

Archives Week at the Monmouth County Library
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The Monmouth County Archives began hosting Archives and History Day, in recognition of Archives Week, at the Monmouth County Library in Manalapan on Saturday, October 12, 1996. The event, initially called Archives Day, was initiated as a result of a combination of factors, including prior approval from our manager, the Monmouth County Clerk; cooperation from MARAC members; individual initiative; availability of facilities; chance; lack of competition; and dumb luck.

In the late 1970s, the International Council on Archives (ICA) began calling for Archives Week celebrations to publicize the work of archivists and, by 1979, events were held in Great Britain and India.¹ In 1988, prompted by the New York State Archives (SARA), Governor Mario Cuomo of New York declared the first week in October to be Archives Week and many events were held, including those scheduled by the Archivists Round Table of New York (for short, ART). ART's array of events provided models for others. Included were awards, exhibits, lectures, tours, panel discussions, and, beginning in 1989, a "Family Heritage Day," which for years afterwards was a major public event with numerous exhibitors and 800 to 1,000 attendees. SARA held its own events in Albany, including tours and video screenings, and promoted the concept inside and outside the state. New York State Archivist Larry J. Hackman, in the *Society of American Archivists' SAA Newsletter* in March 1991, proposed that the first week in October be observed nationally as "United States Archives Week," but SAA did not respond.² Some archives began celebrating at other times of year, including the Society of Ohio Archivists in April 1993 and the Pennsylvania State Archives in May.³

In January 1995, the MARAC Steering Committee designated Archives Week as the second week in October, the first regional archival professional association to formally embrace the idea. The MARAC Outreach Committee, then chaired by Seton Hall history professor Maxine Lurie, began promoting Archives Week in the *Mid-Atlantic Archivist* and at conferences. At the Fall 1995 MARAC Conference, Lurie chaired a session called, "Archives Week: A Primer," at which Beverly Robinson summarized ART's activities over the previous eight years. Also at that program, JoAnn Barry discussed

¹ George W. Bain, "Archives Week and the Power of Intersecting Ripples," *Archival Issues* 23:1 (1998), Note 1, p. 15.

² SAA would not take action until 2005, when it declared October to be "American Archives Month." Elizabeth W. Adkins, "October is American Archives Month!," *Society of American Archivists*, [1996], <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/2006ArchivesKit.pdf>

³ The Society of Ohio Archivists began celebrating Archives Week in April 1993 and the Pennsylvania State Archives about the same year.

Delaware Valley Archivists Group programs and Rebecca Ebert described her Archives Week efforts as a lone arranger in Virginia.⁴

At the March 22, 1995, New Jersey MARAC Caucus meeting, held at the Monmouth County Archives and chaired by Ben Primer, attending archivists discussed a celebration in New Jersey. It was then believed that a statewide event could be coordinated by the New Jersey State Archives and the New Jersey Historical Commission. Ben Primer appointed New Jersey State Archivist Karl J. Niederer to be state coordinator for Archives Week. At the January 4, 1996, Caucus meeting at Princeton University, I reported that Jim Raleigh, who although not an archivist, was involved in history organizations, had offered to coordinate an educational program on preservation on the Saturday of Archives Week. At his request, I reserved meeting space at the Monmouth County Library on October 12, 1996. The Library, upstairs from the Monmouth County Archives, has a large meeting hall that can be divided up into five rooms, as well as another smaller meeting room.

Karl Niederer stepped down as Archives Week coordinator at the May 1996 NJ Caucus meeting held at the MARAC Spring Conference in College Park and was not replaced. The New Jersey Historical Commission also withdrew from active involvement since at that time, the State of New Jersey planned to abolish it and replace it with a History Task Force with very much reduced responsibilities, including the elimination of the grant program that funds the MARAC/NJ CAPES archival consulting service and provides grants to dozens of historical agencies annually. Fortunately, the campaign to save the Commission was successful.

Monmouth County Clerk Jane Clayton gave me the go-ahead to assume responsibility and organize an event on October 12 that would primarily involve Monmouth County organizations. I formed a Steering Committee composed of Jim Raleigh and Monmouth County NJ MARAC Caucus members Mary Ann Kiernan, Fred Pachman, Elsalyn Palmisano, Bob Stewart, and Carla Tobias, with Lois Densky-Wolff,⁵ the new Caucus Chair, serving ex-officio.

At the first Steering Committee meeting on May 24, 1996, Fred Pachman, Jim Raleigh, and I each presented proposals. After quite a spirited discussion, we decided that Archives Day would consist of the following elements:

- 1) Exhibiting organizations at tables. Initially, the invited organizations were either Monmouth County or state organizations like the New Jersey State Archives. There were 26 exhibitors the first year.⁶ Commercial vendors were excluded. In the second year, the restriction on neighboring Ocean County was removed and subsequently, local history organizations from other counties could participate, although the exhibitors continue to be predominantly from Monmouth County or those serving statewide constituencies.

⁴ "Summary of Outreach Session at MARAC, November 19, 1995," *Mid-Atlantic Archivist*, 25:2, p. 19.

⁵ Archivist at the UMDNJ University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark. Earlier in her career, she was archivist at the Monmouth County Historical Association.

⁶ Thirty-one registered but there were five that didn't show up.

- 2) Lectures and seminars. In the first year, there were ten lectures, including concurrent programs in different rooms. Subsequently, as the number of exhibitors increased and more space was needed, the lecture programs were reduced in number, with a featured keynote speaker at a plenary session and seminars in a small meeting room.
- 3) Videos. In 1996, videos on archival preservation and conservation were shown. Videos have continued to be screened, including selections of old news programs from the Monmouth County Archives' TV-34 cable news collection and videos of past keynote addresses.
- 4) Greetings from the podium from Monmouth County VIPs, including the County Clerk, members of the Board of Chosen Freeholders, and the Chair of the Board of Library Commissioners. Also included is a flag salute, featuring military re-enactors carrying in the American and New Jersey flags. For a few years, vocalist and Freeholder Anna C. Little sang the Star Spangled Banner.
- 5) Awards. At the first event, there was a surprise award presentation when the Freeholders proclaimed that the Archives reading room would be named after retiring County Clerk Jane Clayton. Beginning the following year, County Clerk M. Claire French began giving out an annual Jane Clayton Award for contributions to the field of Monmouth County history.⁷ Since 1996, the event has featured several other annual awards presentations from the MARAC/NJ Caucus, the New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance, and the Monmouth County Genealogy Society.
- 6) Opportunity for other organizations to hold meetings during Archives Day. In the first year, the MARAC/NJ Caucus and the Advocates for New Jersey History both held business meetings at the event, one before and one after the programs. Subsequently, each decided to discontinue meeting on this day, probably because the times were inconvenient.

In 1996, the Monmouth County Archives hosted a morning reception and the MARAC NJ Caucus provided one at the end. However, since the event was free, we did not provide lunch and as a result, some people left midday and did not return. The second year, we began charging a modest table fee that included two box lunches, with additional lunches available for purchase.⁸

Despite an estimated 300 attendees in 1996, attendance at some of the lectures and videos was unexpectedly low due in part to competing events. The representatives of many of the exhibiting organizations liked staying at their tables in case someone dropped by to

⁷ A committee, normally consisting of the County Clerk, County Archivist, County Historian, and director of the Monmouth County Historical Association, selects the winner from nominations received.

⁸ We distribute menus in advance to registrants and each lunch is custom ordered through a vendor. At first, attendees would pick up their lunches but this didn't work well because there wasn't enough space around the pickup area. So we developed the delivery system that is still used. At noon, the almost 200 box lunches are taken by six people to the exhibitor tables, each of which is numbered. We color code menus with colors assigned to different table number ranges. The delivery assignments are listed on a five-page schedule for about a dozen staff and volunteers, detailing what they need to be doing at all times during the day. The schedule is distributed about a week before the event, along with a map of the tables.

chat, rather than going to a program in another room. The requests for tables in the second year more than doubled (we now usually get about sixty exhibitors) and we had to open up the space for tables that had been used for lectures. Instead, we scheduled educational lectures and other programs on a weekday during Archives Week. Most recently, we have had four programs on two days, plus an archives tour on each day. For the last several years, on one of the seminar days, the History and Preservation Section of the New Jersey Library Association, has held a luncheon business meeting. Attending NJLA members often also go to the seminars.

In some years, we have obtained grants from the New Jersey Historical Commission to help support Archives Week programs. Currently, we have a modest budget from Monmouth County that we have to keep within, regardless of grants or other income from registration fees. For budgetary reasons, we provide an honorarium for the keynote speaker only.⁹

The Archives Week Steering Committee met several times to plan the first event and the members took responsibility for various tasks before and at Archives Day.¹⁰ After M. Claire French became County Clerk in 1997, I was able to assign work to Archives employees and our own volunteers. Thereafter, the role of the MARAC/NJ Caucus became that of a perennial exhibitor.

In the second year, 1997, the Steering Committee met only once as the framework had been established. Eventually, the Steering Committee no longer had to meet. Programs and exhibits now are mostly the responsibility of Archives staff.

Although the idea of having tours of the Monmouth County Archives on Archives Day was suggested the first year, it wasn't feasible because there wasn't enough staff to handle them since the Archives is not open on Saturdays. In later years, tours became possible.¹¹

The Steering Committee hoped that once Archives Day in Monmouth was established, similar events could be held on the same day in other parts of the State. This dream has not yet been realized. While some archives with MARAC/NJ members, such as the Plainfield Public Library, have held exhibits, tours, and programs during Archives Week, thus far Monmouth's event has been unique in bringing together representatives from about five dozen institutions each year, including MARAC members.

In the second year, we began to have a month-long exhibit in the library of brochures from history organizations and historic sites from around the state. This was another

⁹ At one time, we could expand our program offerings when we got grants but this is no longer the case, as we are limited to \$2,500 for expenses, and we are expected to come close to breaking even. Income from table registrations and grants in 2013 totaled about \$2,000.

¹⁰ In 1996, Monmouth County had decided that no overtime pay, required for non-supervisory staff on weekends, would be available except in emergencies. Hence, volunteers were crucial.

¹¹ We now usually have about 25 people see both our public reading room and the normally off-limits Records Center and Scanning/Micrographics department. The tours require three staff: one to lead it, one at the end of the group to make sure it stays together, and one at the front desk.

suggestion from Jim Raleigh, who eventually became the President of the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey. He helped set up the first display in 1997. At Archives Day, we collected brochures from exhibitors, obtained more from other sources during the year, and exhibited hundreds the following October.¹²

In 1998, the third year, the exhibit space in the Library's lobby became much larger and in 2000, we discontinued the brochure display and instead began having themed exhibits on New Jersey history on topics such as Molly Pitcher, Revolutionary War, Civil War, the history of sports, Great Depression, and World War II.¹³ In 2011, the Library made its art gallery available to the Archives each October and we relocated the main exhibit there. That required us to mat and frame all items in the exhibits. A benefit of the change was that after October, we could move the exhibit to the hallway walls outside our office and leave it up for another ten months until we needed to reuse the frames for the next one. Our current exhibit is on Prohibition in New Jersey.

Also in 1998, we introduced a New Jersey History Game as a kind of raffle with prizes to give out near the end of Archives Day. The purpose of the game is to give attendees a bit of educational fun but also to encourage them to stay for the whole day. The Game is a quiz, usually related to the theme of our annual exhibit, for which a copy of the exhibit catalog is provided to all the organizations with tables. Visitors not associated with exhibitors can also play. Participants drop their game sheets in an old ballot box. At the drawing, we pull from the box and give winners a chance to select from prizes donated for the occasion, including books and videos. The Grand Prize is lunch with the County Clerk. While not the main reason why people attend Archives Day, the History Game gets consistently good ratings on our evaluation form that we distribute at each event. After the event, we post the game to our website, which also includes the exhibition catalogs.

Since 1998, the format for Archives Day has remained basically the same with some tweaks. In 1999, we changed the name to Archives and History Day to acknowledge the many exhibiting history organizations.¹⁴ Each year, we choose a keynote speaker, either a historian or an historical personage, such as Molly Pitcher, Benjamin Franklin, or Eleanor Roosevelt. Usually, the speaker's topic relates to our annual exhibit. In 2013, the speaker, historian Marc Mappen, co-curated with me the exhibit on Prohibition in New Jersey.

Judging by attendance and feedback received on evaluation forms, the event continues to be popular and enjoyable. Many of the exhibitors come back year after year while there

¹² The Monmouth County Archives donated its collection of hundreds of brochures, flyers, newsletters, and ephemera produced by non-Monmouth County historical agencies, organizations, and sites to Special Collections, Rutgers University Libraries.

¹³ The library gave the Archives four sets of free-standing display units, each with three two-sided panels the size of doors, totaling 24 panels. By order of the County Safety Office, these had to be discontinued as a safety precaution in 2011, although none had ever fallen over.

¹⁴ The suggestion to add "history" to the title came initially from William Morrissey, Chairman of the Monmouth County Historical Commission, in a letter to Mary Ann Kiernan, Dec. 3, 1997. Morrissey, suggested "Monmouth History Fair." It is my recollection that Jim Raleigh suggested "Archives and History Day," which was adopted.

is always some welcomed turnover. One frequent comment is to get more public attendees, as about two-thirds of the people there are with exhibiting organizations. We have tried media releases, E-mail blasts, and a number of other marketing techniques but the attendance has stayed pretty much same since we started in 1996.

The overwhelming majority of attendees have told us on evaluation forms to keep it on Saturday. However, those who observe the Sabbath on Saturday will not participate or attend our event.¹⁵ There are pros and cons to changing the day but thus far, we've kept it on Saturday.

To plan this event and the Archives exhibits, it helps to have people available with an array of skills. In 2013, a team of Archives staff did most of the work required for the following:

- Planning, setting policies, designing forms, training personnel, and assigning tasks
- Writing a successful grant proposal to the New Jersey Historical Commission
- Writing media releases for listservs, direct mail, posters, handouts, etc.
- Preparing and printing the program; Prohibition in New Jersey exhibit catalog; encapsulated and reusable table signs; name badges; and history quiz
- Updating the Archives' website with iterations of the program as it evolved and exhibit catalog
- Preparing and stuffing folders with handouts for 62 exhibitors
- Managing registrations for Archives and History Day tables and Archives Week seminars, including planning morning refreshments and 180 individually ordered box or bag lunches
- Research, selecting and acquiring exhibit items, writing exhibit captions and catalog
- Proofreading the exhibit captions, exhibit catalog, grant proposal, and history quiz
- Digitizing and creating facsimiles of documents and photographs for exhibition, requiring PhotoShop skills
- Designing and cutting 40 mats for exhibit, and framing the mats
- Contracting for food, exhibit supplies, and keynote speaker, and arranging for payments
- Managing the nominations process for the annual Jane Clayton Award, helping select the winner, photographing the winner for media release, writing and circulating media release about the winner

¹⁵ Orthodox Jewish and some Christian groups such as Seventh Day Baptists. Sundays are out for us because the library is only open for half a day and there wouldn't be enough time. Most retired seniors, who typically dominate the historical societies, could attend on a weekday and in some respects, it would be easier for us to hold it on a weekday. But some working adults prefer weekends and high school students would be in school on a weekday. It's possible that more teachers and archivists would come on a weekday because some could get time off from their regular job. We've also considered moving the event to a larger county facility but there are drawbacks there as well. It is much more convenient to set up an event in our own building with support from library personnel. Also, our annual exhibit is in the library and we want attendees from around the state to see it.

- Obtaining give-aways to use as prizes for the History Game. Compiling list of prizes for handout.
- Selecting and dubbing old news videos on alcohol-related topics in the Archives' TV-34 News Video Collection for Archives and History Day video program.
- Preparing DVD to run at the event. Preparing handout listing all the organizations with their table numbers.
- Designing table layout and assigning participating exhibitors to numbered tables, accommodating requests for wall space, electric outlets, easel space, and exhibitors who want to be next to, or don't want to be next to, other exhibitors.
- Covering tables with plastic table cloths, setting up decorations and refreshment tables for event
- Helping facilities staff set up 67 tables and about 200 chairs, and take down after the event

In addition to the tasks performed by the Archives, the County Library's Art Department produced posters and flyers in the form of bookmarks. The County's Public Information Department put the finishing touches on media releases and distributed them. Their graphic designer did the cover design for the exhibit catalog. The Finance Department helped with the grant proposal. The Deputy County Clerk was responsible for obtaining an engraved Jane Clayton Award in the form of an attractive crystal sculpture.

At the main event, we had a team of thirteen, including my daughter who served as volunteer videographer. Some worked a half day. Tasks, detailed in a five-page job list, included:

- Assisting elderly exhibitors unload vehicles and deliver materials to display tables
- Directing exhibitors to assigned tables
- Setting up and maintaining morning refreshment tables
- Presenting the Jane Clayton Award and leading the pledge of allegiance (County Clerk)
- Staffing the Monmouth County Archives table and filling in for other exhibitors that want to take a break
- Setting up equipment for PowerPoint presentations by speakers
- Screening videos and playing music, with both iPod and a 1919 Victrola.
- Delivering pre-ordered box or bag lunches to exhibitors
- Photography and videography
- Collecting evaluation forms and table signs
- Selecting History Game winners
- Conducting Archives tour
- Clean up at end of day

Our Archives Week is a lot of work but well worth the effort. The benefits of our Archives Week activities include:

- 1) Promoting public awareness and support for archivists and historians.
- 2) Giving representatives of archives and history organizations an opportunity to network at an *indoor* event where all attendees are in one large room.¹⁶
- 3) Providing a large audience for awards presentations.
- 4) Increasing public knowledge of the table exhibitors, including the host, the Monmouth County Archives.
- 5) Enabling the public to learn about local history through programs, videos, exhibits, and stopping by about sixty exhibitor tables at the main event.
- 6) Providing a “feel good about Archives” experience for public officials
- 7) Increasing visitation at the annual month-long exhibit prepared by the Monmouth County Archives on view in the Monmouth County Library.
- 8) Enhancing the organizational and marketing skills of Archives staff involved in planning and implementing the event.
- 9) Building team spirit among Archives staff.

¹⁶ By comparison, at the New Jersey History Fair, which is held in a park in May, military history groups can have campfires, cook, and fire off cannons, there is a field with antique automobiles, and concurrent programs in different areas. The exhibitors are spread out over a large area with lots of space for each. But attendance at the fair is very dependent on weather conditions.