

Special Project Award Submission – July 1, 2012

Historical Records Preservation

This project was conducted for the **Harris County Archives** located in the Criminal Justice Center at 102B San Jacinto in Houston, Texas. Fourteen members of the **ARMA Houston Chapter** worked under the direction of the Harris County Archivist to index, repair and process historical County Records. The volunteers worked on this effort for several Saturdays between July 2011 and October 2011.

Information Management

Needs Assessment

The Harris County Archives, the first county archives in Texas to be created specifically as a part of a Records Management program, officially opened to researchers in April, 2005. The Archives is charged with preserving the history of the government and citizens of Harris County as revealed through county records and donated materials. The Archive has a strategic mission for the County but operates under a severely limited budget with minimal staff. Volunteer work, performed by skilled records professionals, is the only way to ensure completion of projects that would otherwise remain undone to make previously unavailable collections accessible to researchers and the public.

The Solutions Defined

Having previously worked with the County Archivist, the Chapter officers recognized an opportunity for its members to be of service to the community, to provide a learning opportunity to its membership, and to promote the RIM profession.

Without the support provided by ARMA Houston, the repair, processing, and indexing of a collection of Justice of the Peace Civil Case Files from the late 1800's and early 1900's would have been left undone, or would have been conducted by untrained workers participating in a community service program as part of punishment for a crime committed against the county. The Archives receives occasional assistance from community volunteers (trained and untrained) but not to the magnitude provided by this project.

In order to ensure the proper processing of these important historical documents, the ARMA Houston Board determined that the Harris County Archives would benefit from both RIM trained volunteers and funds for archival supplies.

Implementation Process

ARMA Houston called for volunteers through announcements at Monthly Meetings and in its Weekly Update e-mail to the membership, requesting volunteers to work on several Saturdays under the supervision of County Archivist, Sarah C. Jackson, CA.

The County Archivist identified a collection of historical documents, Justice of the Peace Civil Case Files dating 1889 – 1920, that required attention. The project included indexing, repair and processing of the files. The collection consisted of over 124 cubic feet of civil case files documenting the lives and conflicts of ordinary citizens in Houston, Texas at the turn of the 20th century. Chapter members removed the files from non-archival envelopes, extracted fasteners (which in many cases were rusting straight pins) and placed the records in suitable archival containers. Fourteen ARMA Houston members participated over the duration of the project, volunteering for Saturday workdays.

A cash donation of \$4,000 was also given by the Houston Chapter to help provide archival quality materials and supplies for this project and for future projects. Under the direction of Harris County Archivist, Sarah Canby Jackson, CA and her assistant, the ARMA Houston volunteers were able to provide a service with lasting benefit to the community.

Benefits Achieved

- The Harris County Archives was supplied with acid free archival materials including folders, corrugated sheets, bone folders, special tape and related materials to aid in its ongoing operation.
- A unique collection of historical documents are now accessible to researchers and the public for the first time.
- The volunteers, many of whom were not familiar with archiving processes, had the opportunity for a very beneficial, hands on, learning experience under the expert tutelage of an experienced Certified Archivist.
- Community awareness of the RIM profession was raised as the Chapter was recognized by the Harris County Commissioners for its contribution to the Archives.

After completing several projects with the Archives last year, ARMA Houston made an ongoing commitment to the Archives as part of its Strategic Plan. The donation from the Houston Chapter allowed the Archives to further their goal of achieving administrative, physical, and intellectual control over the permanent and historic records of Harris County. The project also allowed the Archives to make available to researchers and the public, collections that were previously inaccessible.

Overall Assessment

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