



**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Victoria Walch  
vwalch@statearchivists.org  
319-338-0248

## **National Project Seeks to Preserve Valuable Local Government Records**

**IOWA CITY, Iowa. (September 12, 2006)—An endangered national treasure.** A major national project is seeking to identify strategies to save important records of the nation's more than 80,000 local governments.

The *Closest to Home* project, sponsored by the Council of State Archivists (CoSA), focuses on records that are truly "closest to home"—those that document our marriages, homes, lands and businesses; that provide insight into social, educational, public safety, and other services; and that preserve our rights and affect our daily lives and those of our neighbors. In many localities, these invaluable documents are being lost.

"In too many cities, counties, towns, and other local governments, these historically significant records are not preserved or not accessible," said Roy H. Tryon, State Archivist and Administrator of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and Co-Chair of the Task Force that is overseeing the project. "Documentation of the lives of individuals, families, and communities is being lost." Digital technologies create electronic records that are particularly difficult to preserve, he noted, but also offer some potential for improved access and dissemination.

The stakes for preservation of our heritage are high. But as important as history is, there is much more at stake here. Many of these records have transcending legal value and are

therefore essential in litigation. Others document the origin, development, and administration of major government programs. Still others are laws, ordinances, and other key documents that define fundamental policies, rights, and obligations.

The *Closest to Home* project is determined to find workable, effective strategies that can be adopted by localities nationwide. At the same time, they must be adaptable to local conditions, because every state's laws and traditions in regard to its local records are different, and there is much variation even within states as to how local governments approach caring for their archival records. The project's final report and recommendations, expected to be issued by mid-2007, will take this variety into account.

**Project goals.** The project, funded by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, is reviewing past initiatives and studying strong archival programs to identify strategic approaches that work best. It is also exploring roles for the federal and state governments in working with local governments on this issue. It is giving particular attention to four issues:

- How to raise awareness and strengthen advocacy among local government officials about the importance of local government records of continuing value.
- How to identify sustainable funding for preserving these records.
- How to provide training in archival techniques and procedures for local government records custodians.
- How to assess and deal with the impact of new technologies.

"We are looking for approaches that have been successful as well as new ideas that show promise of success," said Kaye Lanning Minchew, Director of the Troup County (GA) Archives and Co-Chair of the Task Force. "Our goal is to produce a report that leads to action and makes

a real difference in the years to come. These records are too valuable to all Americans to neglect their preservation.”

An increasing number of local governments have established programs for their archival records or have arrangements with libraries, historical societies, state archival programs, or other organizations to preserve and make them available. The project is exploring how these arrangements began, how they work, and whether they are good models.

The Task Force has already completed a survey of state archives’ programs for local governments and a study of past local government archives initiatives. The results of both are available on the project website, <http://www.statearchivists.org/lga/>.

The Task Force has engaged four subject-area experts to explore the key issues noted above. Its next public event is a conference, slated for Washington in March 2007, to explore strategic approaches and enlist the active support of associations of state and local government officials.

The Task Force has posted a questionnaire online to gather a broad range of advice and opinions about these four issues [see Sidebar text, below]. The questionnaire can be accessed by going to the project website at <http://www.statearchivists.org/lga/questions.htm>. Comments from all individuals interested in the preservation and use of local government archives are welcome.

CoSA, the sponsoring organization, is an association comprising the directors of the records and archives programs in the fifty states, territories, and the District of Columbia. Its mission includes a commitment to articulating the significance of government’s historical records, advocating on their behalf, and promoting sound, effective archival practices in

identifying, preserving, and accessing historical records. For more information, please go to <http://www.statearchivists.org>.

For more information on the project or to provide additional observations about the particular issues under consideration, please contact any Task Force or staff member. The project web site at <http://www.statearchivists.org/lga/> will provide updates throughout the project. Also on this site is a link to join the Local Government Archives listserv where this project and all other issues of common concern are open for discussion.

## **Local Government Archives Task Force**

### **Co-chairs**

Kaye Lanning Minchew  
Director  
Troup County Archives  
[kaye@trouparchives.org](mailto:kaye@trouparchives.org)

Roy Tryon, CRM  
State Archivist & Records Administrator  
South Carolina Department of Archives and History  
[tryon@scdah.state.sc.us](mailto:tryon@scdah.state.sc.us)

### **Task Force Members**

Paul Bergeron, City Clerk  
Nashua NH  
[Bergeron@ci.nashua.nh.us](mailto:Bergeron@ci.nashua.nh.us)

Lisa Johnston, Assistant City Clerk  
Artesia NM  
[asstcityclerk@artesianm.com](mailto:asstcityclerk@artesianm.com)

Joan Decker, Records Commissioner  
City of Philadelphia  
[joan.decker@phila.gov](mailto:joan.decker@phila.gov)

Shirley Wilson, Director (retired)  
Sumner County (TN) Archives and Certified  
Genealogist  
[swilsontn@aol.com](mailto:swilsontn@aol.com)

Virginia Fritsch, Local Government Records  
Archivist,  
Wisconsin Historical Society  
[vwfritsch@whs.wisc.edu](mailto:vwfritsch@whs.wisc.edu)

### ***Ex Officio***

Richard Cameron, Director of State Programs, National  
Historical Publications and Records Commission

Raimund Goerler, Assistant Director of Libraries  
Ohio State University  
[goerler.1@osu.edu](mailto:goerler.1@osu.edu)

Howard Lowell, National Archives and Records  
Administration

### **Staff**

Bruce W. Dearstyne, Coordinating Consultant to  
the CoSA Local Government Archives Task  
Force, Albany NY  
[dearstyne@verizon.net](mailto:dearstyne@verizon.net)

Victoria Irons Walch, CoSA Executive Director  
[vwalch@statearchivists.org](mailto:vwalch@statearchivists.org)

Jenifer Burlis-Freilich, CoSA Program Officer  
[jbfreilich@statearchivists.org](mailto:jbfreilich@statearchivists.org)