

Tending a Neglected Garden: Archiving Administrative Records at the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum

SAM RUSHAY

Abstract: In this poster presentation, I will use the imagery of roses in a garden to illustrate the Truman Library's past and present records management program. For example, we periodically "prune" our temporary records, while we "cultivate" our permanent records by arranging, describing and preserving them.

Too often, Federal Government archives are not good "gardeners" with respect to the records they create. Government archives are not immune to the tendency that those in corporate archives well understand: attention is given to administrative records out of necessity, in response to legal issues or an organization's significant anniversaries.

Until recently, this was true at the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. There were a variety of reasons that the Library put off preserving, appraising, arranging, and describing its own permanent records for public access. Among those reasons were: 1.) a previous priority on processing and opening the Papers of Harry S. Truman and other manuscript and audiovisual collections and 2.) staff limitations, which meant that even after administrative records were no longer active and were transferred to the archives, we tended to our temporary and not our permanent records, which sat unprocessed on dark shelves, without the exposure to the "sunlight" of ready public and staff access. We are striving to be better "gardeners" now, less passive (e.g., responding to Freedom of Information Act requests) and more proactive in administering the permanent records we create before and after we accession them into the archives. Promoting transparency of our operations and our mission is particularly important at a time when the Presidential Libraries system is receiving much Congressional scrutiny.

About the author:

Samuel W. Rushay, Jr., is supervisory archivist at the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum in Independence, MO, where he worked as an archivist from 1993-1997. From 1997-2007, he was an archivist and subject matter expert at the Nixon Presidential Materials Staff at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland.

Sam published "Listening to Nixon: An Archivist's Reflections on his Work with the White House Tapes" in the fall 2007 issue of the National Archives and Records Administration's Prologue magazine. He is the author of "Harry Truman's History Lessons," which appeared in the spring 2009 issue of Prologue. He also published "Harry Truman's Masonic Career as Revealed in the Truman Library's Collections," in the summer 2009 issue of The Missouri Freemason. He contributed "A Graphic Essay Based on the Holdings of the Harry S. Truman Library," in *Native Americans and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, Volume 4 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2010).

A Columbus, Ohio native, Sam holds a doctorate in U.S. history from Ohio University, where he wrote his dissertation, "The Farm Fair Dealer: Charles F. Brannan and American Liberalism" (2000), under the direction of Truman biographer Alonzo Hamby.

Sam, his wife, Laura, and their two children live in Liberty, MO.