

Giving Back

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In the 19-1/2 years that I have served as archivist for the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, the summer of 2008 was the first time I had the opportunity to mentor a summer intern. It was a new experience for me and has proven to be very valuable, both in having an extra pair of hands to do the work and in furthering my own learning curve. In a manner of speaking, mentoring an intern is a way of “giving back” for the archival education I received from PITT in 1991. I hope the summary of my experience will be a source of inspiration for others who serve as “Lone Arrangers.”

The University of Pittsburgh’s School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) provides for summer placement as a method of extending students’ academic goals to practical work experience. Students must submit, with their application listing the courses they have completed, a proposal outlining their academic goals, must work a minimum of 150 hours and, at the end of the term, turn in a summary of accomplishments relating the field experience to those goals. Once the student’s application has been

accepted, the site supervisor is required to sign an agreement which outlines their responsibilities to the student and provide a written evaluation report to the student’s faculty advisor at the end of the internship.

With these things in mind, to plan for her time in the archives I made a list of nine areas, with a number of projects under each area that seemed appropriate for an intern to undertake, then chose those that I felt might fit best with the courses that she had taken and the goals that she hoped to achieve while she was here. Rather than have her work on my backlog of unprocessed collections—which would have been extremely helpful to me but would have consumed the remainder of the summer and been very narrow from a learning standpoint—my objective was to give her a broad sampling of the range of duties that someone in a small, one to two-person archive might encounter. I used the notes section of the Microsoft Outlook calendar to journal her hours, assignments and progress, and since SLIS did not have an evaluation form on line, I downloaded the Site Supervisor’s Evaluation Form designed

by San Jose State University as a guide to help focus my thoughts for the eventual evaluation report I would need to turn in.

The first day in the office, I had my intern sign an Intern Contract and introduced her to the diocesan staff and staff of the Anglican Communion Network, our sister organization. She then spent the day looking over materials on the diocesan structure, staff procedures, history of the diocese and Archives Policies and Procedures manual to help her become familiar with the environment in which she would be working. The next day we discussed the information I had given her to read, talked about the organization of our archives, and she began work on her first project, which was to appraise and organize one box of a multi-box collection that was in the process of being prepared for off-site storage, but would not be fully processed.

I had already completed some work on the collection. The box on which she worked contained four years of bulletins, parish newsletters and some miscellaneous material. I had her appraise the materials in the box, setting aside those items on which she had questions. We discussed her choices and talked about sampling issues. For one not familiar with the workings of a religious archive, she did very well at diagnosing how to handle the materials. Specifically, we discussed sampling techniques, but in the end decided to keep the entire four years of both newsletters and bulletins when she was unable to locate any others in the previously prepared boxes. In this collection, she also found a small “magnetic” (sticky) photo album. As her second project, she made out a conservation sheet, then reformatted the contents of the album. Because it was only a few pages long, her choice was to place it in an acid-free folder instead of a binder. A note on the conservation sheet provided future conservators the opportunity to place the pages in an acid-free binder should they

wish. The project was well done, but initiated a discussion on the importance of preserving the integrity of collections and of individual items, such as photo albums and scrapbooks. When she had completed the box, she filled out the Iron Mountain forms and made copies for the file, so that we could have the boxes picked up.

Her next major project was to have been processing, for permanent storage, two of the seven boxes from one of our churches which had been closed since 1999. However, an opportunity to provide consultation on an archives collection for one of our open churches came in and I felt she would profit more from accompanying me. Her assignment during our consult was to take notes on what she found at the site and write a synopsis and recommendations that would be sent, along with mine, to the rector and vestry of the church. We made it a “Field Trip” and included a visit to the archives of another church close by on which I had consulted about 10 years ago. The purpose of the visit to this archive was to show her an example of how using the consulting services of the diocesan archivist, and having administrative support, can produce a viable archival solution for historical collections with little space and budget.

Following completion of the recommendations for the church, she began work on the second collection. She was assigned the first two boxes which contained materials from a desk unit, arranged alphabetically from A-Z. Because of her unfamiliarity with Anglicanism and because it was her first box of “regular” materials on which she worked, she went through the first box twice—once to weed, and then to remove staples, rubber bands, etc., file in acid free folders, and box. We went over her work together and she did an admirable job, considering how little she knows about the workings of the denomination. The second box went more quickly, and when she had

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finished we had one box, well documented, instead of two. She created a container list and plans were to enter the seven box collection and the completed box into my PastPerfect database.

At this point, I threw in another project not on the original list. Since my column for *Trinity News*, (the bi-monthly diocesan magazine) was due, I asked her to write a 500-700 word article on her experience of being an archival intern for the diocese and what she had learned both about archival work and the organization—if she could work it into her schedule. With all the work she was doing for her Pitt studies, I was impressed at her quick response and quality of her article.

Throughout her internship, I assigned her several genealogical research projects which involved searching the registers of closed churches and communicating, either by written letter or via e-mail, with the researcher. One instance required that she fill out a Letter of Transfer form for a parishioner transferring from a closed to open church. All were completed in a timely and professional manner.

We also did a number of routine things that are necessary for maintenance of the collection, such as re-shelving boxes of materials that had been pulled for a major research project and relocating a number of books from the repository to the archival library collection in the Processing Center so I would have more storage space for

processed materials. She also joined the diocesan staff for a retirement gathering for the administrator of the diocese.

Another issue that arose during her time here was what I like to call “creative archiving”—a technique which works well in a small archives with low budget and manpower. It basically entails using what archival materials you have on hand to simulate purchased preservation items that require a larger monetary output. She put this to use nicely when processing a large Magnetic album for later conservation efforts.

With schedule adjustments and unforeseen emergencies, she accumulated 158 hours. She had a well-defined work ethic, took instruction well and her enthusiasm was contagious. From her first day, when all I had her do was read over diocesan materials, she paid careful attention to directions and tackled every task I gave her cheerfully, even when she was not feeling well. If she had any serious flaw, it's that she talked herself through her tasks—out loud—but we discussed how that might not work too well in a large archives and she worked on it. Although her internship officially ended in mid-July, she decided she would like to continue to work with me as a volunteer until the end of August, so I benefited even more from some extra time. I hope that she got as much out of working with me as I did having her here.