

Archives Committee of the Waterbird Society

2013 Annual Report

Membership:

Chair: John Anderson

2012-2013 Committee Activities:

Archives, alas, still remain largely a project that is a gleam in my eye rather than a tangible product, but some progress has been made and some planning has moved forward. Since the Council discussion in Vancouver last year I have maintained an electronic archive of all Society related e-mails and documents that I have received, which include a number of past documents/e-mails that Chip forwarded to me for inclusion. In addition, my Work-Study student has scanned some documents that I received by mail. All this material is currently searchable BY ME and is stored "in the Cloud". Neither of these elements is particularly satisfactory, but is, I suppose, better than nothing. I have been in consultation with people from the National Park Service about archival software, and hope to have some other recommendations soon.

Right now, as far as I have been able to ascertain there are two concentrated treasure troves of documents relating to the Society, one residing at the Smithsonian, and consisting of a variety of "foundational materials" dating back to the Society's formation. The second is a box of documents that has been handed on to each succeeding president, and may contain both duplicates of material held at the Smithsonian and newer material. While the Serious Old-Time Conservative in me likes the idea of hard copies of everything, I also see a real advantage/need for electronic backups –particularly as Chris has suggested in a searchable format WITHIN documents.

Scanning is labor intensive and costs significant amounts of money at the professional/industrial level, and I am unsure whether the costs justify the benefit. At present I have a reliable Work-Study student who is interested in seabirds and Natural History and thus has more incentive than an anonymous worker to "get things right".

One project that has been much on my mind since Vancouver is the importance of trying to save visual imagery of the Society's members and activities. I believe that group photos have been taken at least some meetings, and have no doubt that there are a fair number of individual snapshots of people on Society field trips, events, etc. As someone who spent a lot of the past three years pawing through old archives looking for images of great naturalists I know a) how much fun it is to actually find a picture of someone that one is reading or writing about and b) how annoying it is to come across what is likely a good image but has no documentation or definitive identifications.

The question of back-up media needs to be addressed. It is possible that Cloud Storage will be the norm soon, but it does give me some shudders. At the same time, any physical electronic

storage has a way of getting out of date (I think I told some of you at Vancouver of my disgust at finding a few years ago that whereas I had stored all of the drafts of Bill Drury's ms on what was then the Incredible State of the Art 40 meg Zip Disks, I now find that even when I can get (from an electronic junk seller) a Zip Drive, Windows is no longer compatible with the Zip drivers – Windows 95, anyone?). I still think that having our materials stored on two portable hard-drives located at separate sites (perhaps the Secretary would have one, the Archivist the other?) with a schedule of synchronization would make the most sense. It also would make sense to have some portion of the documents available through the Society web site, but I doubt if we should have everything there, and haven't explored what it would take to make this happen.

2013-2014 Proposed Work of the Committee:

With the Council's approval (and particularly that of the present and past presidents) I would like to propose that the "presidential box" be sent here to College of the Atlantic on short-term loan to have the contents scanned. I obviously don't know how much material is in this box & hence have no idea how long it would take, but we can at least make a start with existing resources here & if the task is too large I would apply to the Council for further directions, which might include a request for funding or contracting the job out. Once the "presidential material" has been scanned we should discuss the fate of the Smithsonian Archive. It may be most cost-effective to see if there is anyone in the D.C. area who would be willing to supervise a similar scanning operation there.

Again, with the Council's permission I would like to send out a call to all members asking for digital copies of relevant pictures WITH DOCUMENTATION, attribution, and best of all level of permissions for duplication (some of us might find the image of a Bald eagle snatching a Roseate tern out of Jeff's hands screamingly funny, but maybe he wouldn't...). these would be catalogued, archived and backed up on removable media along with everything else.

Finally, a more ambitious but by no means untimely idea that is much on my mind would be to propose to the Society that we compile a set of Oral Histories from founding members that would be included in the archive. Probably the best way to do this is to get a selection of folks willing to talk into a microphone for 15 minutes or so at each meeting about early involvement in the Society, ideas at founding, transition from a Working Group to a full-fledged Society, high points of meetings, etc. It might be that little of this material is of interest to 99.9% of the future, but for that fraction of a percent, perhaps as yet without binoculars, it could be priceless. Think about it.

Requests for Council Action:

See above.

Respectfully submitted

John Anderson
Co-Archivist, The Waterbird Society