

STATE ARCHIVES ANNUAL REPORT

2019



Students from Village Green Virtual Charter School view the "Andiamo! Italians Make their Mark in RI" exhibition.



Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State



ABOUT US



WHO WE ARE

The Rhode Island State Archives is operated by the Rhode Island Department of State under the leadership of Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea. The State Archives was first authorized by Rhode Island General Laws Chapter 42-8.1 in 1989, under the purview of the Secretary of State. It was established that, "the division shall be the official custodian and trustee for the state of all public records of permanent historical, legal or other value, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which are transferred to it from any public office of the state or any political subdivision thereof."

WHAT WE DO

As the repository for official permanent records of Rhode Island state government, the State Archives strives to protect, maintain, and preserve Rhode Island's powerful history.

The State Archives has three primary objectives:

1. To advance the Rhode Island Department of State's mission to engage and empower all Rhode Islanders by making government more accessible and transparent and encouraging civic pride;
2. To assist Rhode Island residents in learning about their history and increase awareness of Rhode Island's history; and
3. To ensure transparency and accessibility by conserving and preserving records and making them available to the public through exhibitions, public programs, and digital initiatives.

In addition to preserving permanent records of state government, the State Archives also works closely with cities and towns to manage the State Archives Local Government Records Program. This work ensures that records across Rhode Island are maintained and preserved according to the law.

The Local Government Records Program helps cities and towns through a variety of programs including:

- Workshops & Public Presentations: State Archives staff provide updated information on standards, best practices, and State Archives services for records management and preservation; and
- Clean-Up Days: State Archives staff provide full-day guidance and on-site approval for destruction of records which have met their legal retention requirement.

THE STATE ARCHIVES TEAM

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Government
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FROM SECRETARY GORBEA



Dear Rhode Islander:

Since taking office in 2015, one of my key goals as Secretary of State has been to increase civic literacy and pride in our great state. I believe strongly that Rhode Island's rich and diverse history illustrates how we can achieve these goals, which is why I have worked diligently to raise the profile of the State Archives in the eyes of all Rhode Islanders. As the permanent repository for records of state government, the Rhode Island State Archives is home to more than 10 million records dating back to 1638. These records highlight our past, provide context for the present, and can inform our future. Over the past year, we've continued working hard to showcase these priceless documents, and the 2019 Annual Report for the Rhode Island State Archives is a record of our efforts.

While our State Archives contains important documents from our local and national history, Rhode Island is one of few states whose archives do not have a permanent home. Rhode Island is the only state that houses its archives in a commercially-leased office space.

2020 will bring a new set of challenges for the Rhode Island State Archives. Our more than 10 million records will be on the move as we must relocate from our current facility to another temporary, leased space. We remain committed to ensuring that our collections are preserved and protected throughout the move. We are also actively pursuing opportunities to collaborate with other civic and cultural organizations to offer off-site public programs and pop-up exhibitions to ensure our collections remain accessible and visible for Rhode Islanders.

Despite this move to another leased facility, my commitment to identifying a permanent state-owned facility to house and exhibit our archival collections remains steadfast.

As one of the original 13 colonies, Rhode Island played a critical role in the birth and growth of our nation. Our history is beautifully quirky, and endlessly surprising. The State Archives is home to an important collection of documents that chronicle this rich history dating back nearly four centuries. These historic treasures show how ordinary Rhode Islanders lived, were civically engaged, and shaped history.

This is something we can—and should be—incredibly proud of. As your Secretary of State, I will continue the important work of ensuring that the richness of our history is preserved and remains accessible to all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State



More than
10 MILLION
records



Accumulated over
380 YEARS



Over
43,000
online items



54
public programs



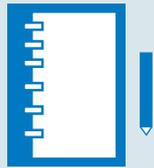
LOOKING BACK: 2019 IN REVIEW

By the Numbers

177
STUDENTS



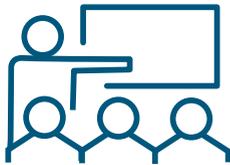
Welcomed over 177 students from 12 groups across Rhode Island.



784
ATTENDEES

Hosted over 784 attendees at 19 different on-site programs throughout the year.

381
PARTICIPANTS



Presented to over 381 members of the community through 18 off-site programs and workshops.



985
OUT-OF-STATE RESEARCHERS

985 out-of-state researchers came to visit the State Archives.

46 STATES

14 COUNTRIES

4

EXHIBITIONS
DISPLAYING

106
RECORDS +
ARTIFACTS

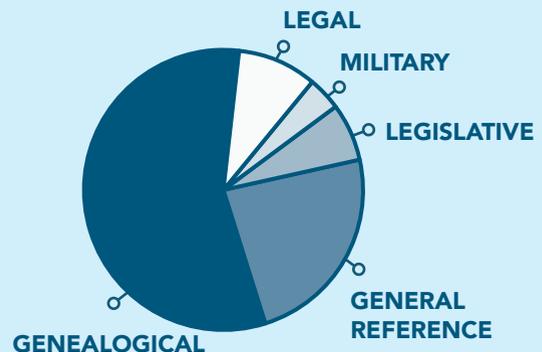
BY THE PUBLIC

2,149 REFERENCE REQUESTS
(Mail, fax, email, and telephone)

1,638 ON-SITE RESEARCHERS

4,896 RECORDS RETRIEVED

BY TOPIC





HIGHLIGHTS

GROWING OUR COLLECTIONS

Added new holdings to the State Archives Collection, encompassing 148 cubic feet (CF) of boxed records.



The State Archives added 19 new collections in 2019, including additional vital records. Others were new series, such as the fire training reports and manuals from 1941-1942.

NOTABLE ADDITIONS:

- › Civilian Conservation Corps Maps, 1930-1960 (.9 CF);
- › Sample Ballots, 2005-2018 (6 CF);
- › Minutes of the Governor's Insurance Council, 1986-2019 (2.4 CF);
- › House and Senate Journals, 2019 (1.2 CF); and
- › 2017 Failed Legislation (.24 CF).

EXPANDING ACCESS

Digitized 3,565 documents and photographs from the State Archives' holdings, and increased public access to historic collections.



ACCESS

Developed online request forms for State Archives field trips and vital records requests.

4,342

CATALOG RESOURCES

Added 4,342 new resources to our online catalog.

43,373

DIGITAL FILES

Expanded the Digital Archive to include over 43,000 searchable and downloadable digital objects, such as photos and PDFs.



RESEARCH

Increased the featured collections and themed collections on the Digital Archive homepage.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS PROGRAM

The Local Government Records Program is primarily responsible for assisting Rhode Island cities and towns with the care and management of public records. To achieve this goal, the program provides workshops for local government records keepers; develops retention schedules for the proper disposition of public records; and provides technical and advisory assistance.

111
ATTENDEES



Hosted 5 Local Government Records Program presentations with 111 attendees.

649
REQUESTS



Received 649 requests from Rhode Island cities and towns for assistance.

Notable Research Topics

Study of witchcraft in colonial New England.

Research for WWII D-Day proclamation issuance.

Land usage, assessments, Providence, 19th century.

WWI Navy Cards, Woonsocket men.

Influenza epidemic research.

Historic veteran highway plaques, East Providence.

History of famous Rhode Island women.

Research on Kinsley Park.

1955 highway development.

Silversmiths in Rhode Island.



SHARING OUR STORY

2019

MORE THAN

177
STUDENTS

Experiential Learning

In 2019, the State Archives continued to expand its educational programs, offering students in grades 4-12 the opportunity to learn about archiving, historic documents, and Rhode Island history. While the State Archives has a space limit of ~25 students per group, staff established different learning stations throughout the facility, including private staff space, to accommodate larger classes.

AT THESE STATIONS, STUDENTS RECEIVED:

- An introduction to primary source research and the basics of preserving historic documents;
- A guided tour through some of our state's most significant historic documents; and
- A docent-led tour of the exhibition on view in the State Archives Gallery.



Thank you again for sparking the interest of the students, and introducing them to Secretary Gorbea and the trove of treasures downstairs.

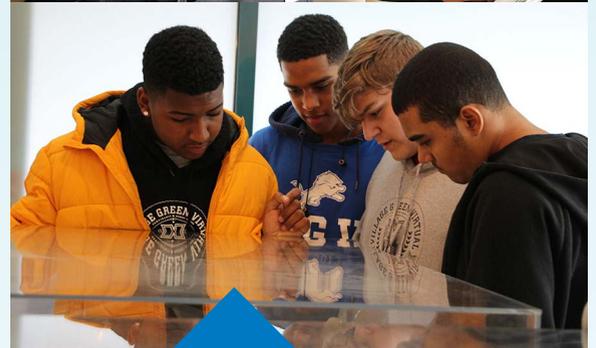
-Jill H., Charette High School

Students from Charette High School visited the Rhode Island State Archives to explore maps and plat books of the city of Providence. (February 2019)



OVER 177 STUDENTS VISITED THE ARCHIVES FOR SPECIAL PROGRAMS, INCLUDING GROUPS FROM:

- Charette High School;
- Village Green Virtual Charter School;
- New Urban Arts;
- Providence Summer Program;
- EnrichRI (homeschool group);
- Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex; and
- Rocky Hill School.



“The whole experience was outstanding. The information was all new to the students, and the staff presented it in such a way that was engaging to them. We really enjoyed it and will come again.”

- Peter Q., Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex



Village Green Virtual Charter School students got a lesson in document conservation and checked out Andiamo! Italians Make their Mark in RI on their visit to the Rhode Island State Archives! (November 2019)

Rocky Hill School students saw a preserved tree stump from where George Washington took command of the Continental Army - one of the more unique items in the State Archives! (December 2019)





PUBLIC PROGRAMS

2019

784
PARTICIPANTS

The State Archives hosted several public programs and events at its downtown location to encourage Rhode Islanders to interact in new ways with the collections. Due to space limitations at this facility, it continued to work with public libraries and organizations across the state to host additional programs. Featured below are photo highlights from the events throughout the year.



COMMUNITY SCANNING EVENT (MAY 2019)

Members of the Italian-American community were invited to visit the State Archives and share their family photographs of life and Italian culture in Rhode Island. Photographs scanned were included as part of the online collection to continue the story of the Andiamo! Italians Make their Mark in RI exhibition on our Digital Archive.



HISTORIC MAP NIGHT (APRIL AND OCTOBER 2019)

Historic Map Night offered guests the opportunity to see the expansive and unique collection of archival maps, plans, plat books, and architectural drawings that are often unable to be shown as part of public exhibitions.



WATERWAYS: PAST AND PRESENT OPENING (MARCH 2019)

Waterways: Past and Present used historic maps, photographs, and other records to illustrate how bodies of water have transformed from the colonial era to today. This gallery reception kicked off a series of public programs on ecology and the history of Rhode Island's waterways.



WATERWAYS: PROVIDENCE GHOST TOUR (MAY 2019)

2019 featured the first ghost tour from the Rhode Island State Archives through a partnership with Providence Ghost Tours! This event shared the stories of ghosts, haunted hotels, and mills with Rhode Islanders.

WATERWAYS: A CONVERSATION ON ECOLOGY AND CIVIC SPACES (JUNE 2019)

Panelists Bob Billington, Sue Kiernan, Alicia Lehrer, and Lorén Spears spoke about supporting river conservation efforts and ideas to re-establish waterways as centers of civic life.



PVDFEST (JUNE 2019)

Over 200 visitors stopped by during their PVDfest travels to have some fun with historic photos and view original copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights!



WHERE IT USED TO BE



PVD: WHERE IT USED TO BE WALKING TOURS (JUNE 2019)

During this guided History Story Walk, visitors traveled through downtown to discover the places that once were - viewing history through archival documents and photographs.



PUBLIC PROGRAMS

FEATURED STOP FOR GALLERY NIGHT PROVIDENCE (AUGUST 2019)

Participants in the Gallery Night Providence art bus tour began their evening at the State Archives to view *Andiamo! Italians Make their Mark in Rhode Island*, the summer exhibition at the State Archives, which explored the impact of the Italian-American community on businesses, government, and culture in Rhode Island. Additional treasures from the vault, including an original drawing of the Rhode Island State House, were displayed for a special one-night-only viewing opportunity.



GENEALOGY OPEN HOUSE (SEPTEMBER 2019)

Future researchers joined this open house to learn how State Archives resources can help conduct family history, census, immigration, and demographic research using multiple types of records and tools.



ANDIAMO! ITALIANS MAKE THEIR MARK IN RHODE ISLAND RECEPTION (OCTOBER 2019)

Visitors celebrated the impact of Italian-Americans by viewing the exhibition sharing the story of their role in Rhode Island business, government, and culture through historic artifacts, photographs, and documents.





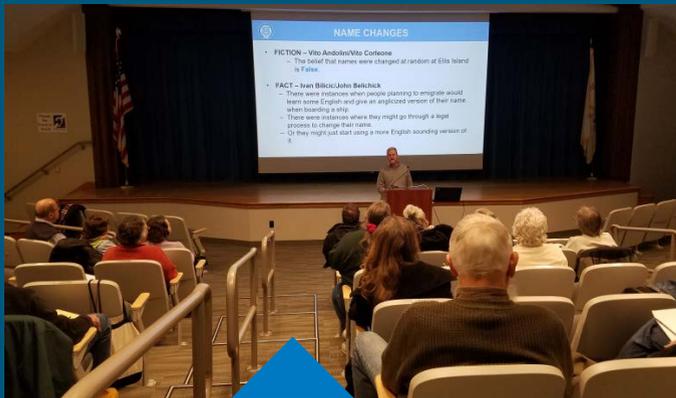
PUBLIC PROGRAMS



COUNT ME IN! EXHIBITION RECEPTION (DECEMBER 2019)

"The story we're making now we can tell in 100 years - if you'll let us," -State Archivist Ashley Selima.

The Census Gallery Reception focused on the history of the state and federal census through Rhode Island State Archives documents, and provided a look at how the upcoming 2020 Census will impact Rhode Island.



Genealogy workshops focused on separating facts from fiction and how the State Archives can help you launch your family history efforts were held at public libraries in Rhode Island, including Barrington, North Providence, and Newport, and the Wingate Residences in Providence. This program launched in 2018 and continues to grow, welcoming new researchers to the State Archives to discover their own stories once they've learned about the resources available.

Records Management workshops and on-site assistance were offered for local governments including for the Rhode Island Tax Collectors Association, the Town of Coventry, the Assessor's Association, the Public Housing Association of Rhode Island, and the Town of Scituate.



DIGITAL INITIATIVES

In 2019, the State Archives increased visibility and transparency of its records by expanding the Digital Archive and continuing to update the Online Catalog.

- 1** Developed a more user-friendly homepage for the Digital Archive featuring instructions for browsing (sosri.access.preservica.com/home)
- 2** Increased Digital Archive holdings by more than 500%, with more than 11,000 downloads of our resources by members of the public.
- 3** Added box and location data in our online catalog, allowing researchers to access information about the size and scope of items, series, or collections.

In 2019, over 4,500 boxes of historic records were barcoded at the State Archives ahead of our relocation in 2020. This project has made our collections even more transparent by identifying the size of collections and will also act as an important quality control measure to ensure safety and security of all records in their transfer to the new, temporary facility.

COMING SOON

Be sure to visit the State Archives in our new location in 2020 to discover what's in the box! The State Archives will exhibit unique, eye-catching and previously un-displayed materials that were discovered during our 2019 inventory project.



NEW WEBSITE

The State Archives reimagined its webpage and expanded access to online collections. New features include:

- Dedicated page to "Discover your Family Story;"
- Vital Records order form to request copies of births, marriages, and deaths in Rhode Island;
- Field Trip Request Information for Educators;
- A new online form to schedule a field trip to the State Archives for students in grades 4-12; and
- Researcher tips and visitor information.



CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Assessing Conservation Needs

Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea released the results of a study commissioned by her office to evaluate the current space and storage conditions of the Rhode Island State Archives, as well as risks posed to the historic documents within.

The study was conducted by the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), an independent laboratory that specializes in the conservation and preservation of paper- and film-based collections.

During the site visit, the NEDCC team evaluated 212 bound items and 162 unbound items to determine their condition and conservation needs. While survey efforts were focused on the oldest and rarest items housed in the vault, items in other locations throughout the building were also evaluated. The team noted the location, description, condition, digitization options, and preservation needs of each item.

The NEDCC team evaluated hundreds of volumes comprising thousands of records during their assessment of the Archives. They found 35% of the collection was at “high priority” for conservation. This means that in its current state, the item is too fragile to be handled and damage will occur during its next use.

Notable high-risk items include:

- The Bill of Rights;
- The Gaspee Commission;
- Declaration of Independence, Stone Printing, 1823;
- Battle of Rhode Island Map, General Sullivan’s Expedition, 1778; and
- The Dorr Rebellion Map of Roads Leading to Chepachet, 1842.

Of the materials surveyed, 33% cannot be digitized in their current condition.



Bexx Caswell-Olson, Director of Book Conservation at NEDCC, with Secretary Gorbea in the State Archives vault.



Terra Huber, Assistant Book Conservator, NEDCC, examines a map from the collection.



Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

This publication was produced by the
Rhode Island Department of State