

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 22, 2011
Chicago, Illinois**

**Discussion Item: Assistance for Japanese Colleagues with
Tsunami-Damaged Public Records
(Prepared by Mark Greene and Nancy Beaumont)**

BACKGROUND

SAA Past President Mark Greene recently received a request from a colleague in Japan for assistance from U.S. archivists in mitigating the challenges presented by extensive damage of public records in the tsunami-devastated regions of Japan. See the email exchanges below.

Initial email message from Kazuya Tominaga, Supervisor, Okinawa Prefectural Archives, Japan:

From: 富永一也 [mailto:tominaga.kazuya@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 02, 2011 2:43 AM
To: Mark Allen Greene
Subject: Hello, it's Kazuya --- need help

Dear Mark,

It's been a while since we met in Tokyo. I sincerely enjoyed your visit....

I am writing to you to ask for a favor and advice.

As you know the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami disaster caused extensive damage, which included public records. Attached with this e-mail is an English translation of a report that was written by archivists from Gunma prefecture, who visited the affected municipalities in early June. The report describes the current state of public records in the affected areas.

The status of the public records is of great concern and I would greatly appreciate your help. It would mean a great deal if you could suggest to the SAA to look for funding to organize a survey team to visit the affected municipalities. I believe that seeing the conditions first hand will raise awareness for the recovery of damaged or lost records.

Of course the rescue efforts have already begun, as some volunteer archivists and conservators have been active in a couple of ravaged cities, but the efforts have been limited (rescue projects have been conducted only at select municipalities), understaffed, and

underbudgeted. Cultural properties have, from the early phases of the relief efforts, received proper attention in comparison with public records but we believe that the latter deserves equal attention.

I do believe that, with help from abroad, the records can be recovered in a more rapid fashion. I would appreciate any suggestions or thoughts you may have concerning the rescue efforts. Also, please pass on the report to the American archivist community as well as anyone else who may have concern for damaged or lost public records to give them a glimpse of what has happened in the affected areas.

Sincerely, Kazuya
Supervisor,
Okinawa Prefectural Archives

Mark Greene's August 2 response:

Dear Kazuya, I am so pleased you thought to contact me, because I don't believe the US archival community has received very much information about the status of archival records in Japan after the tsunami, and therefore has not had impetus to discuss ways in which it might be able to help. I will immediately forward your request and attachment to the executive director and the president of SAA, and ask that they ask the SAA governing council to discuss the matter at its meeting later this month. It is possible that someone other than me will respond to you after that discussion, but I will try to ensure that someone does bring you up to date on developments here.

One question I might ask you now is whether you believe it would be of assistance if SAA were able to send copies of its new volume on the preservation of archival records and possibly also publications on disaster planning that might assist in the mitigation of destruction in the future? I don't know whether English-language publications such as this would be of assistance, but if so, please let me know. However, there may be other means of assistance that SAA is able to offer--that I must leave to the governing council.

Again, thank you for contacting me, and I will do everything I can to urge assistance from the US archival community for our colleagues in the tsunami-devastated regions of Japan. Warm regards, --Mark

Kazuya's response:

From: 富永一也 [mailto:tominaga.kazuya@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 02, 2011 10:14 PM
To: Mark Allen Greene
Subject: Re: Hello, it's Kazuya --- need help

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your quick and positive response.
It is greatly appreciated that you are forwarding my request and the Gunma report to the director and the president of SAA. Hope this makes a kind of signal for our colleagues in the U.S.

As to the publication you offer, I can circulate it across archival networks if it is permitted to create PDF files from the publication for this purpose.

Thank you again for your attention and encouragement. I am leaving office this afternoon on a business trip to Okayama prefectural archives and back on Saturday, and pardon me that my response could get slow during this period.

Best, Kazuya

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What steps might SAA take to assist our Japanese colleagues in mitigating the impact on public records of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami?
2. Should SAA, as suggested in Tominaga's initial message, consider seeking funding to "organize a survey team to visit the affected municipalities"?
3. Would provision of such SAA publications as Ritzenthaler volume on preservation of archival records or other publications on disaster planning be useful? Could they be distributed online? Would SAA be willing to lift its copyright restrictions for this purpose?
4. Should SAA take advantage of the expertise within the Society of Southwest Archivists and SAA itself to launch a nationwide fundraising effort to supply funds to a selected trustworthy archival or relief organization in Japan specifically for the purpose(s) of public records identification, recovery and, where necessary, replacement with digital alternatives?

Survey on Damaged Public Records at Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture Gunma Prefectural Archives

Date: June 1, 2011 (Wed) 1:15 – 3:15pm

Location: Temporary office of the Rikuzentakata City Hall

Surveyors: Mamoru Tomioka, Director, Gunma Prefectural Archives; Shoji Okada, Assistant Director, Gunma Prefectural Archives; Tetsumo Kodaka, Educational Supervisor, Gunma Prefectural Archives

Participants: Kim Kyung Nam, Associate Professor, Institute for Sustainability, Research and Education, Hosei University; ... Matsuura, temporary staff, Hosei University

Participants from Rikuzentakata: Tokuji Chiba, Bureau Chief, Rikuzentakata City Assembly; Masafumi Yamada, Assistant Bureau Chief (Prefectural employee), Rikuzentakata City Assembly

1. Damage and Losses Caused by Earthquake and Tsunami at Rikuzentakata

1) Roughly 90% of the city's center was completely destroyed. Number of buildings destroyed: 3,159

2) Number of affected households: 4,026; Destroyed residences: 3,614; Significantly damaged residences: 105; partially damaged residences: 307 *Roughly half of the total number of households (8,068) as of January, 2011.

3) Death Toll and other Data

- Total Population: 24,246 (based on total population registered in Japan's Basic Resident Registers Network as of March 11, 2011)
- Number of people confirmed alive: 22,132 (as of 6:00pm, May 27, 2011)
- Death toll (from earthquake) : 1,117 * Count for those bodies whose identities have been confirmed and for whom a death notice was submitted.
- Death toll (from other causes): 82 *deaths caused by illnesses, accidents, etc.
- Number of people missing: 652; Number of people for whom safety confirmation requests were received or whose safety status is being confirmed: 26
- Death toll announced by police: 1,508 (including those who died outside the city)

4) The Current City Hall and Conditions in Downtown Rikuzentakata

Long trailers used as temporary city hall (a prefabricated building to be used as a temporary city hall building is now under construction. June 1, 2011)





Interview.



The Rikuzentakata Civic Cultural Centre where the tsunami went over the roof.



The Capital Hotel (Sen Masao) stands in the ruins near the sea. Taken from the tsunami-hit city hall building.

2. Survey Overview:

1) Condition of the City Hall Building and the Death Toll of City Employees

The tsunami waves rushed up to the rooftop of the three-story city hall building. Although the building's outer surface appears to still be intact, there was significant damage inside. Windows were torn, ceilings fell, and the floors were covered with documents and rubble leaving no room to walk around. Of the roughly 270 city employees, about 200 working at city hall headquarters, 68 died. Operations at the city hall came to a complete halt. Iwate Prefecture and Nagoya city sent their help, 8 and 33 employees respectively, to assist with the administrative work.

The tsunami-ravaged Rikuzentakata city hall building (Taken on June 1, 2011)



Inside the Rikuzentakata City Hall building (Taken on June 1, 2011).



Inside the Rikuzentakata City Hall building (Taken on June 1, 2011).



2) How Public Records were Kept before the Disaster

Active records were used in the offices of each department. Permanent records were stored in two-story storage rooms inside the Disaster Prevention Building on steel storage shelves.

Description of storage rooms:

Width 8m; Length 66m

Contains twelve 5.5m x 8m spans

Each span has 12 shelves with five 2.4m rows

Total length of shelves:

12 spans x 12 x 2.4m = 345.6m

Volume of permanent records kept in storage rooms (estimate):

345.6m x 5 shelves x 80% (presumed occupancy rate) = 1382.4m



The Disaster Prevention Building containing the storage rooms (Taken on June 1, 2011).

Damage inside the storage rooms (Taken on June 1, 2011).



An enormous amount of public records await salvage.

3) The Tsunami Aftermath

Although the Disaster Prevention building saved the permanent records from being lost, the tsunami waves destroyed the doors to the storage rooms, allowing the seawater to rush inside. The steel storage shelves were crushed out of shape, leaving it difficult to step into the rooms.

Most of the active records were washed away in the tsunami. A portion of the remaining records deemed usable were collected and taken to the prefabricated temporary city hall building by city employees. The records are now in use while being dried out.

Salvaged public records placed outside the temporary city hall (Taken on June 1, 2011).



Salvaged public records placed outside the temporary city hall (Taken on June 1, 2011).



Salvaged public records remain in their cardboard boxes (Taken on June 1, 2011).



Records scattered across the floor inside the the tsunami-ravaged city hall building.



The Japan Self-Defense Force moved a portion (probably less than half) of the permanent records from the second floor of the storage rooms, where the tsunami waves rushed in and knocked down the shelves, to the second-floor hallway (approx. 70 meters long) of the tsunami-hit, abandoned city hall building. The records were stacked on the floor and covered with a tarp. Although the surfaces of the documents are beginning to dry, the inside is still moist and is beginning to mold. Many wet records remain scattered in the second floor of the Disaster Prevention Building.

Permanent records stacked in the hallway (Taken on June 1, 2011).



Permanent records stacked in the hallway (Taken on June 1, 2011).



Public records that are beginning to mold (Taken on June 1, 2011).



An employee looking for public records to salvage (Taken on June 1, 2011).



4) Measures to Rescue Public Records

According to town hall employees, the salvaging of cultural properties is already taking place. Cultural heritage rescuers from Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs are surveying the disaster-struck areas and their findings will be taken to cold storage companies in Sendai.

As for rescuing public records, however, not even the total volume of records can be determined as the public records registry has washed away. There is therefore a need to catalog the surviving records. Right now, providing assistance those affected by the disaster is of utmost importance, and rescuing public records has taken a back seat. As a result, very little has been done to salvage the records.

If the decision is made to salvage public records, city officials say, active records would be rescued first, followed by non-active, permanent records. However, finding storage space for the records and staff to carry out the rescue efforts appear to be obstacles.

The abandoned city hall building is expected to be torn down soon, and a new temporary prefabricated city hall building is now under construction. If the current temporary city hall is moved into the prefabricated building, the old space could be used to store the rescued records.

3. Impressions

The permanent records remain scattered in the second floor of the abandoned city hall building and are still moist. If no action is taken, the mold will continue to spread and once dry, the pages may stick together, preventing the pages from being opened. Therefore, there is a need to consider measures to salvage the records as soon as possible. Because of the enormous volume of records, the rescue mission cannot be accomplished by a single municipality or organization. In addition, rescuing all of the records is not possible and there is no other choice but to select the records to rescue based on an order of priority, according to the degree of damage, importance, etc.

On top of that, dealing with public records can be complicated due to privacy related issues. While the section chief in charge of public records at Rikuzaantakata city hall has requested civil servants, who are trained in handling records that contain private information properly, to engage in the support efforts, responding to such a request at a time of emergency will be difficult.

4. Requests made by Rikuzentakata City Employees

Our city's top priorities are to assist the earthquake and tsunami victims as well as rehabilitate the city. Rescuing public records is not something that we can do right now. We ask that the present state of public records be surveyed, and the findings be shared with us. We would also like you to consider systematic measures for rescuing the public records. We would like to know how we can ask for assistance from the national government (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications), the National Governor's Association, and the Japan Association of City Mayors. If there is anything we need to do to allow these things to happen, please let us know.

Survey on Damaged Public Records at Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture Gunma Prefectural Archives

Date: June 2, 2011 (Thu) 9:15 – 10:15am

Location: General Affairs Section, Temporary office of the Minamisanriku Town Hall (Minamisanriku, Miyagi)

Surveyors: Mamoru Tomioka, Director, Gunma Prefectural Archives; Shoji Okada, Assistant Director, Gunma Prefectural Archives; Tetsumo Kodaka, Educational Supervisor, Gunma Prefectural Archives

Participants: Kim Kyung Nam, Associate Professor, Institute for Sustainability, Research and Education, Hosei University; ... Matsuura, temporary staff, Hosei University

Participants from Minamisanriku: Akimi Yamauchi, Chief Clerk of Property Management, General Affairs Section, Minamisanriku Town Hall

1. Damage and Losses Caused by Earthquake and Tsunami at Minamisanriku (Confirmed data as of 3:00pm on Sunday April 3, 2011)

1) Human Toll (Source: Asahi Shimbun, June 5, 2011)

Population: Roughly 18,000; Dead: 592; Missing: 660

2) Damaged Buildings (rough estimate)

Tokura district: 520 (Damage ratio: 75%)

Shizugawa district: 2,020 (Damage ratio: 75%)

Iriya district: 10 (Damage ratio: 75%)

Utatsu district: 780 (Damage ratio: 75%)

Total: 3,330 (Damage ratio: 62%)

Residences: 3,880 completely or partially destroyed (Source: Asahi Shimbun, June 5, 2011)

3) Damaged Public Facilities and Buildings

Shizugawa district:

Township Administration Building No. 1, Township Administration Building No. 2, Disaster Prevention Office Building, Shizugawa Health Center, Minamisanriku Volunteer Center, Minamisanriku Day Service Center, Shizugawa Public Hall, Minami Sanriku Library, Arato Child Care Center, Research Institute for Utilization of Maritime Resources, Shizugawa Public Hospital, Minamisanriku Local Wholesale Market, Minamisanriku Water and Sewer Services Office, Minamisanriku Downtown Community Center, Sodehama Fishing Community Wastewater Treatment Facility, etc.

Tokura District:

Tokura Elementary School, Tokura Junior High School, Tokura Child Care Center, Tokura Public Hall, Shizugawa Nature Center, Hadenya Fishing Community Wastewater Treatment Facility

Utatsu District:

Minamisanriku Town Utatsu Branch Office, Utatsu Health Center, Natari Elementary School, Minamisanriku Fisheries Promotion Center

The tsunami-ravaged Disaster Prevention Office building (Taken on June 2, 2011).



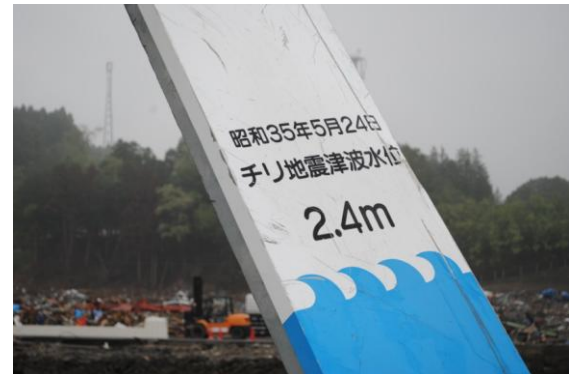
Over half of the town hall employees in charge of carrying out the Disaster Prevention Action Plans who evacuated to the roof died.

All that is left of the town hall building is the concrete foundation in the foreground. See the Minamisanriku Town Hall website for photos from when the tsunami struck.



A seawall and floodgate near Shizugawa Port (Taken on June 2, 2011).

The tsunami-ravaged Shizugawa Public Hospital building (Taken on June 2, 2011).



A warning sign for the tsunami triggered by the Great Chilean Earthquake of 1960.

2. Survey Overview:

1) Condition of the Town Hall Building and the Death Toll of Town Employees

The town hall building was demolished and the rubble has already been cleaned up. The Disaster Prevention Office building next to the town hall building is in a sorrowful state as all that remains are the steel pillars. Immediately after the earthquake struck, the town hall employees headed for their assigned building as specified in the Disaster Prevention Action Plans. A team of employees were in an emergency session with the mayor in the Disaster Prevention Office building when they heard that a tsunami was approaching. Upon receiving the news, they evacuated to the



Mr. Yamauchi who accepted our interview request.

rooftop of the three-story high building. The tsunami waves rose two meters above the rooftop leaving only ten employees alive. Of the 337 total employees, 36 died. Town hall operations came to a complete halt. Shinshiro city, Aichi has sent its employees to help out with the administrative work.

Interview (General Affairs Section,
Taken on June 2, 2011).



The prefabricated town hall building
(Taken on June 2, 2011).



Employees from Shinshiro, Aichi helping out.



The prefabricated town hall building sent as
emergency relief by Japan's Ministry of Land,
Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism.



2) How the Records were Kept before the Disaster

Permanent records were stored in the third floor of the Disaster Prevention Office Building.

3) The Tsunami Aftermath

Except for a group of family registers, all active records (kept in the city hall building) and permanent records (kept in the Disaster Prevention Office building) were washed away by the tsunami. However, a portion of records related to construction that were kept in a separate building survived. Family registers and taxation records, which are used at the town hall on a daily basis, were digitalized and saved onto computers. Although these records were saved in both paper and digital format, neither survived the tsunami. Records used for every day work duties were obtained from Miyagi Prefecture and neighboring municipalities. A portion of salvaged public records have been stored in an abandoned junior high school. However, no decisions have been made with regard to how these records will be managed.

4) Measures to Rescue Public Records

The majority of the town's public records washed away in the tsunami and there are currently no measures in place to rescue them. According to town hall employees, the first necessary records, once town hall operations resume, would be Basic Resident Registries and residence certificates.

3. Impressions

Rubble from what is left of the town hall building has already been cleaned up and no surviving records appeared to be near the building. Debris remains scattered across the Disaster Prevention Office building, where the permanent records were kept, and the conditions there are such that looking for public records does not seem appropriate.

For the time being, in order to provide relief for those in the region affected by the disaster, recovering active records (i.e. Basic Residence Registries) should be prioritized over looking for and salvaging tsunami-affected public records. Once that is done, it may be time rescue permanent records to preserve them as historical records. That is how awful the situation looked in Minamisanriku.

4. Requests made by Minamisanriku Town Hall Employees

With all of our public records gone, carrying out town office operations has been difficult.

Right now, the focus is on providing relief for those affected by the disaster and coming up with plans for recovery. With the mood here, debating whether or not to rescue public records does not seem appropriate. Still, public records will be necessary in carrying out town hall operations. We would appreciate any suggestions with respect to what needs be done under the current circumstances and what needs to be done in carrying out work duties when public records are missing.

Survey on Damaged Public Records at Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture Gunma Prefectural Archives

Date: June 2, 2011 (Thu) 1:15 – 3:00pm

Location: Onagawa Second Elementary School, temporary building for Onagawa Town Hall

Surveyors: Mamoru Tomioka, Director, Gunma Prefectural Archives; Shoji Okada, Assistant Director, Gunma Prefectural Archives; Tetsumo Kodaka, Educational Supervisor, Gunma Prefectural Archives

Participants: Kim Kyung Nam, Associate Professor, Institute for Sustainability, Research and Education, Hosei University; ... Matsuura, temporary staff, Hosei University

Participants from Onagawa: Kimiya Kimura, Chief, Department of Taxation, 2 employees from the Department of Taxation

1. Damage and Losses Caused by Earthquake and Tsunami at Onagawa (Source: Asahi Shimbun, June 5, 2011)

1) The flatland areas were practically wiped away. Director Tomioka of the Gunma Prefectural Archives observed that of the areas that were investigated in this survey (namely Rikuzentakata, Minamisanriku, Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, Onagawa, Iwanuma, and Minamisoma), the damage in Onagawa was worse than anywhere else.

2) Number of destroyed residences: Approx. 4,370

3) Death toll and other data

- Dead: 488; Missing: 450

- Population: 10,016; Number of households: 3,852 (Source: Onagawa town website)

4) Damage caused by the tsunami



(Source: Specialized website showing damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami)

The tsunami-ravaged Onagawa Town Hall building (Taken on June 2, 2011).



The car at the entrance was tossed by the tsunami waves.



A shrine on a hill behind the damaged town hall building (Taken on June 2, 2011).



This building toppled over along with its foundation (downtown Onagawa).



2. Survey Overview:

1) Condition of the Town Hall Building and the Safety of Town Employees

Although the exterior of the town hall building appears to still be intact, there is still rubble and debris scattered inside the building. All of the town employees, with the exception of one who is on a leave of absence, are safe. Operations at the town hall have come to a complete halt.

A temporary town hall has been set up at Onagawa Second Elementary School, which is located on a nearby hill.

Public records scattered inside the tsunami-hit town hall building.



2) How the Records were Kept before the Disaster

Active and permanent records are believed to have been stored inside the town hall building. However, this has not been confirmed.

3) The Tsunami Aftermath

As a general rule, permanent records (minutes for town assembly meetings, financial statements, official bulletins, etc.) have been digitalized and are stored in a separate location (Hachioji city) to serve as backup data. The disks containing these records, which were stored in a safe, was discovered in good condition and are now being used to carry out daily town hall duties.

In April, about 100 binders containing land and real estate registries that had been stored in a treasurer safe in the tsunami-hit town hall building were moved to an elementary school. We confirmed that the records are now kept in steel shelves and lockers in a storage room at the elementary school.

Despite the fact that parts of the binder surfaces are already beginning to mold and some of the writing is not legible due to ink smearing, we believe that partial recovery is possible if immediate action is taken. However, employees at the town hall are busy attending to the needs of town residents who were affected by the tsunami and earthquake, and the town cannot afford to appoint employees or volunteers to carry out the rescue efforts.

Disaster-affected records kept in an elementary school storage room.



Black mold developing on public records
(Taken on June 2, 2011).



Public records with smeared ink.



Public records remain scattered on the first floor of the damaged town hall building, and discovered among them were records that appeared to be parts of land and real estate registries and family registers.

4) Measures to Rescue Public Records

In response to the requests of town hall employees in charge, we removed the damaged land and real estate registries from the steel shelves while still wet and placed them on the floor to allow better air circulation for quicker drying. We also sprayed the records with alcohol to keep the



mold from spreading and air dried them.

We also borrowed one binder each from the land and real estate registries (roughly 100 binders, Department of Taxation) and family registers (roughly 100 binders, Department of Civil Affairs), under the Gunma Prefectural Archives' director's name. We will use these to consider measures to salvage public records.

As of June 3, the records are being air dried at the Gunma Prefectural Archives with interleaves placed between the pages.

3. Impressions

Although we were unable to get an idea of the total volume of lost records, in looking at the above mentioned land and real estate registries and family register records which we investigated in this survey, we have come to the conclusion that while a complete recovery of the records may not be possible, partial recovery is possible if immediate action is taken.

However, a large volume of other public records remain abandoned in the first floor of the tsunami-ravaged town hall building and measures for managing these records need to be considered.

Since Gunma Prefecture is already involved in relief efforts for the town of Onagawa, we believe that measures to rescue public records as part of the relief records need to be considered.

4. Requests Made by Onagawa Town Hall Employees

Here at Onagawa, permanent records for the most part have been digitalized and we are using those for our daily work needs. The data has also been backed up and we should not have any problems carrying out town hall operations for the time being. While records concerning land ownership can be obtained from the Legal Affairs Bureau, determining changes in land ownership (indicated in land and real estate registries) will be more difficult. In considering ways to rehabilitate the town, reassuring land owners that they are being treated fairly will be important. Therefore, we would be grateful if your prefectural government could engage in rescuing public records that have been affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

5. The Decision of the Gunma Prefectural Government

Upon discussion with the Prefectural Office after the completion of the survey, the Gunma Prefectural government made the decision to rescue public records affected by the earthquake and tsunami in Onagawa. We are now considering measures to salvage the records.