complete. **At the top of the priority list is a records management program.** In addition to the library and archives, all park division office staffs, about 100 employees, eventually will move into the Philadelphia Exchange. This impending relocation presents a prime opportunity to implement a park records management program. And the park archives is positioned to support that initiative.

A second priority is to develop a comprehensive Photograph Collection Management Plan to process, catalog and rehouse the research and study photo collection of over 50,000 items and the photographs from park maintenance, rehabilitation and construction projects. This includes a collection of photographs, covering the years 1950 to date, from the historic architect's office, which plans a future CD-ROM scanning project for these images.

Independence NHP recognized the importance of the park's documentary resources to NPS staff and researchers long before there were funds and staff to manage them properly. Staff took steps to preserve and protect them as best they could until the time was right. Now in its 51st year, with a professional archivist on staff, funding opportunities available, and the prospect of an adequate archival facility, INHP continues to honor its commitment to the NPS mission of preserving, protecting, and interpreting cultural resources.

Karen Stevens is Archivist, Independence National Historical Park.