

# American Archives Month

OCTOBER 2007



## Celebrating the American Record

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## Contents

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Ideas for Reaching Out to Your Community . . . . .                                    | 3 |
| Communication Planning 101 . . . . .  | 4 |
| Talking Points: The Value of Archives . . . . .                                       | 4 |
| Say What? The First Annual “Best Elevator Speech” Contest . . . . .                   | 4 |
| More About Messages: Tell Your Story . . . . .  | 5 |
| 5 Easy Steps for Ensuring Media Coverage . . . . .                                    | 6 |
| Creating and Maintaining Good Media Relations . . . . .                               | 8 |
| <b>Special Pull-Out Section:</b><br>Celebrating the American Record with Young People |   |

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## Dear Colleague:

Since the late 1980s, Archives Week/Month has seen steady growth at the grassroots level, supported by the energetic and creative members of regional, state, and local archival associations; state archives and state historical records advisory boards; and repositories working individually and collectively. American Archives Month (AAM) is intended to boost current efforts and encourage even more participation. It’s a tool that can help raise awareness among various audiences, including policy makers, “influentials” within your community, resource allocators, prospective donors, researchers, future archivists, the media (including newsletter editors and community relations departments within your own institution!) — and, of course, the general public.

This *2007 American Archives Month Public Relations Kit* can aid in our joint efforts to promote the value of archives and the importance of archivists. We hope that your state, regional organization, or repository will be stimulated by the ideas and tips presented here (and in supplementary materials on the SAA website) to schedule an event, issue a press release, set up a media prospect list, or take some other step — however small — toward enhancing public awareness of your capabilities.

Our overall goal in “Celebrating the American Record” is to provide materials that will give every archivist the opportunity to make his or her archives program more visible... and more appreciated. In fact, although this kit is developed especially for American Archives Month, I encourage you to consider using its suggestions year round to increase the visibility and stature of your repository — whether to internal or external audiences.

Highlighted in this second annual kit is a special pull-out section that will help you “spread the good word” about archives to youngsters. They’re current and future users of our materials, they’re influencers of our culture, and they may even be future archivists!

We’re very grateful to Lockheed Martin Corporation for its support for development and distribution of the 2007 kit and poster.

SAA believes that there is strength in numbers, and that the collective voice of archivists can be more powerful than individual voices. We hope that you’ll set aside some time in October to “Celebrate the American Record” using the tips and tools provided in this kit to educate your community about the *power* of archives!



Mark A. Greene  
President, 2007-2008

P.S. SAA is always available as a resource. We’d like to hear your ideas and are happy to answer your questions about conducting American Archives Month activities. Please contact us at 312-922-0140 or at [archivesmonth@archivists.org](mailto:archivesmonth@archivists.org).





# A Dozen Ideas for Reaching Out to Your Community

## 1. Organize a workshop or other program and advertise it via a community calendar.

Design your workshop to be of interest to your primary audience. Workshops for the public might cover researching your family history on the web, digitizing family photographs, or learning the history of your house.

## 2. Sponsor a lecture by a researcher who has used your collection.

If the researcher has published a book, consider doing a book signing and sale, and ask the author to donate a portion of the proceeds to your repository.

## 3. Approach your institution's newsletter editor or community relations department

with an article idea for American Archives Month. Hold an open house or tour of the archives. Engage staff throughout your organization by inviting them to participate in a trivia contest on your internal website.

## 4. Call your local schools and volunteer to speak to students.

Use American Archives Month as an opportunity to build an interest in a career in archives among 6th or 8th or 10th graders. Tell them about the hidden treasures in your repository – and what fun you have as an archivist. (For more, see the special pull-out section in this American Archives Month PR Kit.)

## 5. Volunteer your organization as a resource for students preparing National History Day projects.

SAA endorses this year-long nationwide effort whose objectives include providing students with the opportunity to work with and analyze historical documents and other primary source material. Many state archives participate in

National History Day. See [www.nationalhistoryday.com](http://www.nationalhistoryday.com).

## 6. Organize a walking tour

of a neighborhood documented by your repository.

## 7. Write letters to the editors of your local newspapers

about the importance of access to public records, or another topic that will allow you to tie in a message about the importance of archives and the work of archivists.

## 8. Invite your local media representatives for a tour of your repository.

American Archives Month is an opportunity to begin a relationship that can last throughout the year.

## 9. Invite your governor, federal and state legislators, and local officials to participate in your Archives Month event(s).

Arrange for a gubernatorial

or mayoral proclamation in advance, and submit photos of the presentation to newspapers and newsletters.

## 10. Schedule appointments with your members of Congress during district visits

to discuss the importance of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the Partnership for the American Historical Record. For more information on the agency and the proposed initiative, see [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org) or [www.statearchivists.org](http://www.statearchivists.org).

## 11. Broadcast your archives message

on a local radio or cable television station.

## 12. Contact your state archives

to determine how your repository might participate in an established statewide program. ■

## Tried and True!

Archives throughout the country participated in American Archives Month in 2006. Here are some examples of what they did. (For more ideas, see the Council of State Archivists website at [www.statearchivists.org](http://www.statearchivists.org).)

### The California State Archives

coordinated statewide efforts that included “Family History Day” at the state archives; three exhibits at the Charles Schulz Museum and Research Center; “Imposing Order: Contemporary Photography and the Archives” at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and

the grand opening of the Santa Clara County Archives.

### The Mississippi Department of Archives and History

provided all visitors free genealogy workbooks for use in tracing their family trees.

### The National Archives, New York City,

offered a lecture entitled “Finding Family: Using Library and Local Government Records,” followed two days later by “Immigrant Research Day” with an expert from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

### The New Mexico Commission of Public Records, State Records Center and Archives,

celebrated “Recovering Women’s History: An Exploration into the Historical Record” with events throughout the state that included exhibits, lectures, a women’s symposium, and historical film screenings.

### The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference

coordinated region-wide activities based on the theme “Archives Bridges from the Past to the Present.” The Columbia Archives in Columbia, Maryland, sponsored an open house featuring hands-on preservation tips, video screenings, archival photos, documents, and fun memorabilia.

### The Archives of the History of American Psychology

at the University of Akron held a public event featuring a brief history and overview of the collection, a presentation on film preservation and the future conservation work needed to maintain the collection, and a screening of the 1951 film “Our Nation’s Mental Health.”

### Open your doors! Information fairs, exhibits, lectures, open houses, tours – any of these ideas can introduce key audiences to your repository’s treasures and help raise awareness about the important work of archives and archivists. ■

# Communication Planning 101

As you consider how to participate in American Archives Month, draft a simple communications plan by asking yourself the following questions – *always* beginning with “Who?”

## WHO?

**The target audience (the “who”) is the group of individuals whose thinking or behavior (or both) you want to influence.**

Most archives have a range of potential audiences. You could decide to mount a broad effort to make American Archives Month reach as many people as possible, or you could select a cluster of individuals (eg, policy makers, resource allocators, high school students, or even staff within your own institution). Begin by identifying all potential audiences, then narrow your list to one or two priorities. Be as specific as possible, because this improves the chances of creating a meaningful and powerful message that is likely to catch the attention of your target audience.

## WHAT?

**The message (the “what”) is the key information or idea(s) that may serve to influence the target audience’s thinking or behavior.**

This is the hard part – and it’s all about keeping it simple. A simple message is more likely to be memorable. See “Talking Points: The Value of Archives” for some ideas to get you started.

## HOW?

**And the medium (the “how”) is the method used to communicate the message to the target audience.**

We typically think of publications (newspapers, newsletters, magazines) and the Internet when we think of mediums. But mediums may include paid ads, blast e-mail, your repository’s website, wikis and blogs, a good old-fashioned letter, a keynote address or session at a community or professional meeting, a presentation to a local high school class, and many others. Consider what will be the most effective way to present your *key* message(s) to your *key* audience(s). ■

# Say What?

## THE FIRST ANNUAL “BEST ELEVATOR SPEECH” CONTEST – WITH PRIZES!

Imagine yourself on an elevator with a friendly stranger who innocently inquires what you do for a living. You say with enthusiasm, “I’m an archivist!” The stranger gives you “that” blank look and you know she’s thinking, “Say what?” Seizing the opportunity to evangelize, and knowing there are precious few seconds left before the elevator arrives at your floor, you eloquently explain your professional calling. . . .

Tell SAA – in 30 words or fewer – what you would say in this situation. You could win a complimentary one-year membership in SAA and a \$50 coupon for books – not to mention a lifetime of gratitude from archivists everywhere!

**Don’t delay; send your 30-word elevator speech by October 31 to [archivesmonth@archivists.org](mailto:archivesmonth@archivists.org). And say what!**

Here are a couple of “straw men” to stimulate your creative juices:

“Archivists play an important role in making materials available to the public. When researchers have questions, we have answers. We select and keep documents, photographs, sound recordings, and other records that have enduring value as reliable memories of the past. We also help people find and understand the information they need in those records.”

“An archives is a collection of original documents and other types of records that have lasting historical value. [Give an example.] Archivists are the professionals who manage archives.” ■

**In future American Archives Month Public Relations Kits, we’d like to feature what your organization did to celebrate. Please send photos and brief descriptions of your efforts to SAA at [archivesmonth@archivists.org](mailto:archivesmonth@archivists.org).**

## TALKING POINTS: The Value of Archives

Your repository probably already does outreach. But does it tell the broader story of archives and archivists? Add to your ongoing efforts some simple language that describes what an archives is, who uses archives, why archives are important, and what archivists do. For example:

- In the course of daily life, individuals, organizations, and governments create and keep

information about their activities. Archivists are professionals who assess, collect, organize, preserve, maintain control of, and provide access to the portions of this information that have lasting value. Archivists keep records that have enduring value as reliable memories of the past, and they help people find and understand the information they need in those records.

- These records, and the places

in which they are kept, are called “archives.” Archival records take many forms, including correspondence, diaries, financial and legal documents, photographs, video or sound recordings, and electronic records.

- An archives serves to strengthen collective memory by creating a reliable information bank that provides access to an irreplaceable asset – an organization’s, government’s, or society’s primary sources.

- Archival records are essential to support society’s increasing demand for accountability and

transparency in government and public and private institutions.

- Archival records protect the rights, property, and identity of our citizens.

- Archivists play a key role in ensuring that the digital records being created today will be accessible when needed in the future.

- American Archives Month is a time to focus on the importance of records of enduring value and to enhance public recognition for the people and programs that are responsible for maintaining our communities’ vital historical records. ■

# American Archives Month

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## Celebrating the American Record With Young People

### Ideas for Reaching Out to Students in Elementary Through High School

This special section of the *2007 American Archives Month Public Relations Kit* will help you “spread the good word” about archives to youngsters. They’re current and future users of our materials, they’re influencers of our culture, and they may even be future archivists!

By informing students of the value and power of archives, you can

- Help educate young people about the importance of preserving their own cultural heritage – thus contributing to the completeness of America’s documentary record;
- Help expand your repository’s user base; and
- Help “refresh” the graying archives profession by stimulating an interest in archives as a career.

Provided here are ideas for you to use in participating in school career days, working with a teacher to prepare a classroom lesson, or inviting a group of students to visit your repository. If you’re looking for a general handout to add to your materials, be sure to download the “What Is an Archives?” page from the SAA website. See page 4 of this special section for details.



*The Library of Congress website is one source of great information about how primary sources can be used to enhance learning. See [www.loc.gov/learn](http://www.loc.gov/learn) to get started!*

#### A Message for Students:

### Your History Is Our Country's History...

Letters from relatives, your grandmother’s diary, photos and videos of you and your friends, and other material collected over the years provides vital and unique information about your life or the history of your family. Obviously these items are important to you. But they also may be important to your community, state, or country, too. Whether or not members of your family attained a degree of fame, they have contributed to the heritage of a certain place and time. When you donate your personal or family papers to an archives, your family history becomes a part of your community’s – and America’s – collective memory. ■



## LESSONS LEARNED

## Archives in the Classroom, Students

Some archives support robust education programs, with educators on staff, a full schedule of opportunities for teachers, activities for students, outreach programs for community groups, lecture series, conferences, publications, and more. Other institutions support education projects on a smaller scale. And some organizations are just starting to develop programs.

Whichever description best fits your organization, there can be no denying that education programs reap valuable rewards. They inspire community members to better understand your holdings and mission. They help you attract and maintain enthusiastic volunteers and staff members. And they help

you gain valuable support for other aspects of your operation.

If you are just starting to consider your archives' role with regard to the education community or making plans to expand it, the following ideas and resources may be useful.

- If you're a parent, start by talking to your child's teacher or principal. Ask what the class is studying (if you're not already aware!) and find out whether the teacher is willing to have you bring in some materials to supplement a lesson or schedule a field trip to your repository. An excited teacher may well share your availability with her/his colleagues!

- If you're not a parent, call your local school(s) anyway!

- Most of the 50 states mandate use of primary sources in the classroom. Demonstrate your expertise by suggesting some sources the teacher might use.

- Remember that although the focus of classroom use of primary sources often is on social studies, they can also be used effectively in English, music, art, geography, and even math and science classes.

- Work with the teacher to plan the lesson. S/he understands the standards and the goals for a particular lesson; you can provide content ideas and suggestions

for resources to enhance the lesson.

- Start small. You don't need to create a complete lesson. Begin by supplying a map that relates to a local history lesson or a diary entry that relates to an event the students are studying.

- Be creative. The unexpected may be a perfect caper to a lesson. Do you have a document or artifact in your repository that is especially interesting to youngsters?

- Tailor your selection of materials to the appropriate grade level. Younger students might be asked to count the number of people in a picture or watch a silent film and tell the story that they see. Older students might

## Lasting Impact: "Pitch Perfect" Primary Sources

**Danna Bell-Russel, educational outreach specialist for the Library of Congress**, knows first hand the lasting impact a primary source can have in a classroom. But she stresses that primary sources can apply well beyond social studies – and become integral parts of the educational experience in English, music, art, geography, and, yes, even science and math classes! "Primary sources can be used to improve critical thinking, do analysis, and show bias or differences in how a story or event has been seen in history and may have changed," says Bell-Russel.

A favorite story occurred on a trip to California with the Julliard Quartet to visit the Idylwild Arts Academy. "We took a large col-

lection of musical materials, including an original page of Brahms sheet music. One student was completely overwhelmed and excited by this one document; it was the same piece he was practicing for a performance!" relates Bell-Russel. "In studying the primary source, he noticed that the transcription he was using was completely different. At every class break, he returned to look at the music. He brought his friends back. And then he brought his violin to try and play the piece as originally transcribed...."

You, too, can find a way to make your archives' primary sources "pitch perfect" in the classroom! ■

# in Your Repository

work with ledger books and figure out how much it cost to run a farm or company. (Example: Use the ledgers from George Washington's papers to determine how much it cost him to run his farm).

- Make sure to review the material you plan to show to determine whether it contains words that are no longer in use (and that you may need to explain) or words or images that may be inappropriate for the age group.
- Help the teacher prepare students for the lesson and your visit by providing some information about primary sources and archives. And assist in developing follow-up activities to make sure that students gained the knowledge that was intended.
- Consider how you might help raise awareness about the importance of ensuring the diversity of America's documentary record. Include in your materials examples of documents created by members of under-represented groups.
- If you bring materials into the classroom, make sure that

the room is neat, clean, and clear of anything that might damage the documents.

- Make sure the teacher stays in the room and assists with teaching the lesson. This is not a time for her or him to get other work done.
- Don't overtax yourself. If your popularity as a presenter means that you're receiving too many requests, seek assistance from other repositories in your area.

**For some ideas about primary sources that are helpful and fun in supplementing lessons, see the following online resources:**

#### **From Library of Congress**

- [http://memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc\\_greatdepression\\_kit.php](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc_greatdepression_kit.php)
- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/01/map/>
- <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/>

#### **From Public Broadcasting Service**

- <http://pbskids.org/historydetectives/parentsteachers/index.html> ■

SAA is especially grateful to two individuals who contributed their time, expertise, and great ideas to this supplement: Lee Ann Potter, Head of Education and Volunteer Programs at the National Archives and Records Administration; and Danna Bell-Russel, Educational Outreach Specialist, Office of Strategic Initiatives, Library of Congress.

## Resources to Note

### **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

[www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

NCSS is the largest professional organization for social studies teachers in the country, with more than 26,000 members and affiliate groups in virtually every state. Working with NCSS is a great way to reach teachers. The organization holds annual national, regional, and state conferences and publishes *Social Education*, *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, and *The Social Studies Professional*. Since 1977, the group has partnered with educators at the National Archives to publish "Teaching With Documents" articles in *Social Education*. NARA has found this to be a great way to reach teachers with the message that documents can be valuable teaching tools. Many of the state affiliates publish journals as well. Perhaps they'd like to work with you to promote your holdings and mission!

### **National Council for History Education (NCHE)**

[www.nche.net](http://www.nche.net)

NCHE is a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting the importance of history in schools and in society. The group has state councils and hosts an annual conference as well as state and regional conferences and meetings. It has partnered with numerous Teaching American History Grant recipients in recent years, working with hundreds of teachers to alert them to resources available in museums and archives. NCHE publishes *History Mat-*

ters monthly during the school year. Another publication of interest is "Building a United States History Curriculum" — a manual on implementing the Bradley Commission's US History Guidelines, which emphasize the importance of primary source documents and original research.

### **National History Day (NHD)**

[www.nationalhistoryday.org](http://www.nationalhistoryday.org)

National History Day (NHD) is an academic organization for elementary and secondary school students. More than half a million students, working with thousands of teachers nationwide, participate in the NHD contest each year. Early in the school year, students choose historical topics related to an annual theme and conduct extensive research. After analyzing and interpreting their sources and drawing conclusions about their topics' significance in history, students present their work in four categories: original papers, exhibits, performances, and documentaries. These products are entered into competitions in the spring at local, state, and national levels and are evaluated by professional historians and educators. The program culminates in a national competition each June at the University of Maryland at College Park. NHD publishes an annual teachers' guide, supports a website that provides links to dozens of archival institutions, and supports professional development opportunities for teachers. Every state has a state coordinator. SAA is an endorser of National History Day. ■

# School Daze

## Growing the Profession by Participating in School Career Days

What if you were asked to participate in a career day at your local elementary school and you have to follow a fireman and precede the owner of the local ice cream store?

Declining the offer shouldn't even cross your mind! Here are some tips for making sure that you get the message across to your young audience.

### Get Ready...

**1.** Pretend you are the age of the students who will be in your audience. Consider what materials in your collection might spark their interest. Do you have photographs of children their age? Do you have letters written by children? Do you have interesting maps of your community? Anything related to a famous person with whom the students might be familiar?

**2.** Make color facsimiles of the documents you identified in #1. (Or, if you have original documents that can stand the travel, include those. Students enjoy seeing "real old stuff.")

**3.** Place the facsimiles in Mylar sleeves and in acid-free folders.

**4.** Place the facsimiles and folders in acid free boxes.

**5.** Grab white gloves, magnifying glasses, and pencils.

**6.** Spend some time thinking about what you like about your job. Write down the top three things that you like best.

**7.** Think about words you might use in your talk with which the students might be unfamiliar. Make a list of them and think of simple ways to explain what they mean.

### Get Set...

**8.** Wear clothing like you wear on a typical day of work. If that includes a stack coat, wear it, too!

**9.** Bring the facsimiles, boxes, gloves, pencils, and magnifying glasses with you, along with brochures or handouts about archives and archivists and your facility.

### Go!

**10.** Start your presentation by asking students (indicating their answers by a raise of hands) if they like the aspects of your job that you like (see #6). It's likely that some of those aspects may include: if they like solving mysteries; if they have ever wanted to be an explorer; if they like helping people; and if they like to use their imaginations.

**11.** Tell them stories – about someone you helped, about the oldest document you ever held, about something you learned yesterday. Try to integrate into the stories the vocabulary that you identified in #7.

**12.** Invite the students to discover the contents of your acid-free box. Maybe dim the lights and ask why that might be important. Ask for a volunteer to put on the gloves and take out the documents. Ask others why they think gloves might be important. Ask another volunteer to use the magnifying glass and look for particular items that you have pre-selected. It may be helpful to make enough copies for all students to participate.

**13.** Let them guess what subjects you studied in school. Let them guess what a "typical" day is like for you.

**14.** Bring pictures of where you work or brochures for them to keep. If possible, invite them to pay a visit to you at work. Make a plan with their teacher for a class fieldtrip.

**15.** Remember that enthusiasm is contagious! Have fun!

— Lee Ann Potter ■

# What Is an Archives?

*The full article entitled "What Is an Archives" is available for download from the SAA website. You can download it, print multiple copies (preferably on a color printer), and make it available to students who visit your repository. Or take it with you to distribute to students on your next career day visit!*

An archives is a place where people go to find information. But rather than gathering information from books as you would in a library, people who do research in archives often gather firsthand facts, data, and evidence from letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, audio and video recordings, and other *primary sources*.

Whether or not you realize it, you probably have an archives in your home. It might be in a filing cabinet in the study, a box in the basement, a chest in the attic – or even in all three. This is your personal archives: a collection of material that records important events from your family's history.

Believe it or not, there are similarities between your family's archives and local, state, or national archives. All save items to serve as proof that an event occurred, to explain how something happened, or for financial or sentimental reasons. All types of archives may be stored in more than one location. And both personal archives and larger archives save a variety of materials that can range from letters to photographs, to films, to databases, to official documents, and more.

### But what are the differences?

Archives come in all shapes and sizes. There are national archives, state archives, city archives, community archives,

business archives, church archives, and more. There are archives for different types of government records, and also archives that contain the personal records of people and organizations. There are archives that contain the personal papers of famous leaders (for example, Martin Luther King, Jr), authors (for example, Maya Angelou and Ernest Hemingway), scientists (for example, Albert Einstein and Marie Curie), performers, religious and business leaders, social activists, and more! Archives – and the professional archivists who work in them – make sure that all important records will be available for research by generations to come.

America's largest archives is the National Archives in Washington, DC. What makes America's National Archives different from what you might call your personal memory box?

The materials held by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) number in the billions! NARA's holdings are created either by or for the federal government. The material comes from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Although your records are personal, those held by the National Archives are official. Your family's archives might contain, for example, your great-grandmother's diary, while the National Archives retains the correspondence files of previous directors of federal agencies. Or your family's archives might include your birth certificate. The National Archives holds the original, signed "birth certificate" for our nation – the Declaration of Independence.

Visit our website at [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org) for the complete article, "What Is an Archives?" ■



# More About Messages: Tell Your Story

Whoever your key audience is, people love stories. Tailor your story to that audience, demonstrate passion and enthusiasm for your archives and your work, and you'll leave a positive – and lasting – impression.

Your “elevator speech” is vital for those occasions when you have a short time to present a compelling explanation of archives and archivists. When you have a bit more time to communicate, share a story....

What are the most interesting stories in your archives? Do you have a document or artifact in your repository that always “gets ‘em”? You know, the Bible that absorbed a bullet and saved someone’s life, or the letter from a soldier to his young wife that reveals what it was really like on D-Day? Do you have a story about a visit to your collection that changed forever someone’s understanding of his family history or her heritage?

Peter Gottlieb, state archivist of Wisconsin and chair of SAA’s American Archives Month Task Force, set about to collect stories from the Wisconsin Historical Society staff that could be used to advocate for the state archives. Here – to stimulate your own ideas – are several of those stories.

## CHANGING LIVES

“The Wisconsin Child Center was a state orphanage. There are numerous examples of the impact created when people use these records. Perhaps the most striking is the case of two brothers placed at the Center in the 1930s and then ‘indentured’ to families in different parts of the

“The passions are the only advocates which always persuade. They are a natural art, the rules of which are infallible; and the simplest man with passion will be more persuasive than the most eloquent without.”

~ Francois duc de la Rouchefoucauld

state. One of the brothers came to see the records and through them not only learned of the family situation that led to the placement, but also was able to locate and be reunited with his brother living in the Green Bay area.”

## PROTECTING RIGHTS

“The Archives responds routinely to requests from individuals who need information from school records, court case files, and naturalization volumes in order to secure social security, get a passport, or prove citizenship. Earlier this fall we received an inquiry from a recently widowed elderly woman now living in Salem, Oregon. She was naturalized under her maiden name in Dane County in the 1940s, and needed to document her citizenship to receive certain Medicare benefits. We were able to provide a certified copy of her naturalization in the Circuit Court for Dane County.”

## CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH THEIR PAST

“A researcher came to the Archives Research Room seeking information on his father, who was the first journalist killed on New Guinea during World War II. The researcher

was one year old when his father was killed. He wanted to use the Lewis Sebring Collection because Sebring had been a journalist in New Guinea during the war. In the collection was a series of photographs documenting the father’s funeral.”

“Through a Google search, a man from Colorado learned that we have an oral history interview with his grandfather, whom he had never met. The caller identified himself as a pilot, and the interview concerns the grandfather’s barnstorming career in the LaCrosse area. He ordered a copy of the interview on CD to share at his family’s Christmas gathering.”

## MAKING HISTORY POSSIBLE

“The thing we call history is created by individuals conducting research and writing about their findings. The ongoing preservation and conservation work of the Library/Archives makes it possible to write the history of many people, places, and events. The Historical Society not only preserves the materials necessary for individuals to connect with their personal pasts, but preserves the raw material that is essential

to writing the histories that society needs to understand its past, present, and future.”

“The Historical Society has the diary of the only member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition to die during the journey. It’s a true national treasure. Because of its value and fragility, the original was seldom accessible to researchers. Following careful and thorough conservation, we scanned the diary, produced an impressive facsimile, and placed it on the Web. The original diary was available for display in several major exhibits during the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial; the facsimile is readily available to researchers at the Historical Society, giving them the same experience as handling the original; and now anyone in the world can access the diary on the Web.”

## AN ONGOING NEED

“A Native American researcher was working in the Government Publications stacks investigating potential topics for her dissertation. She caught a volume that serendipitously fell from the shelf. It was a copy of the Robert La Follette hearings on the condition of Native Americans in Wisconsin. As she caught the volume, it fell open to her grandfather’s testimony before La Follette’s Senate committee. This experience led to her dissertation based in part on these published hearings. She not only found her topic, but she recognized that the volume was deteriorating rapidly and brought the problem to staff attention. It has now been repaired and digitized for future generations.” ■

# 5 Easy Steps for Ensuring Media Coverage OF YOUR ARCHIVES MONTH EVENT

[www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)

Planning an event? You'll find an **Event Planning Guide** at [www.archivists.org/archivesmonth](http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth)

## 1: CREATE YOUR MEDIA LIST

Media coverage helps get the archives message to a mass audience, and an essential part of event planning is to invite the media to attend. Your media list should include individuals who cover the humanities, human-interest features, and/or community events in newspapers or magazines and for radio and television stations. (Remember to include community newspapers and local cable channels.)

To find local media telephone numbers and addresses, use the online directories at [www.usnpl.com](http://www.usnpl.com), [www.newslink.org](http://www.newslink.org), or [www.newsdirectory.com](http://www.newsdirectory.com). Once on the media outlet's website, use the "contact us" link to scan the list of editors and reporters. You may also call the outlet's main line and ask the receptionist for contact information for the assignment editor of the section to which you are sending the information and the community calendar editor. Also consider targeting the legislative or business media contacts, depending on your topic.

When you call a radio or television station, ask for the names of the news director, the assignment editor, and the public service director, as well as the producers of specific locally produced talk shows.

To develop and maintain your media list, create a simple Excel spreadsheet that includes columns for "Media Outlet" and

the reporter's "First Name," "Last Name," "Email Address," "Phone," "Fax," "Mailing Address," "Preference for Receipt of Information" (ie, email, fax, mail), and "Comments." The last column is where you'll track contacts with the reporter and any need for follow-up.

## 2: SEND YOUR MEDIA ALERT



The media alert (or fact sheet) is an abbreviated version of the news release. This one-page, at-a-glance reference contains the basics of your event: who, what, when, where, why, and how. (See the example.)

Send your media alert via fax, email, and/or mail to all of your media contacts (and particularly those responsible for community calendar listings) up to three times: four weeks before your event, the week before your event, and the morning before your event.

**Tip:** Don't send your media alert as an email attachment. Instead,

cut and paste the text of the alert into your email message. Many media outlets don't allow their employees to receive email attachments due to the problems of spam and junk email.

Some media outlets have online community calendars that allow you to enter your event information online. Once your listing is reviewed, chances are good that your event will be posted.

## 3: WRITE YOUR PRESS RELEASE

The press or news release is the basic and most accepted method of conveying information to the media. A news release may announce a special event, meeting, speech, award, appointment, research report, or any other information that you consider noteworthy.

Reporters receive hundreds of news releases each week, so your challenge is to make yours stand out. Ideally you should talk to the reporter first, then follow up with a release.

Send your release to the appropriate editor or news director two to three weeks in advance of the event. (Weekly and monthly publications should be notified one to three months in advance.) Call the news outlet to confirm deadlines. For daily newspapers and electronic media, call one week to 24 hours before the event to confirm receipt of your release. The call serves as a reminder of the event and as a second chance to promote it.

For statewide events, distribute the information to media contacts in as many cities and towns in your state as possible. Wire

services and news bureaus (such as Associated Press, Crain's News Service, and Gannett News Service) may be interested in statewide and other large events, but don't rely on these alone.

Local media are most interested in stories with hometown appeal. "Localize" your release as much as possible, citing names of current or historic local people, places, and events. Also, look for a local perspective on a national story. Tying local activities to national events or controversies may give your story more importance in the eyes of readers and the media. Be creative with current events. Look for an archives angle on something that is happening in your region. One spin-off from the hometown high school team's victory season, for example, could be a profile of a hometown hero from another era.

Despite the advent of online submission of news releases, it's important that you also mail your release and that you apply the following general "rules" to your submission:

- The first paragraph (the "lead") answers the following questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Limit your lead to 30 words, and make sure it gives the reader a clear idea of the story.
- Present the facts in the order of their news value (inverted pyramid style).
- Identify any people mentioned in the release by title and/or organization. Do not assume that the reader knows anyone's affiliation.
- Stick to the facts. Opinions should be expressed only with attribution (ie, when quoting someone).

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Stick to your main topic.
- Use words with which the public is familiar. Avoid jargon. If you must use acronyms, spell out the full proper name with the first mention and indicate the acronym in parentheses.
- Include your contact information (name, email address, and telephone number) in the upper right corner of the first page, and in the upper left corner type the release date (the date on which the information may be disclosed). If the information can be published upon receipt, indicate “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.”
- Try to limit your release to one page. Double-space your copy and provide wide margins so that the reporter can make notes. If you must go beyond one page, type “More...” at the bottom center of the first page and include a brief identifier and page number at the top of page 2.
- At the end of the release, include a sentence or short paragraph that explains what your organization is and does: “Founded in 1936, the Society of American Archivists is North America’s oldest and largest national archival professional association. SAA’s mission is to serve the education and information needs of more than 4,900 individual and institutional members and to provide leadership to ensure the identification, preservation, and use of records of enduring value.” End the release with “####” or “30” centered at the bottom.
- Print the release on your institution’s letterhead. See [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org) for a sample.

#### 4: TAKE DIGITAL IMAGES

Be sure to ask your media contacts if they would be interested in post-event photos. (Many local newspapers will run photos after an event.) Have a photographer on site during your event to capture any VIP visits or graphic shots. Provide a caption that – very briefly – tells the story of who, what, when, and where.

Here are some tips for making the most of your photographs:

- Ask about the publication’s (or website’s) photo requirements. Most prefer high-resolution digital images.
- Compose your picture in a manner that gives the viewer the most information possible. Avoid “mug shots” against a bare wall and drinks in hand. If possible, include a banner, enlarged photo, or “cool” things from your collection or holdings as a backdrop to provide context and enhance interest.
- Add depth by shooting at an angle rather than head-on. Candid shots that avoid a posed look are best.
- If using a digital camera: Set the resolution at a minimum of 300 dots per inch (DPI) for photographs that will appear in print, and at a minimum of 72 DPI for online photos.
- Avoid damaging photos with labels and paper clips, and don’t write on the back of photographs. Type your caption on a separate piece of paper and carefully tape the edge of the photo to the paper. Your caption should identify individuals in the photo and describe any action or location that it portrays.

## [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)

Go to [www.archivists.org/archivesmonth](http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth) for a proclamation “template” and request letter that may be adapted for your use.

- Newspapers rarely return photographs, so don’t send your only copy!

#### 5: SECURE AN OFFICIAL PROCLAMATION

Ask your governor, mayor, or local elected official to declare October as “Archives Month.” Call the official’s office first to find out the preferred procedure for such requests. Send a sample proclamation with a cover letter indicating the importance of Archives Month within your community/state. If your official does not have a standard proclamation form, suggest that the sample language be typed on the state, city/town, or county letterhead.



Arrange for a photographer and representatives from your repository or organization to be present for the proclamation signing. Send a captioned photo to local print media representatives, along with a news release detailing your Archives Month celebration. ■

## CHANGING CHANNELS

New online tools can provide even more opportunities for communicating about archives and archivists. Don’t limit yourself to traditional media; try changing channels!

If you’re already a blogger or wiki-meister, consider how your network might help raise awareness about archives, archivists, and archival issues.

If you’re a novice in the world of social media – which is all about sharing information and experiences – here’s a quick reference (source: Wikipedia at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)):

A **wiki** is a piece of server software that allows users to create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. It’s a composition system, a discussion medium, a repository, a mail system, and a collaboration tool. (“WikiWiki” is Hawaiian for “quick.”)

A **blog** (from **web log**) is a website where entries are written in chronological order and commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. Many began as personal online diaries; many more are evolving into very large and active digital communities.

**Flickr** ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) is a photo-sharing website and an online community platform. In addition to being a popular website for users to share personal photographs, the service is widely used by bloggers as a photo repository. ■

## [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)

You’ll find a sample press release that you can adapt for your use at [www.archivists.org/archivesmonth](http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth)



You and your institution may already have developed relationships with one or more reporters as part of your repository's outreach efforts. If so, American Archives Month is another opportunity to take advantage of your contacts.

But if you haven't begun the work of establishing relationships with the media, now's the time to get started! The key to successful media attention is establishing rapport with individuals. Those individuals are professionals (like you) who have deadlines and a

[www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)

For "How to Know if Something Is Newsworthy" and Tips for Media Interviews, go to [www.archivists.org/archivesmonth](http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth)

relates to a larger issue, and better inform and entertain subscribers and viewers.

- Archivists, through their understanding of research and their contacts with fellow professionals, can help the media locate information about a variety of topics.

inform or entertain the audience. Invite the reporter to tour your repository at his/her convenience or attend an American Archives Month or other event at your facility.

Maintain the relationships that you establish with the media. Let them know how their article or broadcast increased attendance or otherwise contributed to the success of your activity. Send a thank-you note with a photo and caption of the event, and express your appreciation for their help in spreading the word about archives and archivists.

Don't be discouraged if a reporter isn't interested in your story this time – the media can't possibly cover everything. Express thanks for the person's time and go on to your next call. Be sure to mention the resources that you have available to assist in their research or development of story ideas. ■

## Creating and Maintaining Good Media Relations

critical need for good material to publish. Media outlets, whether print or broadcast, generally have four goals: to inform, to advise, to entertain, and to make a profit. To the extent that you can help them achieve one or more of those goals, they'll be interested in telling your story.

Although American Archives Month is designated as a period of celebration and recognition of archives and archivists, the fact is that your organization or repository serves the public – and the media – throughout the year. As you make your media contacts, don't be shy about mentioning the following:

### SPECIAL MESSAGES FOR THE MEDIA

- Historical records are unique, one-of-a-kind sources of information.
- Records contain valuable information that can help put developing stories into context, explain current issues in historical terms, help readers/viewers understand their local communities, demonstrate how a local activity or topic

- To the eye of a trained journalist, many archives would reveal a wealth of feature article ideas.
- Historical records programs in the local community often contain information that could help the media "localize" national or statewide trend stories.
- The media maintain their own archives (the "morgue" to veteran journalists) – files of newspaper articles and videotapes that are essential for reporting. Public historical records programs and other types of archival materials are a similar resource.

Good media relations can be the key to obtaining coverage of your event or story idea. Initial contacts with the media are made by telephone. Explain why you are calling and offer a description of your article idea or upcoming event – dates, times, and locations of activities. Be prepared to answer any questions either in person or via the phone.

Be concise in explaining how your subject or event is a public service and how a story will help



**Idea!** You can create a reason to contact the media by paying attention to what is being published or broadcast. For example: A group of Chicago-area archivists noticed that the *Chicago Tribune* had run a series of articles that relied on archival material or told an archives-related story. They used that observation as the basis for a letter to the editor praising the newspaper for its attention to Chicago's history. The letter was published, and even noted that "SAA is headquartered in Chicago's own South Loop"!

