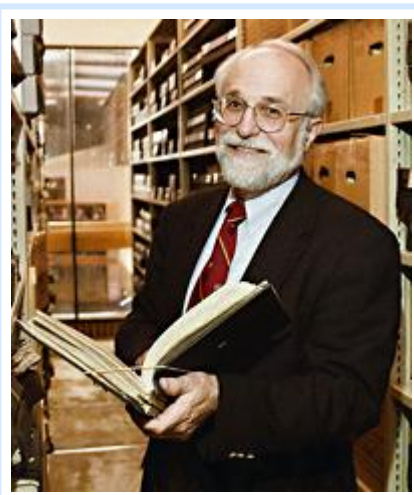


Digital Preservation Pioneers

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Digital Preservation Pioneer: Ed Papenfuse



February 2011 - Maryland has long been at the forefront of technology in providing online access to land and other permanently valuable archival records, thanks in a large part to State Archivist Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse. Papenfuse has a gift for recognizing opportunities and imagining possibilities.

For example, he started working on automating recordkeeping over forty years ago and made Maryland one of the first states to put government information on the web. He also has done an exemplary job in overseeing an economically self-sustaining digital repository.

The first job of Papenfuse's early professional career was as an editor bibliographer at the *American Historical Review*, and he had the tedious chore of typesetting handwritten bibliographic notices that historians gathered from their reading. A publisher colleague at Byrd Press suggested to him that much of what was being keyboarded for typesetting could be retained and managed

electronically. Papenfuse began researching the idea and in 1970, long before the digital revolution, he got hooked on databases.

Other coincidences wove into his professional life. He became a staff person for a group of archivists that were interested in expanding the National Historical Publications Commission into the [National Historical Preservation Records Commission](#). Papenfuse said, "Some of the first work that I did was to look at how we could convert the paper records created by the [Works Progress Administration](#) in the 1930s into a searchable database environment."

Because of that work, and his help drafting legislation to create the [NHPRC](#), in 1973 he was offered — and accepted — the job as assistant archivist of the state of Maryland. "When I arrived there, I asked myself how we can move in the direction of bringing all of our finding aid material into a searchable, retrieval world," Papenfuse said. "I began to think about structurally how you should inventory, how you manage, how you should access records and how you could do this in an electronic way."

He knew they needed to standardize their finding aids and bring them into some electronic form where they would be manageable and retrievable. He started late in the 1970s by putting a finding aid onto 8-inch floppy disks, which were then state of the art. "We also used those same floppy disks to produce hardcopy photo type pages for the guide," said Papenfuse. "And my theory was that someday we'd be able to bring that electronic information into a much larger searchable database."

In the early 1990s, Papenfuse began to pay attention to the developing Internet. By 1994, he was able to place the [Maryland Manual](#), a comprehensive guide to the Maryland state government, into an "internet retrievable environment." That led to other opportunities, including developing a model website for all Maryland government agencies.

Later, Papenfuse developed an innovative sustainability plan to support a digital preservation and access repository for Maryland county land records. He arranged for a tax surcharge on each official transaction

involving land records; the resulting funds allowed the Maryland State Archives to scan, index and provide [Web access](#) to every land record in the state, going back to its founding in 1637.

"Every time you bought a house, every time you mortgaged a house, every time you filed something, \$25 of that fee went into a fund and out of that fund came the money for sustaining this project," Papenfuse said. "So over the course of four years, with \$35 million from that fund, we created one of the best archives in the country and continue to receive a fee for sustaining that still-growing electronic environment. That has been the saving grace of the [Maryland State Archives](#)."

As Maryland's online government presence expands, so does its value to its citizens. Papenfuse is a big believer in folding in data from the public, either from direct contributions or capturing what they do with online records. He continually points to data interconnectivity and, more importantly, *access* as the keys to increasing the archives' value. "You should enable people to be able to supply information about why those records are important," Papenfuse said.

He sees collaboration as another important element of the future Maryland archives. "We need much more in the way of shared repository responsibility," said Papenfuse. "And the places where we should be getting it from initially are from the academic library environments and the academic institutions."

And from other state agencies. "Many agencies today believe they can do this all themselves within their own IT departments," said Papenfuse. "Just entrusting IT people to keep the stuff alive forever is not the answer for effective information management."

It is also a challenge to make those who are directly engaged in government aware that they need to use a distributed computer environment — the "cloud" — over which they don't necessarily have full control. It's part of the nature of collaboration.

"We have to think of it in terms of a much bigger environment in which the information flows in a natural way," said Papenfuse. "We have our individual facilities but we have to also be part of the larger movement."

Papenfuse does not want the Maryland State Archives to rest on its accomplishments. "We have to be a part of the state agencies envisioning how they hold onto their own collective memory and how they access information from the past that is directly relevant to what it is they have to do daily," he said. "One of the big problems that the archive faces is making sure that we have an integrated program that is forever enlarging the understanding of the value of what we're caring for."

Papenfuse's goal all along has been to bring government online and to make its information available to its citizens. "A state archives needs to be *the* information repository of what government is all about," said Papenfuse. "An accountable, authoritative place where the ongoing basic information of what government is and does will always be present and accessible, regardless of the platform or software, as you move through time."

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