

New Hampshire Connecting to Collections: From Awareness to Funding Narrative

1. Need and Rationale

The rationale for this plan stems from the pervasive lack of knowledge about special collections and archives held by New Hampshire's institutions and the desire to make information about these materials accessible to those who seek it. Central to this rationale is the optimistic view that when citizens, stakeholders, private donors and public officials learn the extent of the collected heritage contained within New Hampshire's 500+ museums, libraries and archives, they will all be encouraged to share the responsibility required to properly protect them. In partnership, the New Hampshire State Library intends to utilize Connecting to Collections funds to improve access to New Hampshire's information heritage and create a supportive public attitude towards collections. This project builds on three previous preservation assessment and planning activities. The preservation goals of access and raised awareness were contained in the strategic plans of the New Hampshire Historical Records Advisory Board (NHHRAB) published in 1984 and 1994 as part of the board's statutory mandate to support the preservation of New Hampshire's unique information heritage contained in state and local archives. (*1984 & 1994 summaries attached*)

In 1995, the New Hampshire State Library published a broad scale strategic preservation plan aimed at all special collections entitled, *Bridges from the Past to the Future: A Strategic Preservation Plan for the State of New Hampshire*. (*Recommendations attached*). Directed by the New Hampshire State Library, this cooperative project identified and acknowledged the preservation challenges and problems of assessment, awareness, funding, archival storage, education, training, leadership and access that all of New Hampshire's collecting institutions faced at the time. Identical to those findings and recommendations of the 2005 *Heritage Health Index Report*, New Hampshire's 1995 strategic preservation plan found the state's collection to be at risk and emphasized an urgency to raise awareness for safe environmental conditions, emergency preparedness, state preservation leadership and sustainable preservation funding.

The rareness and strength of New Hampshire's heritage of information emanates from the peculiarities of its esteemed cultural development and legacy as one of the thirteen original colonies. New Hampshire's long history of the political, economic, social, literary and educational life in a new nation is found in its 232 public libraries, 245 county, city and town government archives, 140 historical societies, 150 art galleries and museums and 25 academic institutions. In addition, private archives survive in a number of educational, religious and ethnic organizations. New Hampshire can also boast a rich history in preservation activities. In 1697 the colony passed a law entitled "An Act for Security and Preservation of the Records of its Province, demonstrating at an "early age" the value of manuscript preservation. Again in 1825, the New Hampshire Secretary of State, Richard Bartlett, initiated a program to paste and bind state documents into scrapbooks. Thanks to grant offerings from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), New Hampshire institutions began seeking and receiving grants in 1977 from NHPRC and other public funders for various preservation activities, some of which included the bound scrapbooks of state documents dated 1864—1925 and housed at the New Hampshire State Archives, the industrial collection at the Manchester Historical Association and the colonial collections of the Portsmouth Athenaeum, the Strawberry Banke Museum and Peterborough Historical Society. Around the same time, the University of New Hampshire established its university archives and records management program with an NHPRC grant. More recently, Dartmouth College used NHPRC funds in 2001 to partner with 8 organizations, including the New Hampshire State Library, for the "New Hampshire Local Records Education Project" which provided preservation surveys and workshops to

educate and train archivists, librarians and curators in the care of collections and preservation management. In the late 1980's, National Endowment for Humanities provided a half million dollars for the successful "New Hampshire Newspaper Project" under which Dartmouth College, the New Hampshire State Library, the University of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire Historical Society microfilmed over 1,500 titles. At that same time, the U.S. Department of Education awarded microfilming grants to Dartmouth College for its Williams Watson Theatre Collection, its unrivaled collection of New Hampshire imprints and the college's collection of polar research materials.

With the exception of increased access to and raised awareness of cultural collections in New Hampshire, the other statewide initiatives recommended by *Bridges from the Past to the Future* have been achieved thanks to the close proximity of New Hampshire to the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCCC) in Andover, Massachusetts. Founded in 1973, NEDCC still maintains today a strong track record and stability of preservation services. It is the best non-profit facility in New England for education, field services, collections assessment, preservation treatments, digitization and disaster response. The most recent NEDCC service now being promoted and utilized in New Hampshire is the free online tool called "dPlan." This IMLS-supported tool supplies a complete template for creating a custom disaster plan. The center recently released COSTEP, a Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness framework, another IMLS-supported tool designed to guide state libraries, state archives and state museums in planning cooperatively for large scale disasters.

As a direct result of the NHRAB and *Bridges from the Past* recommendations, the state legislature signed into law two funding opportunities at the end of the twentieth century for the purpose of supporting an assortment of preservation activities by public organizations. The first, the Vital Records Improvement Fund (VRIF), began funding grants in 1998 to finance vital records preservation at the local community level. Revenue for VRIF is derived from a portion of the fees collected by the Secretary of State for copying and verifying vital records. From May 2006 until January 2008, \$1.3 million in VRIF grants provided assistance to town clerks in (1) assessment and planning by qualified experts (2) improvements to records storage environment, security, and monitoring equipment and (3) rehousing, reformatting and conservation of vital records, including microfilming. Out of 234 New Hampshire towns, an impressive 180 received funding and education demonstrating a significant demand for assistance. The key components of the VRIF preservation program included environmental controls, disaster preparedness, security, storage & handling, reformatting, binding & repair, conservation treatment and the important role that collections care, written policies, and staff/user education plays in the overall planning process. That same year, the state legislature established another conservation program called the Conservation License Plate Trust Fund funded through the sale of special license plates, known as "moose plates." This trust now supports a wide array of environmental and cultural conservation and preservation programs in the state. In FY 2008 moose plate sales for the year reached over 40,000 generating more than \$1,222,290 for state conservation projects. In 2003, the Department of Cultural Resources began distributing its share of these funds by means of competitive conservation grants offered through its three divisions: the New Hampshire State Library, the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources and the New Hampshire Council on the Arts. At the end of FY 2008, the Department of Cultural Resources had awarded a total of \$1,255,895 to 150 non-profit institutions to implement conservation activities and increase public access to documents, works of art, historic sites, monuments and other New Hampshire cultural resources.

Of the four recommendations cited in the *Heritage Health Index Report*, the one that is germane to New Hampshire planning efforts is the raising of public awareness of historically valuable collections and the marshaling of public and private support for collections care. In 1992, New Hampshire State Library spearheaded a single defined project in collaboration with the New Hampshire Historical Society to

increase the access to historically valuable collections in the Granite State for its scholars and citizens. Using both public and private funding, the partners produced a printed directory of 625 collections in 125 institutions (i.e., 5 collections per institution). The resulting single volume, alphabetical resource was called *New Hampshire collections: A guide to our cultural heritage*. To date this invaluable paper guide (*Excerpts attached*) remains the only compilation of extant collections statewide that connects scholars, teachers, students, historians and researchers to a selectively small amount of New Hampshire's cultural heritage. Since the publishing of this guide, new museums and archives have opened their doors, and libraries have gone on acquiring newly discovered papers and artifacts for their collections. Having raised the preservation awareness bar over the last decades, the New Hampshire State Library has seen increased efforts to embrace preservation best practices within those institutions that can afford the challenge or who are motivated to pursue outside funding. Statistical information assembled from projects funded with Moose License Plate sales revenue shows that smaller institutions are more inclined to pursue outside financial support for preservation on their imperiled collections when their collections are publicly known to exist. It is precisely for this reason that the New Hampshire State Library plans to compile and publish with its partners an updated, online database of *New Hampshire collections: A guide to our cultural heritage* that will be the comprehensive resource of artifacts, artwork, archeological materials, manuscripts, historic sites and other materials relating to New Hampshire's rich heritage of information. Benefiting museum curators, scholars, teachers, local historians and the library community, the searchable database has the potential to serve as the instrument by which New Hampshire's collecting partners can begin to conduct outreach for collections care, preservation planning, collecting priorities, fundraising activities and marketing.

2. The Planning Process

In partnership with the New Hampshire Division of Archives & Records Management, the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, the New Hampshire Historical Society, the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, the New Hampshire State Library proposes to develop the tool to expose collections and make them more accessible to users via the Internet. The plan includes comprehensively surveying the state's cultural collections and populating a digital registry database of collections and archives in a format that will address the state's need for increased awareness, increased access and increased support from the government and private sector for collections care. As the 1994 *Bridges from the Past* strategic plan recommends, the New Hampshire State Library is assuming the leadership role in the coordination of activities. Responsibility for oversight, organization and follow-through will lie with the state library. The Project Director, Janet Eklund, will serve as chair to the Preservation Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will forge the necessary collaborations to advise and steer the plan's process with the specific purpose of (1) increasing access to New Hampshire's known and hidden collections (2) increasing public awareness of the needs of New Hampshire's valuable collections and (3) increasing the capacity to leverage public and private funds for long-term care of artifacts, documents, records and other cultural assets. The description of activities for this 18 month planning process are:

- Step 1: The project partners (letters of support are attached) will come together to establish a Preservation Steering Committee from 10 members from New Hampshire's large pool of professionals working in archives, libraries and museums including librarians, archivists, curators, collections managers, conservators and stewards of historic house museums. The Steering Committee will meet regularly for the duration of the project to set the parameters of the survey and database functionality.
- Step 2: The steering committee will select the best individual from the two interested candidates to serve as database developer for the project. The developer will adopt the open source software

platform called WordPress to design the digital registry that will update the 1992 print version of *New Hampshire collections: A guide to our cultural heritage* and serve as both the survey tool and the collections database. A suitable remote web server host will be selected for the WordPress database. A laptop will be provided to the developer for the duration of the project.

- Step 3: Steering Committee members will contribute their membership and contact information to ensure a comprehensive survey. Self-entry of data into WordPress by those surveyed will be the norm. The developer will implement the survey as instructed by the committee and follow-up with contacts to ensure a 95% participation and submission rate.
- Step 4: Project Director, database developer and Steering Committee members will promote and market the survey and the database to legislators, citizens, emergency responders and prospective funders via press releases, webpage news items and in-person presentations.
- Step 5: Steering Committee members will identify any hidden and imperiled collections that can be protected using VRIF monies and Moose License Plate Conservation grants. Steering committee will encourage application for Moose License Plate Conservation funds by the annual March 31st deadline.
- Step 6: Project director will assemble the project observations in a written report suitable for publication that summarizes successes, obstacles, planned sustainability activities and any collaborative dynamics that occurred as a result of creating an online collections resource containing user-contributed content.

The five partnering organizations will be charged with identifying and recruiting colleagues to the committee who possess an active association to the discipline of preservation and who are willing to embrace technology as an access solution. They will have a responsibility to disseminate information about the database project and promote the survey by submitting data from their own collecting institutions. To ensure wide state coverage of cultural organizations partners will share information from their current mailing and membership lists. The Preservation Steering Committee will decide the parameters of the survey, the best methodology to implement the survey and the functionality needed within the database. The Steering Committee's role will be to make the database encompassing and revelatory by defining what is considered a significant cultural collection within New Hampshire. Additional survey points on collecting priorities, conservation data and digitized collections may also be included in the database if applicable. At the project's end, they will help identify those significant collections that are at risk and encourage application to the two state conservation funding programs.

The existing open source software called WordPress will serve as the survey tool, the platform and interface to the online resource. WordPress is a free Web 2.0 multi-use social software application that is widely used to build traditional blogs, library Websites, informational sites and digital libraries. Research and training on WordPress by Project Director, Janet Eklund, preceded this proposal. WordPress proved to be extremely flexible, scalable, cost effective and capable of functioning in many ways. We chose blogging software as a platform because it fills many of the needs of the project, including future photo representation, use of special fields, category support and embedded social tools. WordPress will serve as the Content Management System, the full-text search engine, the cross linking relational database and the unified portal with multi points of access to the cultural resources throughout the state. WordPress is written in PHP, a web programming language that mixes with HTML to produce dynamic web pages and has a host of template functions and plugins for easy customization. It allows user-contributed content, including comments, description and tags, plus permits the import and export of data in bulk. For our

project, we will use the blog entry, aka database record, of the software to represent an individual collection, and we will make extensive use of Wordpress's custom fields to enhance search functionality.

The process of using social software to update and expand a paper guide while simultaneously launching a user-contributed register creates a template for successful hidden collections projects elsewhere. Whereas the original edition of the guide provided alphabetical access only by institution name and material type, the WordPress resource will provide access by collection name, institution, town, subject, time period, material type, conservation treatment activity, digitized format and other assigned tags—making it possible for users to search the site by all kinds of hyperspecific criteria. The survey results of each institution will be linked to and interoperable with those of all others to form a federated environment that can be built upon over time. When faced with natural or manmade disasters, state and local government agencies will be better prepared for emergency response knowing what special collections in which institutions are in existence in times of crises.

3. Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

The budget is primarily allocated for personnel expenses in hiring a database developer to design, conduct and compile a collections survey and accompanying database using open source software. Funds have been allocated for a laptop and peripherals needed for a wide scale survey and subsequent follow-up process. There are monthly fees budgeted for a remote web server to host the database. The remaining funds are for mileage reimbursement for the Preservation Steering Committee and developer and for the cost to promote the completed product. Personnel to carry out this plan include the members of the steering committee, the project director and the database developer. Two candidates with the requisite knowledge and experience have been identified who express an interest in implementing this project. The Steering Committee will select the individual who is best suited to implement and manage the details of the project. Some specific skills required to work with WordPress and common digital applications include skills using PHP, SQL, CSS/HTML, web server software and JavaScript. Members of the steering committee will serve without remuneration but will receive reimbursement for travel to attend a series of 12 meetings over 18 months. The developer will be employed as a temporary part-time position at the New Hampshire State Library and receive benefits at 7.65% in conformity with the state of New Hampshire employment practices. He/she will communicate bi-weekly with and report to the project director, Janet Eklund, at the New Hampshire State Library. She will have responsibility for the administration, coordination and reporting tasks of the project. The state library will share the expense of the work space, supplies and materials for the database developer at the state library headquarters in Concord. The project director estimates giving 20% of her time (i.e. four days per month) towards the administration of the project over an 18 month project timeline.

The New Hampshire State Library will assume the support and maintenance of the database after the funding period. The lasting benefits beyond the completion of this project will come from the strong social network of state preservation partners, a collections database that fosters and improves with user-added content and a connecting means that exposes the public to current and potential risks facing their cultural assets. This increased exposure has the power to influence and attract financial support from both private and public sectors for needed preservation measures. By sending a strong message to state and federal legislators and to public officials about endangered cultural collections, new conservation funding programs similar to the Conservation Moose License Plate and Vital Records Improvement Fund stand a better chance of legislative action. By completing this project, state and local organizations in New Hampshire will be positioned to move forward with advocacy plans and fundraising campaigns to sustain the heritage, culture and knowledge contained within their collecting institutions.