

Report on The Baltimore City Archives
Rob Schoeberlein, Acting City Archivist
November 2015



Background

The Maryland State Archives, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Baltimore, has administered the Baltimore City Archives since July 1, 2010. A new MOU extends state presence at the facility until July 1, 2018.

Goals for the City Archives were, and still remain, to enhance public accessibility to the archival holdings, expand the Baltimore City records program, and educate the records managers of City departments. Partially supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the initial phase of this work allowed for the integration of Baltimore record group descriptions into the State Archives' *Guide to Government Records* online catalog.

Staffing

Staffing levels have decreased, largely due to the expiration of grant funded positions, from a high of twelve (in 2010) to the current level of three. One of those positions will be 80% for the next seven months.

Records Management

The second and third quarters of 2015 witnessed the continuation of outreach efforts through departmental or site visits. In July, staff met with Department of Public Works (DPW) managers to assist them as they formulate a comprehensive records management program. In August, we hosted 15 DPW department heads and engaged them in a discussion on retention schedule guidelines. We later led them on a tour of our facility. All of this effort was in preparation for a large transfer of DPW material slated for October.

In July we began working with the Legal Affairs practice group of the Law Department, (housed within the Baltimore Police Department headquarters). A portion of their case files have been boxed and will be transferred to the BCA at some future date.

In early September, BCA staff met with administrators from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Code Enforcement Administration, about code enforcement files located in a warehouse owned by the Housing Authority of Baltimore City. This was a field appraisal in preparation for another records transfer.

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In addition, transfers were made to the City Archives of some 435 cubic feet of record material. The departments represented include Transportation, Housing, Public Works, Retirement, Health, and Fire.

Historical Collections

Processing initiatives focused upon the description of the Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke Papers [BRG 9, Series 44] and the Maryland Architectural Drawings Collection [BTR 31]. Sixty-three boxes of incoming correspondence relating to the Schmoke administration are now available publicly. The Drawings Collection, on loan from the Maryland Historical Society, requires additional some description. Staff and volunteers are now engaged in this activity. The finding aid which we have posted online will be updated periodically with new information.

Outreach

We continue to publicize our holdings and build public support for our efforts. Our social media presence has expanded as we continue to feature images from the BCA holdings upon our Facebook page on a twice weekly basis. Our homepage "likes" have grown, largely through image-driven posts, from 699 at the beginning of February to 2966 as of the 21st of September. One post, relating to the Old Town Mall shopping district, had a reach of 98,799, generating 917 shares and 88 comments. We are pleased that we are reaching a broad and diverse audience.

The City Archives participated in the Maryland State Archives Family History Festival on Saturday, the 7th of November. A staff member manned a table and fielded questions from the general public. On the 21st of November, a PowerPoint presentation on our holdings will be delivered at the Enoch Pratt Library

Records Management/Emergency Preparedness training workshops, in conjunction with Maryland State Archives staff, are planned for the fall and winter. Our first took place on the 30th of October with nine attendees. Some institutions represented included the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, Maryland Historical Society, Anne Arundel Historical Society, National Archives, College Park, and the Loyola/Notre Dame Library. Another workshop will take place on the 20th of November. Eleven individuals have already pre-registered.

Researcher Services/Digitization

From April to September 2105, the Archives has had 122 registered visitors* and 39 research appointments. Some researcher topics investigated included 20th century community organizations, the 1904 Fire aftermath, post-WWII health institutions, Lawrence Fowler drawings, Carver Vo-Tech, and family research using the WPA indexed papers. Fifty-nine scanning work orders, mostly in fulfillment of City Agency requests, have been processed during this time.

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We have digitized and placed online the Baltimore Monumental Subscription Book [BMS 3]. The volume lists the names of about 2000 citizens who donated money to erect Baltimore's Battle Monument, a memorial to those fallen heroes from the 1814 Battle of Baltimore.

*Not the total number of visitors to the BCA (ie., tours, media, service reps. excluded)

Interns and Volunteers

We hosted one intern this summer for a five week period. Phillip Morton, Jr., came to us under the auspices of YouthWorks, a state-funded, city-administered program to place Baltimore City schools students into temporary jobs. Mr. Morton digitized photographs relating to Mayor "Du" Burns and compiled descriptive information on other collections which we subsequently added to our catalog. We hope to host another YouthWorks intern next year. Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake tweeted about Mr. Morton and YouthWorks featured him on its Facebook page (see page five).

We placed a call for volunteers to assist us in general processing and cataloging in May. We have also been actively recruiting individuals. Several volunteers have come forward to date. David Lari is assisting us in further cataloging the thousands of city agency produced Kodachrome slides (1950s-1980s). Assistance cataloging and preparing a finding aid for the Maryland Architectural Drawings Collection [BTR 31] is another task. Sarah Cotner, MLS, is now helping us with the drawings. Yanghoon Jang, MLS, and a former archivist at the University of Seoul, assists us with the cataloging, flattening, and the rehousing of historical plats.

We will also soon have another drawings-related collection from the Neighborhood Design Center. This collection will be transferred here sometime this Fall.

Challenges

The City Archives has an ongoing (and still yet unresolved) issue regarding the disposal of non-permanent City records containing personal information. Our warehouse, once again, has become clogged with this material since it cannot be recycled or otherwise disposed of easily. We need to have at minimum an annual shred coordinated through the Recycling Section of the Bureau of Solid Waste, Department of Public Works.

Another challenge has been the transfer of records here either without a proper or an incomplete inventory. The boxed files from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Code Enforcement Administration is one example. Archives staff time was wasted on fruitless searches as files that appeared upon the inventory were simply missing from the boxes. This issue, however, has been resolved through departmental negotiation as of November 2015. The DHCD will now send its own staff

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to perform the searches, pull files, and digitize them, alleviating the small City Archives staff from performing this task ever again.

Lastly, the lighting in our main record storage area remains inadequate with certain areas in almost complete darkness. The plan to upgrade and re-light the area is currently with the City's Space Usage Committee for review. It has taken about three years to progress to this stage (our landlord, and his inability to secure bids in a timely fashion, is partially to blame for this delay). We are pleased to report that the lighting plan and its associated costs will be presented before the Baltimore City Board of Estimates at its upcoming November 18 meeting.

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Mayor Rawlings-Blake
@MayorSRB

TWEETS 9,483 FOLLOWING 1,365 FOLLOWERS 68.9K FAVORITES 384 LISTS 1

Follow

Mayor Rawlings-Blake retweeted
Mayor's OED @BaltMOED · Jul 16
#you@works gives our kids jobs in our city. The program is 1 of the hottest things Baltimore City has launched.

Baltimore Police @BaltimorePolice · Jul 15
Several of our officers who grew up in Baltimore helped to organize the youth basketball league.

Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Employment Development
July 16 · 🌐

Baltimore City's youthworks program is keeping our young people engaged and productive this summer. Take Phillip for example, he's 17 and wants to go to college to pursue a business degree so he can try his hand at real estate management. Phillip works at the Baltimore City Archives where he does a variety of tasks including digitizing photographs. Phillip says Youthworks Baltimore helps him by providing "real life experiences in the workplace." He also says that he has more confidence because of the program. All across the city young workers like Phillip are using their summer to prepare for future careers.

Like · Comment · Share

David R. Herron, Philip J. Merrill, Mumina Harris and 68 others like this.

15 shares

Kia Lachelle Saunders Go Phillip
Like · Reply · 1 · July 16 at 12:20pm

Shenise Franklin Awesome...
Like · Reply · August 19 at 9:41am

Linda Moore McCauley Sounds like a young man with a plan! Good luck with your future endeavors!
Like · Reply · July 20 at 1:20pm

Write a comment...