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December 31, 2002

Mr. Richard Anderson
Dutchess County Clerk
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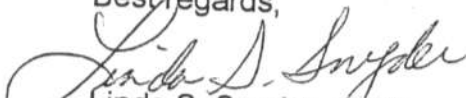
Dear Mr. Anderson:

Enclosed please find the Needs Assessment related to the Historic Records Grant project. I appreciate all of the cooperation from your staff and from Helen Slattery in the Records Center. Everyone I spoke to seemed very dedicated and concerned with helping researchers and with the preservation of the County's historic records.

I am aware that as part of the grant, a Records Advisory Board has been formed and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with them to discuss this report.

Please contact me at your convenience, or have one of your deputies contact me to coordinate a review of this report or to respond to any questions you may have related to the County's historic records collection.

Best regards,


Linda S. Snyder, GRM

Historic Records Analysis Report Dutchess County Clerk's Office

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Needs Assessment Dutchess County Historic Records Grant

Introduction:

The Dutchess County Clerk applied for and received an Historic Records Grant from the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund. The purpose of the grant was to hire an archival consultant to review the County Clerk's historic records collection and to prepare a Needs Assessment.

The New York State Archives has defined "historical records" as those records that are worthy of preservation and special care because of the continuing importance of the information they contain. Historical records may be in a variety of formats, including paper files, maps, photographs, videotapes, or computer files.

Dutchess County was created by an Act of the Colonial Assembly on November 1, 1763. The historic records pre-date the creation of the County and begin with the year 1717 and the Records of the Supervisors. The Dutchess County Clerk's Office is located at 22 Market Street, Poughkeepsie, New York. A review was made of basement inactive records storage area, the first floor administrative office area and the second floor records room. Discussions were held with Deputy County Clerk, Catherine Adler and several staff members involved directly with historic records or whose daily activities are working with the various types of researchers and those involved with the receiving of records. The County Records Center on Washington Street was also reviewed and discussions were held with Helen Slattery, a Principal Program Assistant who coordinates the operations there.

In addition, discussions were held via e-mail with former Dutchess County Records Manager, C. Raymond LaFever who was responsible for setting up the County's first Records Center. He also began measures to conserve and protect historic records. With a small group of volunteers, he saw to it that bound volumes of historic records were carefully wrapped in acid-free paper with content information recorded on the outer paper. In the County's first Records Center there was a temperature and humidity controlled vault where these volumes were stored. When the Records Center was moved to the Washington Street location, there was no vault, so the historic records were put on shelves directly or put into records storage boxes. Unfortunately, in the dozen years or so that have past since the conservation project was done, the wrappings have come undone, have been torn and have gotten dusty and dirty.

In January 1991, Dutchess County received an "archival" grant. An archivist, Christopher Gratzel, was hired for a seven-month period. The focus of his efforts was on the court documents and the "Series Description Forms" he created were

used as part of this analysis. Some of the court records were able to be humidified, unfolded and put into acid-free folders. Conservation efforts were also taken regarding some 18th and 19th Century maps. Unfortunately, the project began late and was not completed. As part of this current project, e-mail and telephone contact was made with Christopher Gratzel, who is now the Deputy Director of the Westchester County Archives.

There has been no other project to preserve or conserve any of the County Clerk's historic records with the exception of a recent project related to Naturalization Records. These records had been stored folded into three or four segments and filed in a filing cabinet. There were no file folders or other means to assist in facilitating access or retrieval. The County Clerk's office began a project that has resulted in the unfolding of most of the documents. The documents have been alphabetized by year and put into acid-free folders and acid-free records storage boxes. Severely torn documents were put into Mylar sleeves to avoid further damage and to facilitate photocopying. An index database related to these records was begun. Some of the records were not unfolded because of concern about damaging them by doing so. These documents need to have humidity gradually introduced before they can be unfolded. It may be possible to do with in-house staff, or a paper conservator may be needed.

Purpose of the Assessment:

The Dutchess County Clerk, Richard Anderson, is concerned about the historic records entrusted to his care. Over the past several years, local historians and other interested parties have expressed a concern for the condition and preservation of the vast collection of historic records, which date back to 1717. These concerns were responsible for the grant application to be submitted.

The historic records collection is located in three separate areas: the Dutchess County Records Center, the County Clerk's Records Room and the County Clerk's basement. None of these areas offer appropriate climate control or other preservation appropriate environments. Since there are three separate areas, it is difficult for researchers to easily locate the information they may be interested in. It is the intent of this Needs Assessment to provide the County Clerk with a written plan to assist in prioritizing the development of an archival program to provide for the appropriate storage, preservation, access and use of these valuable historic records.

Legal Authority and Purpose:

The Dutchess County Clerk's Office represents one department of the County Government. Many of the records created within the County structure are handled through this department, but the over-all records management activities of the County does not fall under the aegis of the County Clerk. According to Robert Arnold, Chief, Government Records Services of the New York State Archives, in fully seventy- percent of New York State counties, the county clerk has been appointed the records management officer. [This information was taken from Mr. Arnold's comments posted to a *Daily Freeman* website article, December 2, 2002, relating to the new Archives at the Ulster County Records Center.] Dutchess County is an exception with the Director of General Services serving as the "acting" County records management officer. A County the size of Dutchess and with the needs for control over historic records, as well as management for the records in various different media (paper, microfilm, photographs, audio and video tape and electronic records) for all County Departments requires a full-time Archivist/Records Manager. This individual should have training in archives and records management.

Procedures are in place in the Dutchess County Clerk's Office for researchers to request information that is not "online" or available in the books in the main area of the records room. A requisition form is used for records that are fragile, microfilm or other records requiring special handling of one sort or another. In some cases, the researcher will be provided with a copy of a fragile document and not the document itself.

There also needs to be a written policy for access to and use of historic records. Fragile archival records should not be handled indiscriminately. Genuine research use needs to be established and the researcher should be restricted in the physical handling and use of the archival records. If the original records are to be used, handling should be with white archival gloves, notes taken by the researcher should be only with a pencil, photocopying or scanning should be restricted or not permitted depending upon the condition of the records. If photocopying is to be done, ideally this should not be done by the researcher, but by departmental personnel so that the necessary careful handling of the original records will be done.

County Clerk's office places a great deal of responsibility on the office personnel. The personnel are accustomed to the needs of title insurance companies and other of the traditional researchers of land records. Historical research requirements are not the same. Historical researchers require a quiet area where they are able to read and to take notes. This area does require constant supervision, lest records be lost or damaged. A county office in Massachusetts last year had documents taken because of the signatures of "Hall of Fame" baseball players. Thankfully, the documents were recovered and the thief has been punished. Access to historic records is best provided in a "reading room"

that is provided at the County Archives and Records Center. Researchers can be accommodated and monitored there. This is virtually impossible in the busy, fast paced records room of the County Clerk's Office.

It is recommended that the program for Dutchess County Government Archives and Records Management be strengthened by the enactment of a Local Law. This Local Law would define the terms "archives" and "historic records", "records" and "records management". Although no position of County Archivist/Records Manager exists at the present, the Local Law would provide for the creation of such a position. It would also further define the duties of and support the efforts of a County Archivist/Records Manager with the creation of a Records Advisory Board. In addition, it would define a collection policy for the County Archives, define custody of records deposited in the County Archives/Records Center and provide for "replevin" where necessary to recover County records that have been alienated from proper custody.

Administration:

As previously stated, the Dutchess County Clerk's Office is only one department of the Dutchess County Government. The need for a County Archives and for proper storage, preservation and access to historic records is not the exclusive concern or need of the Dutchess County Clerk. These needs would relate to the entire governmental structure of the County. While the County Clerk is probably responsible for the oldest historic records extant within the County government, each of the other departments would have historic records. The County departments also each have records management needs and concerns and could use the advice and counsel of a County Archivist/Records Manager.

To address archival or historic records management, one cannot merely use dates as a cut-off point and decide that the historic records begin at 1717 and end with 1930. The age of the record is not the determining factor in dealing with historic records. Historic records are being created daily and the media for historical records is not restricted to paper. Records are archival or historical because of the long term research and historical value the recorded information provides.

The Dutchess County Clerk, as well as other Dutchess County Government Departments all need to address and continue to address the growing collections of historic records within their jurisdiction. Identification of records series as historic needs to occur at the time the records are being created. These "new" historic records may be electronic records, e-mail, CAD drawings, videotapes and audiotapes, or other non-paper media. To retain and maintain historic records that are of a digital nature, it will be necessary to address reformatting or a migration plan to assure that no archival information is lost. Appropriate storage, conservation and preservation methods will need to be implemented as well.

Publicizing or calling attention to historic records, their research value, preservation and conservation needs is a continuing effort. Involving community leaders, local historical societies, genealogists, historians and other interested citizens will help assure that funds continue for the necessary preservation efforts to assure the preservation of local government historic records.

Financial Resources:

The historic records grant has been an important step in achieving funding related to the County Clerk's historic records. It is clear that sufficient funds have not been authorized for Dutchess County's Records Management Program or its historic records. Historic records stored in the County Clerk's basement are potentially subjected to damage on an almost daily basis. Water leaks in the ceiling have gone unrepaired. Repairs need to be made. The basement storage area features mobile aisle shelving, but the overhead light fixtures are not positioned to easily illuminate shelves. Only one fire extinguisher was observed.

License plates are being cut and debris is in the air over much of the basement storage area. If this activity does need to be done in the basement, it should be in a separate area away from everything else and where the debris can be contained. Obsolete equipment and broken equipment is also wasting space that could be used for inactive records storage, storage of supplies or for other productive functions. These excess items should be removed from County inventory and sold or destroyed.

Dutchess County has been without a trained Records Manager for approximately ten years. It is recommended that a professional Archivist/Records Manager be hired. This person's position would be to oversee the County's Archives and Records Management needs, including working to secure further grants to provide for historic records conservation, reformatting of records series, active records management, etc. Another responsibility would be to work with each of the County's departments to assist them in all areas of archives and records management. The starting salary range recommended for this position would be \$35,000-\$38,000 per year, plus benefits.

It is understood that the County is going to be moving to a new Records Center in 2005. Space for historic records should be provided that is temperature and humidity controlled on a separate system than the rest of the Records Center. The climate for an archive should be a temperature between 60 and 64 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity maintained at about 46 percent. There needs to be a "reading room" for research use. The reading room will need to be located so that reference use of the historic records can be monitored by Records Center staff. Provisions are also needed for microfilm viewing and the production of paper copies should be part of the "reading room". Since many of the other neighboring counties have archival vaults and "reading rooms" as part of their

county records centers, it is recommended that site visits to these other facilities be made and that discussions be held with archives and records management personnel from the other counties to obtain their suggestions for the Dutchess County Archives and Records Center.

Once archival space and a "reading room" have been established, it is recommended that the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program and the County Historical Society be contacted to determine whether volunteer help may be available. Rockland County has had wonderful success with such a program and it is hoped that the same potential exists within Dutchess County.

Based on the priorities, budgetary or grant funds should be sought for the needed conservation and preservation efforts. These efforts may include such activities as inspecting and duplicating existing microfilm rolls, or preservation photocopying documents onto acid free paper and then removing the original record from research use. Budget dollars should also be allocated for acid-free archival storage boxes, acid-free folders and other archival supplies.

Personnel:

The County Clerk's Office has personnel involved with records management and historic records on a day-to-day basis, but it would be difficult to relate this to full-time equivalents. Personnel in the records room are involved in the document recording process and also in the retrieval of records for individual researchers. They are trained to meet these tasks, but are not trained in all aspects of records management or in historic records and archives. The County Record Center has one full-time and one part-time employee involved in its operations. They are responsible for retrieving stored records, for receiving newly transferred records and updating the database system, and for coordinating the destruction of obsolete records. Helen Slattery, Principal Program Assistant, the full-time person working in the County Records Center has attended some of the workshops run by the State Archives and was on staff when the County last had a full-time Records Manager.

As previously stated, it is recommended that a professional Archivist/Records Manager be hired oversee the County's Archives and Records Management needs. Part of the responsibility of this position would be to work with each of the County's departments to assist them in all areas of historic records preservation and records management. The starting salary range recommended for this position would be \$35,000-\$38,000 per year, plus benefits.

Security:

The County Clerk's basement is not accessible to the public. Access to this area is only by County Clerk's staff and records from the basement are brought to the researcher. Access to records in the County Clerk's records room is open with the exception of the microfilm collection, records with legally restricted access, fragile records, or records that have been removed to the basement storage area. These records must be requested on a "requisition form". A "requisition form" is also required at the County Records Center. The Records Center is locked at all times and only authorized personnel have keys. Visitors to the Center have to present themselves for access. Security measures at the County Records Center include an intrusion alarm system and a sprinkler system.

Preserving Records:

For the purposes of this grant, there are an estimated 3,500 cubic feet of historic records related to the County Clerk's office. Historic records date back to 1717 and include vast holdings from the eighteenth century. Many of these records pre-date the creation of Dutchess County and its government. There are also military records from the Civil War and Naturalization Records of interest and value to genealogists and historic researchers. These record series represent only a few of the historic records in the collection. Many of the historic records are unavailable for research in their present conditions. The paper documents and books range in condition from tattered and faded to fair. There is no Finding Aid for these records, with the exception of the "Index to the Ancient Documents" that was created by Dr. Henry Noble Mac Cracken, retired President of Vassar College, in 1955. The "Ancient Documents" collection consists of court record filings dating from 1730 to ca. 1800.

Over the years beginning with the 1950's many of the historic records have been microfilmed. In some instances a duplicate microfilm roll was created and stored in another building. At one time this was the Motor Vehicle office in Beacon and then these rolls were transferred to the County Records Center. Unfortunately, neither the master negative microfilms nor the duplicate rolls were properly stored in a temperature and humidity controlled environment.

Some of the rolls of microfilm in the records room were reviewed. It was not possible to view the roll on a reader printer because the microfilm was brittle and tore in the process. A potential problem exists for a large percentage of the microfilm collection. From the 1930's into the 1980's, the microfilm that was used consisted of the silver emulsion on an acetate base. Unfortunately, especially because there was no climate-controlled storage, acetate base microfilm is prone to something called the "vinegar syndrome". The acetate film breaks down becoming brittle and separating from the emulsion.

If preservation of the County Clerk's microfilm collection is not undertaken, all of the acetate microfilm images will be lost. Thankfully the microfilm can be, in most cases, duplicated onto today's microfilm which is on a polyester base. This microfilm collection needs to be evaluated on a priority basis to determine whether the microfilm is acetate base, whether the quality of the microfilming warrants preservation efforts, and if the remicrofilming of original documents is needed. For those rolls of microfilm that are acetate and pass the quality criteria, duplicate silver microfilm rolls should be created. Then this new master set of microfilms should be sent to a commercial microfilm storage facility for storage in a climate-controlled atmosphere. The concept of using a commercial facility will also afford the County of Dutchess a disaster prevention or disaster recovery potential that would not exist if the microfilm storage climate-controlled atmosphere were a local one. It is further recommended that diazo duplicate copies of the microfilm be made as the research or user copy. Diazo is a more durable product than silver microfilm and can withstand the constant use of inexperienced researchers operating a microfilm reader-printer.

Today's polyester base microfilm has been accepted by the American National Standards Institute as having a 500-year life expectancy. The stored copy on polyester base would assure that Dutchess County's historic records would continue to be available to researchers. Microfilm remains an excellent way to provide access to the information from historic records without the necessity of handling the actual paper records.

Any of the historic records in the Dutchess County Clerk's collection which are not on microfilm, or where the microfilm is found to be too deteriorated for duplication, preservation microfilming should be done as a means of long term preservation.

Once microfilm of the records exists, technology has now made it possible to economically digitize the microfilm and output the images to CD-ROM. This process would allow access to the images via e-mail, the Internet or other electronic means while using the 500-year life expectancy of the microfilm for long-term storage.

There is an extensive collection of maps in the Dutchess County Clerk's Office and at the Record Center. Most of the collection is stored in shallow drawers called "flat files". The benefit of this type of storage is that the maps are kept flat, but the disadvantage is that mixed sizes of maps are stacked together in a drawer. This causes the retrieval of the maps to be difficult and not without the potential for damage caused by the papers getting attached to each other or getting stuck in the drawer when closing. It is recommended that the maps be microfilmed for preservation, the microfilm duplicated and a diazo copy made for research use; or that all of the maps be digitized and the digital images available for the researcher. If the digital option is adopted, it is further recommended that the digital images be converted to microfilm as a long-term solution. For either

scenario, the original paper maps should be retired from use and stored in the archival vault.

Preservation and digital records are almost mutually exclusive terms. While the digitizing of records collections is becoming more and more popular to post information on websites and improve access to information, it is not appropriate for preservation. Software products change quickly with new versions coming out at least once a year. Digital storage media is also constantly changing and there are no set standards. For these reasons, the preservation of digital information requires a financial commitment to migrate the data as software, hardware and storage media change. Digitizing Dutchess County's historic records should not be ruled out, but as a priority, it is a lesser one and is not an end unto itself. The digital images would facilitate access to the information and would allow for the possible addition of historic information to the County's website, but it should be seen as an optional tool.

Records keeping practices have changed over the years. At one time, documents were routinely folded, tied with ribbons and maintained in narrow drawers. Dutchess County historic records include many documents that have been maintained in this manner for years and years. This folding has compromised the quality of these documents by causing brittleness, tearing, or loss of information. In order to preserve these records, they should be unfolded and placed in folders in acid free storage boxes and removed from the active office area to an area with appropriate temperature and humidity controls.

There are numerous bound volumes in the historic records collection of the County Clerk's Office. As previously stated, many of these volumes have been wrapped in acid-free paper and identified on the outside of the paper as to the contents. Most of these volumes are stored on shelves in the Records Center. Sometimes the height of the volume is too tall for the shelf and the volume is put on the shelf spine side up. This is not a good way to store historic records as it is create further damage to the volume. The paper wrappings have been torn and are dusty and dirty. Exposed bindings are in extremely poor condition. Leather volumes have "red rot" or other deterioration. The volumes need to be rewrapped and either put into appropriately space shelves or put into acid-free boxes for better support. The more historically significant volumes and ones having some value as an artifact could be sent to a paper conservator for cleaning, repair and rebinding.

Once there is an Archivist/Records Manager for the County, that individual can solicit volunteers from the local RSVP Program, the County Historical or Genealogical Society to assist with the processing, reboxing and inventorying the archival records. The historic records can be surveyed to record arrangement, description, location, condition, cross-reference related collections or other formats with the same information. The survey information would be used to create a Finding Aid to Dutchess County's Historic Records. This guide could be

published and copies distributed to libraries, historical societies, and local governments in the County. Some of New York's Counties have posted such Finding Aids to their websites. Finding Aids would be used by genealogical and historical researchers in determining where records are located that will be helpful in their research.

The County Archivist/Records Manager would be responsible for applying for New York State Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund Grants and, if qualified, for New York State Library Discretionary Grants which can assist in funding various records management and historic records projects. The County Archivist/Records Manager would prioritize preservation projects to assure that the more frequently referenced records for genealogical and historical research purposes were preserved first. Consideration would also be given to the condition of the records so that the more fragile records were also given priority.

Action Plan Dutchess County Historic Records Grant

After reviewing the historic records related to the Dutchess County Clerk's Office, it became apparent that many of the record series had at one time or another been microfilmed. If the microfilm is in good condition, diazo duplicate copies could be made for research and reference use. The original paper records whether in bound form (books) or loose documents in file folders are in varying condition and much conservation and preservation work is needed. Before making that kind of investment, it would seem that having the microfilm available would be easier and potentially less expensive. The short-term goals herein address the microfilm collection. It is believed that many of the short-term goals can be addressed without the County having a professional archivist/records manager.

Short-Term Goals:

1. Inventory all historic records microfilm in the County Clerk's records room using a database package such as Access.
2. Compare this inventory to the microfilm holdings in the County Records Center and include the duplicate rolls in the database.
3. Create a listing of all historic records microfilm where there is only one microfilm copy in existence.
4. Obtain funding through another Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund Grant or with County budgetary funds to inspect the older microfilm of the historic records to identify acetate based microfilm. The copy to inspect should be the one from the County Records Center, since that copy has probably not been used with a reader-printer.
5. Establish a priority list of the acetate-based microfilm in terms of condition of original records and reference use or potential use of the records.
6. Secure funds for duplicating the most significant microfilm. There should be a silver duplicate roll and a diazo roll made from each of the acetate based original rolls.
7. Arrange for off-site climate controlled storage of the new silver microfilm.
8. Store the diazo rolls and provide to researchers as requested.
9. Create a finding aid to the historic records on microfilm.

10. Establish a priority list for the continuation of the duplication of the rest of the microfilm collection.
11. Determine which historic records series have not been microfilmed or where remicrofilming is required.

Long-Range Goals for Dutchess County historic records have to include an appropriate storage facility and a professional archivist/records manager as a full-time County employee. The Long-Range Goals provided herein require the implementation of both of these key objectives.

Long-Range Goals:

1. Establish the position of County Archivist/Records Manager and include the salary and benefits package in the County Budget.
2. Advertise, interview and hire a County Archivist/Records Manager.
3. Enact a "Local Law for Records Management".
4. Survey the historic records needs of the County Clerk's office and other County Departments in terms of cubic footage requirements.
5. Use this information in the planning of the new County Records Center to assure that appropriate space is provided for a climate-controlled historic records vault.
6. Visit adjacent County Archives and Records Center to learn how their space is organized and to obtain ideas for use in the Dutchess County building project.
7. Develop a priority program of conservation efforts for the historic records, to include wrapping volumes in acid-free paper with storage in acid-free records storage boxes, humidifying and unfolding documents for storage in acid-free folders in acid-free boxes.
8. Assess the conservation and preservation needs related to the historic maps collection and develop a priority plan.
9. Develop a policy and procedure for the transfer of the historic records collections and inactive records to the County Records Center.

10. Conduct a survey of the historic records collections to include arrangement and description information, condition of the records, availability on microfilm or other media, location, etc.
11. Use the historic records survey information to develop a Finding Aid to the historic records collections and publish or include on the County's website.

AFTERWARD

Historical Records or Archives as part of County Government:

In the neighboring counties of the mid-Hudson Valley, most have some type of archives and records center facility. Orange County has a records center with no separate archival vault that is operated by the County Records Manager and one full time staff person. There are plans to develop an archive or historic records vault. Rockland County has an Archivist operating their Archives and Records Center. There is a staff and the County Archivist also oversees the County's records management program. Putnam County has a Records Center with an archives vault area, the Deputy County Clerk is the County Records Management Officer, but a records manager oversees the operations at the Records Center. Ulster County has a new archives vault in the County Records Center, a Deputy County Clerk is the County Records Management Officer and runs this facility with the help of staff including an archival processing technician. Westchester County has an Archives Records Center with staff archivists and records managers. The County Records Management Officer is the Director of the Archives and Records Center.

Historic Records and the Dutchess County Clerk:

Archival and Historic Records from the Dutchess County Clerk's office have been discussed regularly throughout the decades. Concern for records was expressed in a 1908 transcript of the First Book of Supervisors and repeated in an address by Dr. James F. Baldwin to the Dutchess County Historical Society in 1915. An inventory of County Clerk's records was done in 1946 by County Clerk, Fred Smith. Information was recorded on a label put inside the cover of each book indicating its condition and other basic information about the volume. An historical records survey of sorts was done in 1955 by Dr. Henry Noble MacCracken and the "Ancient Documents Index" developed. The "Ancient Documents" are court filings dating from 1730 to approximately 1800. They are maintained in acid-free boxes using acid-free folders, but are brittle and the inks are fading. The "Ancient Documents Index" is one of the few Finding Aids to the historic records collection from the Dutchess County Clerk's Office.

The Value of Historic Records:

Dutchess County's historic records document the events that shaped the lives of its settlers and describe the development of its communities and businesses. History is important; it defines our existence, our rights and our obligations.

Heritage Tourism is a popular concept in the Hudson Valley. In the display case outside the Dutchess County Clerk's office there is a display regarding the importance of tourism in Dutchess County. By providing access to the County's Historic Records, Heritage Tourism and the revenue it provides to the County would increase.

Historic Records Goals:

The objective of having control over Dutchess County Government's historic records should be to preserve and enhance the holdings of the County Government, and to make as much material available as possible to the citizens of the County, the general public, students, historians, writers, and journalists.