

Building Communities: Creating a Documentation Model for the Austin Historic Architecture Web-based Resource

CAROL BROCK, APRIL NORRIS, AND KATHRYN PIERCE

Abstract: The City of Austin (Texas) lacks a current, citywide inventory of historic and culturally significant properties. Without accurate records, city-planning efforts, including rehabilitation, redevelopment, and historic property preservation could be impacted. Local efforts to address this have resulted in neighborhood-led surveys, with volunteers seeking to organize local historic districts. These efforts are slowed (if not abandoned) due to difficulties with collecting, managing, and sharing the information required for historic designation.

To resolve this issue, the University of Texas at Austin's Schools of Architecture and Information, in collaboration with Austin's Historic Preservation Office and the Office of Planning are developing a web-based resource that will facilitate the identification and collection of information from multiple contributor communities, provide convenient access to public information, and allow regular updates to survey information while preserving a historical record of Austin's built environment.

A review of similar projects revealed that these information coordination issues are not unique to Austin. These projects relied on strong collaborative efforts among government agencies, non-government organizations, and community volunteers. However, we were unable to find documentation describing how these projects identified stakeholders and their roles beyond the principal sponsors. We believe that complex municipal projects such as the Austin Historic Resource could benefit from a more thorough understanding of these issues.

We draw from previous work in architectural preservation, archival and records management practice, and information policy to develop a plan for the complete and accurate documentation of Austin's historic, culturally significant properties. This plan is based on documentation strategy to identify stakeholders, records, and policy requirements. This will enable the AHA Project Team to better articulate specific stakeholder responsibilities and guide the development of the AHA Resource with the improved likelihood of continued use, proper management, and archival preservation of records.

About the authors:

Carol Brock is a Certified Records Manager and the former Director of Information Assets for the US Government Accountability Office. She successfully spearheaded a NARA pilot project for simplified records scheduling and implemented an enterprise-wide electronic recordkeeping system for which she earned the National Archivist's Achievement Award. She has 24 years of Federal RM experience as a contractor, consultant, and Federal employee. Carol is a founding member of the Federal Information and Records Management (FIRM) Council and is an active member of ARMA, AIIM, and SAA. As a member of AIIM's C-30 Committee, she co-authored the EDM/ERM Integrated Functional Requirements. Carol is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin working on a Ph.D. in Digital Preservation.

April Norris is an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Preservation Doctoral Fellow in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2006, she earned a M.S. in

Information Studies and an Endorsement of Specialization in digital preservation from the University of Texas at Austin. Digital preservation is the kernel of April's research interests, which also include archival theory & practice, records management, and Library and Information Science (LIS) education. Currently, April is exploring the field of digital forensics as a means of improving digital preservation practices. Professionally, April has worked as an information professional in both Texas state government and higher education. Most recently, she was the Records Manager for the University of Texas System Administration following a position as an Information Analyst at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. She is a member of the Society of American Archivists.

Kathryn Pierce is an IMLS preservation doctoral fellow in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. She received a BA in Philosophy from Southwestern University in 2002. She completed a Master's degree in Information studies in 2007 and a Master's in Architectural history in 2009, both at the University of Texas at Austin. Her primary research interest is in architectural archives and the shift from predominantly paper-based collections to born-digital materials. This focus on architectural records developed while working at the Alexander Architectural Archive during her graduate education. As an archival practitioner, she has had an opportunity to process several collections, curate exhibits that draw from the archival holdings, and confront preservation issues when attempting to accession digital records. While her primary focus has been on archives, she is interested in the intersections between architectural libraries, archives, and museums. Through her doctoral research, Kathryn pursues questions about how to preserve digital architectural records, maintain the technology needed to use materials, and create systems to provide access to files. She is beginning her research by examining how architects create and use digital files within their practice as a means to determine which records to archive, how to describe the files, and how to connect disparate record types, both analog and digital, to create cohesive and complete archives of architectural firms. She is also exploring how patrons, both scholars and the broader public, might engage architectural records and contribute to documenting the history of their communities. Kathryn anticipates sharing her research with the field of library and information science as well as the architectural community to create an open dialogue about the sustainability of records documenting the built environment.