

Archives

This has been a busy year for the Waterbird Society's Archives. At the 2013 Council meeting in Wilhelmshaven the Council voted to authorize John Anderson to hire former student Kate Shlepr to travel to Washington DC, assess the state of paper archives kept at the Smithsonian, and begin the process of converting them into digital form. After some discussion among Council members it was agreed that efforts be made to convert suitable documents into "searchable PDFs" with an eye to incorporating them into a master database that would be available ultimately on-line. Kate proceeded to DC in early winter and spent 5 days going through multiple boxes in the Smithsonian archival section. As per instructions, part of her intent was to determine the nature of materials at the Smithsonian, the total volume of stuff stored, and to assess the practicalities of digital conversion. The good news is that all materials seem to be in excellent shape, cared for by Smithsonian staff, and there is a degree of organization to some of the boxes. The bad news is that like many organizations the Society has had a tendency to store pretty much everything, at least during its early years. The required and still requires a degree of sorting and organization that was beyond the time that Kate could allot to the process this year.

During her time at the Smithsonian, Kate scanned approximately 50% of the materials present, focusing on what she perceived as documents important in the founding of the Society. Some of what remains are probably not worth the effort, but in conversations both while she was in the Archive and subsequently, we both agreed that much of the joy (and ultimate historical value) of the archival material came from odd snippets of information –exchanges over Journal articles, planning for particular meetings, etc. As Kate put it: Here are the creators of the Society relaxed and raw seemingly unaware that they are going to go on to become Names in Ornithology that their successors will instantly recognize. This of course poses a problem in that while we are nervous about continuing to be "pack-rats of information, we don't want to leave out things that some future reader/historian would find valuable. Kate is willing to return to D.C. in the future to finish the scanning process, time and funds depending. She has started graduate work with Tony Diamond at UNB and this is eating up her life right now, but I don't see this task as particularly Time Sensitive, given how long we have waited to do anything. Copies of all the digital data developed so far are housed here at COA and at UNB, so we have "off-site" backups.

On other fronts. I am planning to have the "Presidential Box" scanned by a Workstudy student this winter. As with the Smithsonian materials, this is something of a potpourri of information, but we will do our best to sort it out. I am also retaining digital copies of all e-mails from Council that I get cced on including extensive archival material sent by Chip Wesloh. I hope to incorporate all of this into the ultimate digital database.

In relation to the "database" question, I have been working somewhat spasmodically on testing out different models, so far without particular success. Ultimately, if this succeeds however, we will need to decide on an institution or organization that would house/host such a database & provide access as the Council sees fit.

ACTION ITEMS FOR COUNCIL:

- 1) At Wilhelmshaven there seemed to be support for including photographs of members/meetings/etc. in the Archive. Since then I haven't received much of anything. I would encourage folks in Baja to take & send images!
- 2) Any further guidance from Council as to priorities for the Archive would be much appreciated.
- 3) I would also love any specific suggestions regarding database forms or software. I have had some suggestions from individuals, but this is very much a "work in Progress"
- 4) I would love it if the Council would be willing to acknowledge Kate Shlepr's hard work on the project so far by (if possible) declaring her the Assistant Archivist or some such. Whereas we paid her some for the work in DC she has actually put in a lot more time, first getting scanning software & hardware going & then actually making sure that there was some order and continuity to the process.
- 5) I would like to encourage other members of Council to follow Chip's example and send me materials that they feel could belong in the Archive.
- 6) At some point it might be worth discussing to what extent the Ornithological Exchange serves as an on-going "current Archive" and what its future role might be.

Respectfully Submitted

(John Anderson)