

**Preservation Partners:
A Strategic Plan for Preserving Virgin Islands Collections**

1. Need and Rationale

Background Since 1917 when the Danish West Indies were purchased by the U.S. and became the U.S. Virgin Islands, there has been one, and only one, professional needs assessment conducted on collections in the Virgin Islands. That assessment was made more than 17 years ago in 1991 under the auspices of the Virgin Islands Archives Council, a legislatively mandated body which at the time was also serving a dual role as the designated National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) Virgin Islands Historical Records Advisory Board. *See Attachment 8.Supportingdocument.pdf.*

Consultant Nicholas Burckel, later President of the Society of American Archivists in 1997, and still later Dean of Libraries *emeritus* at Marquette University, had been engaged by VIHRAB to professionally evaluate the state of the Territorial Archives and special collections materials held by the Applicant Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums (DLAM) and others and to prioritize needs. Burckel's report, issued in 1992, supports the conclusions of the accompanying Archives Council's report, *to wit*, the Territorial Archives must be the catalyst for and play vital roles in manuscript and archival collections held in public and private repositories and in private hands. This is still the case today.

Shortly after reporting its recommendations, the Archives Council ceased to meet and has not reconvened since. During the intervening years, the Territory has been without an archivist, its fledgling records management program has become inactive and, despite the lessons learned from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Marilyn on St. Thomas in 1995 (and other subsequent storms of lesser *gravitas*), there is still no operative preservation or disaster plan in place for the Government's collections. In late 2007, two years after the Heritage Health Index was compiled and published, Governor John de Jongh, Jr., created the position of Territorial Coordinator for Archives in recognition of the critical need for collections care and preservation management in the Territory. While the HHI does not reflect any specific survey results garnered from the Virgin Islands, its final report's concluding recommendations most assuredly apply to Virgin Islands collecting institutions.

Virgin Islands collections are not safe. Some of the most historically significant and archival materials in the Virgin Islands are housed in substandard conditions. Suffering from advanced age and the deteriorating effects of the tropical environment, the historic buildings where many collections are stored are characterized by an endemic lack of environmental controls, little or no monitoring for heat and humidity, and inefficient space design and usage. Tropical weather challenges are further exacerbated by the lack of consistency and redundancy in the delivery of island-wide electrical service. Toxic mold air quality testing was conducted in early October 2008 in one of the largest storage areas for Government documents in St. Thomas. Results revealed mold levels at 30 to 300 times the acceptable range for humans. With commercial storage space at a premium, however, there are few economically viable options available and little or no remediation expertise on hand to adequately address these issues.

The Virgin Islands does not have an emergency or disaster preparedness plan in place for its collections. In 2008, the Virgin Islands participated in the Council of State Archivists initiative funded by FEMA for Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) but it will be well into 2009 before any of the IPER training modules will be available for dissemination to the branches of the local government for training and education. In the meantime, the Territorial Archives has begun the process of preparing a comprehensive emergency plan for the Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums but it is not yet complete, and there has been little coordinated effort throughout the Territory to specifically identify, target and engage other collections care managers in this process.

Virgin Islands collecting institutions typically do not assign responsibility for collections care. Without a designated caregiver, and an affirmative recognition of responsibility and accountability, most collections experience a higher degree of neglect and risk of damage. Historically in the Caribbean there

has been a lack of understanding and diminished appreciation of the need for a documentary heritage. Throughout Caribbean history, records were created for the most part by colonial powers and seldom were accessible to the region's largely unfree and indentured population or their descendants. For this reason, and because of a well-developed and compensating cultural and oral history tradition, the Virgin Islands has come late to the realization that it owns one of the most significant collections of documents created by a foreign government (Denmark) presently held under the U.S. flag. Unfortunately, without an archives standard bearer, collections in the Territory are now suffering generally from a lack of preservation, conservation and documentary integrity.

Virgin Islands collecting institutions are unsuccessful at marshaling public and private support for or raising public awareness about collections care. With its inconsistent record of preservation stewardship and leadership, limited fiscal resources, and few if any organizational models to follow in the Caribbean, the Territorial Archives and other collection owners until recently have simply hoarded collections without a view to long-term care and risk protection. There have been no resources identified for outreach services in the past, either by the Territorial Government or the private sector. Efforts to-date have been neither effective or comprehensive about collections care training and service delivery in the Territory and as a result inconsistent messages, philosophies and procedures have proliferated. Without a community of experts or users to connect with, collections owners and custodians have succeeded in fortifying information access silos. Networking has not been used as an information sharing strategy, and collegial relationships among collection holders—especially from one island to another— have foundered as a result.

In a community of over 104,000 residents on four major islands with population centers (St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John and Water Islands) and over 50 cays, most of which are uninhabited, information sharing has been made more difficult by ingrained habits and attitudes toward collaborative projects and diversified interests. This proposal requests funding to (a) identify Virgin Islands collections and their custodians; (b) conduct a comprehensive survey of the status of all collections in the Territory—however and wherever held, including institutional preparedness for emergency and the level of information and procedural knowledge of collection caregivers; and (c) prepare a strategic plan for Territory-wide preservation management of all Virgin Islands collections.

2. The Planning Process

The Preservation Partners A remarkable event occurred in preparation for this grant proposal when over 70 different library, museum, archives and other collections custodians or service providers were identified and invited to attend a conference call briefing on the IMLS Statewide Planning Grant initiative. With over 35 representatives participating, the Territorial Coordinator for Archives summarized broad goals for collections care planning, answered questions and responded to comments on this first-ever collections conservation outreach effort by DLAM. Within the following two weeks, almost half of those organizations responded to the call to action by providing not only a Partnership Statement confirming both readiness and a pledge to participate in the planning process but a letter of commitment, commending DLAM for its efforts and in most cases detailing what specific resources or support the organization would contribute to the partnership dynamic.

DLAM will be the lead organization on this project, ably and enthusiastically assisted by the following 16 Virgin Islands Preservation Partners:

- OLG Office of the Lieutenant Governor of the Virgin Islands
- UVI University of the Virgin Islands
- VINP Virgin Islands National Park
- DCtVI District Court of the Virgin Islands
- CFVI Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, Inc.
- EZC Economic Development Authority, Enterprise Zone Commission
- Friends Friends of the Elaine I. Sprauve Public Library

- SCLS St. Croix Landmarks Society, Inc.
- VISHA Virgin Islands Social History Associates, Inc.
- VIS Virgin Islands Source
- VIBA Virgin Islands Bar Association
- STSJLA St. Thomas-St. John Library Association, Inc.
- SCLA St. Croix Library Association, Inc.
- CGL Caribbean Genealogy Library, Inc.
- SJHS St. John Historical Society, Inc.
- STHT St. Thomas Historical Trust, Inc.

Still other organizations have signaled their willingness to cooperate in the strategic planning process whether through the needs assessment survey, disseminating information, facilitating training or supporting the efforts of others. Without exception the collections community as a whole has expressed its eager anticipation for erecting platforms for information sharing and networking and looks forward to getting started as soon as possible.

The Preservation Partners reflect a strong plan for collaboration among task-appropriate entities. With its relatively small population, the Virgin Islands has few overarching entities to recruit as member partners—i.e., there exists no territorial association of libraries, museums or archives, few if any territory-wide foundations or organizations to represent conglomerations of smaller islands entities. To ensure the broadest and richest mix of attributes and resources, DLAM has successfully recruited 16 of the most highly organized and active key players in the community of collections users and service providers, each contributing a key element of partnership support for the contemplated Virgin Islands Preservation Partners Project.

Members of the territory’s two library associations, STSJLA and SCLA, will put at the project’s disposal participants with library, archives and museum professional expertise – with the Friends and other similar groups, they constitute a ready-made network for disseminating, establishing and applying new preservation skills and paradigms. Partner CFVI, in addition to providing organizational expertise within the nonprofit community, offers its superb outreach and information tool: a Territorial organizational directory of service providers, resource developers and experts developed over the past few years. This resource will be further expanded and exploited during the strategic planning process to enable the Preservation Partnership to identify present collections custodians as well as potential partners for the future. CFVI also joins the governmental entity EZC in offering economic guidance and significant entrée into the established philanthropic community as a source of funding and in-kind support for some of the initiatives that will be developed.

The largest collection holders in the Territory are presently DLAM (which includes all public libraries, archives and museums, and, through its parent entity, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, records collections pertaining to land management, building and construction, professional and business licensing, scientific communities serving the public and the like), OLG (which includes responsibility for the Recorder of Deeds, corporation and trademarks, insurance, banking, the cadastral function and the tax assessor, among others), UVI (its libraries, special collections, university archives, research entities, and scientific communities), VINP (includes maps, historical documents, artifact and archaeological collections), and DCtVI, and through the latter to the local Virgin Islands Superior Court (includes special libraries, electronic and paper-based court documentation, processes, electronic filing, and database management). Each of these partners has also pledged assistance and participation in the planning process, outreach to other associated and known collection holdings, and the legal and experiential framework within which such partnerships may optimally operate to achieve desired results. These organizations will provide the organizational scaffolding to strengthen and bolster the efforts of the remarkable collections amassed by local cultural and heritage custodians SCLS, SJHS, STHT, CGL and VISHA, each of whom brings not only irreplaceable information resources but a cadre of diverse supporters and members to the talent pool.

The world's only fully online newspaper, the VIS, will lead the communications charge for the Preservation Partners, coordinating with and through its information pipelines and other media outlets to inform the public of the goals and progress of the strategic planning process. And with the highest per capita rate of attorneys anywhere in the nation, except Washington, D.C., VIBA's participation signals the inclusion of over 800 members of the Bar and legal community – a professional, legal and information resource that will be tapped into time and again as electronic and traditional document preservation standards are revisited and implemented within the local community.

Scope of Work The project will work through the Preservation Partners, under the leadership of DLAM, to establish a network of collections and collections custodians and owners by identifying what and who they are, preparing a directory of contact information and collections descriptions, and disseminating this information widely and publicly to complete the first round of information gathering early on in the project period of 12 months. The Territorial Coordinator for Archives will serve as Project Manager, assisted by a part-time graduate student.

With parties and collections identified, a Preservation Management Consultant will be contracted to design, prepare and carry out a survey updating the 1992 VIHRAB/Burckel Report and modeled on the HHI, for purposes of assessing the current needs of Virgin Islands collections and collections holders. Another part-time graduate student will assist in the survey information gathering and analysis process and all Preservation Partners will facilitate and provide support for timely survey responses for their own organizations and others in the Territory. The survey results will be published and provided to the collections community and the public at large, via the Web and in print, with recommendations for action items explicitly detailed.

The Preservation Partners will engage a Conservation Consultant to advise them on how best to respond to the conservation needs identified in the survey results. The Conservation Consultant will also provide contact with other advisors to assist the Preservation Partners in the strategic planning process for preservation management. A one-day symposium on St. Thomas and also on St. Croix will be held for attendance by the Preservation Partners and all interested and affected collections caregivers and custodians to discuss the results of the survey, to review recommendations for action items and to have a brief demonstration and discussion of current conservation and preservation practices and resources, as well as emergency preparedness training.

With the survey results in hand, and feedback and suggestions garnered from the symposia, Preservation Partners will meet monthly over the following 6-month period to design and prepare a strategic plan for preservation management. The final plan will be published and disseminated to the entire collections community and made available to the public via the Web. The planning process will be greatly aided by the needs assessment report and the networking information for collections and collections service providers which will already be in place at the time.

Project Evaluation and Sustainability The Preservation Partners have already given strong indications that the flows of information which are just beginning will be sustained by and through others even after the grant period; with systems in place and directories of resources available both in print and via the Web, collections care custodians will no longer exist in silos, relegated to "lone arranger" status. Moreover, there is an abiding interest in expanding collaborations in the future to other islands in the Caribbean. The shared interests and challenges of the common history and development in our islands make it likely that all parties would gain from collections care management information sharing up and down the archipelago.

The strategic plan resulting from this project will specifically identify those resources and entities that must be committed to the plan to ensure sustainability beyond the grant period. The plan will identify dependable and entrusted resource providers to carry out those tasks and to be accountable to the collections community for doing so. More importantly, the strategic plan will position the Virgin Islands to collaboratively care for its collections by implementing its goals in a demonstrated partnership of shared resources and expertise. The long-term objective will be to pursue additional funding for

implementation that will also solidify programs for the Preservation Partners to improve on the coordination of their efforts for future collections management.

Outcome based evaluation techniques will measure the success of the goals set forth in the foregoing Scope of Work during the concluding month of the project. Expected project outcomes, including the directory of collections resources and contact information, the needs assessment survey results and reports, and the strategic plan for implementing the recommendations for meeting the territories needs, will each yield discrete and measurable impact on the connection and provision of collections resources in the Territory. The brief demonstrations of conservation, preservation and emergency preparedness techniques will serve to heighten interest and excitement about the implementation phase of the Preservation Partners Project and will keep the participants engaged and invested in the outcomes.

As a result, Virgin Islands collections will be safer, there will be a provision for establishing a territory-wide emergency disaster plan and conservation services for protecting those collections, collections will be identified and responsibility and accountability for the care of the collections will be a matter of public record, and raised public awareness is expected to result in increased support for the goals of the collections care community.

3. Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

The Budget proposed here is sufficient to support the planning tasks to carry out these goals. It is The Preservation Partners will provide resources in kind to assist in this process, but the allocation of funds will be adequate to cover the designated expenses of the outside consultancies and part-time administrative assistance needed to produce the strategic plan for the Virgin Islands Preservation Partners Project.

With the staffing resources and technical support of DLAM already in place on all three islands, the Project Manager and other key DLAM staff members will be called upon throughout the term of the grant period for hours of participation in and coordination of the project. Their efforts will be supplemented by the Preservation Management Consultant for the four-week term of the survey, and the Conservation Consultant periodically during the active strategic planning phase. Administrative, data entry support and other tasks will be performed on an independent contract basis on one or more islands during the survey phase and periodically throughout the entire project phase by one or more part-time graduate students at a cost that is commensurate for such tasks within the Territory.

Consultant fee estimates are within the range of similar projects already endorsed by IMLS, modified by a factor of approximately 20% to adjust for the exigencies of long-distance travel and operating in a challenging tropical resort environment. It is expected that Advisors recommended for assisting the Preservation Partners will serve without compensation and their expenses, if any, will be covered by one or more of the Preservation Partners in this effort.

Publishing, data collection and entry and information dissemination make up the bulk of the remaining expenses for this project. Office space and computer and other office equipment will be provided as needed by DLAM.

The benefits for collections care in the Virgin Islands will redound to DLAM as well as staff are exposed to new procedures and processes, additional opportunities for information sharing and training, and increased profiles for all divisions in the public arena.