



## *In the Vault...*

*Vol. 1, Issue 9*

*October 2, 1998*

*A periodic newsletter about archives and records management in the Town of Burlington.*

### ***What is she doing in there?***

Last month included a number of long-term research projects, so the deed index is not quite finished. The item level index should be up in the next couple weeks at [www.burlington.org/archives/collect/002](http://www.burlington.org/archives/collect/002).

Jennifer Jacobsen, a MLIS archives intern from Simmons College is experiencing Tweetie Birds in Santa caps and town records at Meadowbrook, as we chip away at the inventory and sorting. We have two more weeks on the inventory, then we will write up destruction requests for the appropriate department heads. After that we will begin reboxing the remaining records. Jenn is required to complete a 60 hour internship and I hope that between the two of us we will be able to clear out Meadowbrook basement by December.

I am collecting examples of other municipal archives policies and procedures and am chipping away at a rough draft for Burlington. My goal is to have a rough draft out there for review in the next month and a half.

### ***What is next?***

Besides sorting out Meadowbrook, I will begin scheduling in-office surveys in November. In-office surveys, Meadowbrook and processing will be the focus for the winter months.

### ***Organizing It***

The following is not rocket science, but it is amazing how the little things can speed retrieval.

- For longterm storage and access of inactive records, organize

records into series or like types of things e.g., minutes, earning records, etc. For instance, rather than grouping everything by fiscal year, group it by type of record. The idea is to be able to go to the unit or subunit as quickly as possible, without wading through a lot of other records. For instance, if you are looking for a particular contract, it is easier to go right to the contract if the related correspondence is kept in a separate file and series e.g., Contracts and Contract--Correspondence.

- Project files can be organized into functional areas e.g., Town projects, Water and Sewer and Streets and Highways. Within the project files, it helps to break records down into subseries, for instance correspondence, project reports, contracts, RFPs. Again, the smaller the filing unit, the faster you can locate the information you need.
- Print file labels on the computer. Text can be entered into Access or Word and labels can be printed on a laser printer. The advantages are 1) smaller type, so more label information than with a typewriter; 2) ability to do keyword searches on folder titles; 3) file list increases drawer and box control; 4) more readable. See `t:\temp\folder.mdb` for an already created Access database. Please let me know if you need any help getting started with it!
- Select a filing arrangement and stick to it e.g., chronological, alphabetical, geographic, etc. Consistency makes indexing and retrieval much faster.

- Store blank forms together and organize by form title or form number. Masters should be stored the same way on the computer.
- Computer files should be stored in your department's network directory: only your department has access to these files. If you store the files on the network, they will be backed up every night. Yes, your local hard drive (c) can go belly up.
- Electronic files can be used to enhance searchability. I organize my electronic files like most people organize their paper files. This makes keyword searches much easier, since I have an idea if I need to search `f:\clerk\archives\corr\ref\1998` or the whole correspondence file. If you think in terms of hierarchy and levels, you can break down searches into different levels, from general to more specific. Like paper files, a hiddly piddly of files works for a year or two, but as time goes by, it's harder to find what you are looking for.

For instance, my computer files are organized under the Town Clerk's directory on the town network's f drive in

```
f:\clerk\archives\
    accessions
        accforms
        accreg
    corr
        depthhead
        histcomm
        jane
        ref
            1997
            1998
        intern
        townmtg
```

vendor  
db (for various databases)  
forms  
newsltr  
webpg

Other possibilities would be:

minutes  
1997  
1998  
projects  
W&S98 [year started]  
pineglen  
corr  
1997  
1998  
budget  
minutes  
town98

I include these as possible arrangement schemes, since some folks have asked how to organize electronic files. Like paper files, the idea is to develop a system and stick to it.

One of the main advantages of organizing electronic files is speedier keyword searching.

To do a keyword search in Word:

1. Go to the menu bar to File.
2. Go to Find File.
3. Click Advanced.
4. Click Summary.
5. Enter the text you want to search for in Containing Text box.
6. Click Okay.
7. Pull Location down to the appropriate file.
8. Click Include Subdirectories if you need to.
9. Click Okay.

### ***Why do archivists and records managers save what they do?***

A few months ago someone asked me, "How do you know what to keep?" Why do we save what we do?

The first part of the record's "life cycle" concerns the active use of the record. The value of the record during this period is legal, administrative and fiscal. For instance, the record may

document a project, administrative decision or project cost.

The second part of the record's life cycle concerns the informational and evidential value--the historical or permanent value. This volume of records is typically 5% of the records created by an organization. For archivists, there are some records that are typically considered archival, no questions asked e.g., annual reports, minutes, bylaws, legal material, audit reports. By preserving records from different departments, the archives keeps a long-term, holistic picture of the organization. Since the records and information are inter-related, one needs to look at the records for the whole organization in order to have a real picture of the organization. This organic grouping of records is the organization's corporate memory.

In collecting archives records are collected for a particular subject area. For instance, Harvard's Schlessinger Library documents the history of women in American and the American Jewish Historical Society documents the history of Jewish settlement and organizations in North and South America. In collecting and organizational archives, the decision about what to keep is sometimes instinctive and depends if the information exists elsewhere. For example, the last place I worked had a lot of 19th century records from religious organizations. The corresponding secretary was typically the mover and shaker in the organization and the correspondence was the majority of the records. The correspondence documented the financial status of the organization, who was where, etc. The minutes were purposely vague. Normally correspondence is not considered archival unless it has informational or evidential value, but in a couple cases, I kept all the correspondence, particularly since there were scarcely any other records.

When you ask if you should keep something and I say, "It depends," I am not sidestepping the issue--sometimes the departmental records need to be organized before that question can be answered. Yes, people do debate what to keep. You cannot keep everything and in some cases people may scoop up what another archives tosses. For example, there was a debate a couple years ago at the Maine State Archives--some of the material they were disposing of had value on the historical records market, even though the records were eligible for destruction. There was a question of whether to dispose of the records, sell them or transfer them. Whether or not something is kept should be determined by a collection policy, retention schedules and informed decisions about what other records in the organization contain that information. And yes, sometimes one person's destruction list is sometimes another person's treasure...

### ***Back to the old schedule***

October 19th I should be back to my old schedule, in all day Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday.

### ***How to reach Lisa***

- Phone 270-1604 or 270-1660 (town clerk's office)
- Email [lpato@burlmass.org](mailto:lpato@burlmass.org) or [lpato@tiac.net](mailto:lpato@tiac.net) (the latter address is good if I am not in Burlington).

Also, I have a message machine on 270-1604--feel free to leave a message if you need to retrieve something.

### ***So, is anyone using it?***

I have been tracking the number of box pulls from various departments. This information will be useful for figuring out what records should be reformatted and how deep to index, if at all.

