

User Group Meeting
Wednesday, September 29, 2010
The National Archives (NARA)
At College Park, MD (Archives 2)
1PM - Lecture Room B
(15 users; 10 NARA staff in attendance)

David Ferriero, Archivist of the United States attended, discussing issues and answering questions from the users in attendance. Diane Dimkoff opened the meeting with the following agenda items.

I. NARA Proposed Rule in Federal Register

NARA's proposed regulations will remove NARA facilities' hours of operation from the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and establish procedures that NARA offices must follow when changing facilities' hours of operation. The proposed procedure will require NARA to provide the public with advance notice in writing of any proposed changes in hours, including justifications for those changes. This change in the regulations is for internal use and presently, there are no proposed changes to the hours of operation at any NARA facility.

II. Wi-Fi Update

The installation of wireless hardware has been completed for Archives 1 and Archives 2.

The second Usability Evaluation will be conducted with researchers in the Archives 1 Training Room (G-24) on Friday, October 8, 2010, at 1PM.

The first Usability Evaluation was held at Archives 2 on August 19, 2010. The evaluation feedback will help us finalize the look and feel of the wireless portal and registration process.

Once we have gone through additional testing, system certification, and the transition to operations, we hope to have the wireless capability at A1 and A2 available this fall. Before we can go live, we need to work with the operational staff regarding security considerations.

III. NARA and Expanded use of Social Media

The Archivist spoke on NARA's expanded use of social media. He places a high premium on the use of social media and encourages staff to experience and get used to its components. One of NARA's roles is to offer advice on social media to the White House, Federal agencies, and various people around the world; therefore, it is extremely important that we place a great deal of focus on this issue.

We have implemented various social media avenues, including iTweet, Blogs, Narrations, Prologue, and WiKi; we need you to focus your attention on all of these opportunities. We need to know where you are as users, - to see how you participate without having to visit a NARA facility. So far, most of the conversation has been one-sided; we are asking for comments, but are not getting much feedback.

Q: Are you using this media? Are you taking advantage of them? Are you pleased with the media opportunities?

Users responded with various questions, comments, and suggestions:

- Send an email to inform users that comments have been posted.
- NARA should ensure follow-up to the comments and questions posted on the Blog. Users need to know that they will receive a response to their concerns and questions.
- How could we connect to WWI images? Would we be notified? The Archivist suggested that we conduct a demo of the Online Public Access (OPA). He mentioned it would replace ARC.
- Docsteach – The user is excited about the information and the citation of the information. The Archivist said his goal is to get 10 billion documents into classrooms.
- Is there an update on webinars? Could the Know Your Records (KYR) sessions, as well as others given by subject matter experts on certain records, be recorded and then placed on the website or on UTube? Could videoconferencing be used for the KYR sessions so that genealogists all over the country could see the sessions? Could questions be submitted while these sessions are in progress?
 - KYR sessions are recorded every Thursday; the DVDs are available in the NARA library.
 - Videoconferencing of the KYR sessions is done with some of the regional facilities, particularly at our Kansas City regional facility. We offer DVD copies of the presentations to our regional records facilities so that they can show them to staff and researchers.
 - We are experimenting with putting the KYR lectures up on the website. Our main challenge is 508 compliance. We will look into ways to facilitate transcription to ensure 508 compliance.
 - We will work on receiving calls during the KYR sessions.
 - The Archivist said that C-SPAN offers training and we can talk to them about a series of records specific sessions in our KYR program to go on a Federal government channel.

IV. Update on NARA's Proposal to use Colored Paper

To further distinguish original records and copies, and to streamline the checkout process, we will soon begin using colored paper in all of the public access pc printers and the photo copiers. Diane's team has tested many different colors of paper on scanners and copiers. Please look at the results and give us your feedback.

Questions arose as to the price of copies, going paperless, impact of colored paper on certification of copies for legal purposes, and whether testing has been done for possible gray marks on the colored copies.

The price for copies will not increase. The change in paper color is an internal security issue and we have sources for purchasing paper that will enable us to get the necessary paper for an appropriate cost.

Our long-range plans for going paperless have been discussed at various staff meetings. This, of course, is something that NARA cannot do overnight, particularly with the continued accession of paper records from Federal agencies.

NARA is exploring possible legal requirements for white paper.

Diane's team has tested for gray marks on the various colored paper. Other NARA facilities, including the FDR and Reagan Libraries have instituted the use of colored paper with great success. These products are environmentally friendly. NARA will keep users up-to-date on this issue through its Blog and various meetings.

V. Green Bank Bags

In order to protect the original records, researchers, and staff, we are expanding the use of green bags for copies of records and researchers' notes that are taken out of the research rooms. We have ordered an additional 500 green bags so that we can fully implement this procedure in both buildings.

VI. Saturday Pulls - July 2010 Pilot

We have not made any determinations yet on the Saturday pulls. The Archivist would like us to conduct a pilot at A2 in November. We would like to know if anyone has used this service and their reactions to the service. One response indicated that the service had been great, with only a very small "hiccup" on a tricky textual records request. Overall, there have been no problems with pulling records on Saturday at A1 in July.

NARA issued a press release for the July Saturday pulls and attendees suggested that publicity for the November pilot be extended to include local genealogical societies and various list serves. Diane asked for contact information so that we can widen our publicity.

VII. Other Items

- a. We ordered 75 carts for use at Archives 1. There are due in soon.
- b. We acquired the Serial Set Digital Collection of the US Government publications and it is now available to the public free of charge in all NARA research rooms nationwide. For more details, please refer to our press release of September 29, 2010.

VIII. Additional Questions, Comments, Suggestions:

Q: Lobby Congestion – Please allow the researchers who have checked in to go to the A1 Researcher lobby to keep the lobby clear. The outer lobby is very crowded.

Q: Book Scanner (A2) and Contract for Equipment Maintenance at A1 and A2 – Comments were made about equipment which is out of service. Two examples are the scanner at A2, which works sporadically, and the microfilm readers, many of which are down at any given time.

A: We have called and are waiting for parts; the parts come from Israel.

FOLLOW-UP Q: Scanners - You decided on the Scan Pro 2000; when will you purchase it?

A: We are in the process of purchasing 13 reader-scanners, which will replace the microfilm readers.

Q: Certified copies – Getting copies certified is taking 6-8 weeks. This wait is a problem for researchers, particularly those serving the legal community; copies are needed quickly.

A: It does take too long. There is a rather large volume of records to certify each day; but, we will try to do a better job of getting these done in a timely manner. Diane promised to look at the process.

Q: Staple Removal – Why can't we remove staples from the deck logs? Contractors remove the staples when the logs go for certification.

A: The deck logs are heavily used. If staples are removed, materials get separated. We will look into this; in the meantime, we will remove all staples. We will soon begin a project to digitize deck logs.

Q: Inconsistency in Rules in the Research Rooms – We are experiencing a wide variety of answers from staff (particularly student interns) regarding rules. We suggest more consistency at both buildings.

Q: Digitization of Records. – There are plenty of researchers who would love to give NARA copies of the records they have researched and burned to a CD or a DVD; this would enable NARA to put these records online.

A: Yesterday, we announced the formation of the Digitization Work Group; this is an agenda item which the group will be considering soon.

FOLLOW-UP Q: If I am working for a client and charging the client for information I find, is it ethical and/or legal to turn this information over to NARA?

A: This is a good question which we need to consider.

Q: Microfilm vs. Digital - Are you still producing microfilm or are you going totally digital? (**A:** digital) It would be nice for you to redo the microfilm and then make it digital. Also, when you go to digital imaging, please go to color digital images. The colors on the documents have a meaning and if we can only see the images in black and white, we will be dumbing down history.

Q: Computer Tables – Please take a look at the condition of the rickety computer tables in the textual consultation room.

A: We agree with you and we are in the process of shifting things around to improve the area and to provide brighter work areas.

FOLLOW-UP Q: New researchers don't know where to go when they reach the research rooms and are wandering around.

A: We have an orientation in the Customer Service Center for first time users; however, we will hold a meeting to bring this to the attention of the staff.

Q: Requests to see Obscure Records – We, at the Lincoln Papers Project, sometimes request obscure records and run into archivists who tell us that we do not need to see those records.

A: Please let a manager know if that occurs.

Q: Poll of Morale at Federal Agencies – What can we do to help morale of the staff?

A: Archivist's response - Last year, NARA ranked second from the bottom of the Federal agencies. I put a huge premium on staff participation in the February 2010 survey; and, we set a new record of 82% staff participation in the survey. NARA tied for the bottom position. We have created a task force to look at problem areas to determine what can be done internally, and in particular, how to find ways to improve support for our staff to do their jobs.

I was told that the dissatisfaction within NARA was primarily from those who pulled records in the regional facilities. Well, I've visited 21 of 44 facilities and have talked to the staff. It is clear

that there is a lot of work needed to create value around what people are doing, -- around their piece of the puzzle in the agency. Staff does not have a big picture of their impact for the public. When I was hired at my first job, I was hired to shelve books. But, managers recognized my other talents and they created opportunities for me, which made my life more interesting. At NARA, we need to create career paths for our staff so that they can see that they can make a career at the National Archives.

To answer your question about how you can help, we ask that you interact with our staff. Say thank you and tell them what you're working on and how it is important to your life. If you have any further ideas on how to make staff feel more appreciated, please send me an email; we would love to hear from you.

FOLLOW-UP Q: If Congress thought you were important, maybe that would help.

A: The Archivist stated that he has split most of his time evenly between visiting our regional facilities and meeting with those on the Hill. He has met one-on-one with Congressional staff and has gone armed with facsimiles of documents in which they are interested. His favorite example is of Louise Slater. The weekend before the health bill passed, he showed her a copy of FDR's health plan detailed in his 1939 message to Congress. The next day, Louise Slater took a copy of FDR's message to Congress on health care and read from it on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Diane concluded the meeting by inviting questions and comments be sent to her at diane.dimkoff@nara.gov.