

USER GROUP MEETING
The National Archives at College Park (Archives 2)
May 21, 2010

OPENING

Susan Cummings, Acting Director of Access Programs, introduced herself and welcomed everyone to the User Group meeting.

AGENDA

1. Briefing on Archives 2 Reference Studies – Ann Cummings

Over the past six months, staff at Archives 2 has conducted several studies on finding aids, refiles, and the correspondence process. Data collected on the reference process will be analyzed to determine what practices will be changed, kept, or updated. A follow-up survey will be conducted this summer at Archives 2.

In addition, an initial survey will begin this summer at Archives 1. Both surveys should be completed by the end of September; but throughout the summer, users will be provided updates on these studies. Ann reminded users to complete a survey form each time they visit NARA, so that the studies include as many experiences with the reference processes as possible.

2. Update on Presenting the Know Your Records Series as Webinars - Andrea Matney

Andrea provided background on the Know Your Records (KYR) program. She has received requests to put the weekly KYR lectures up on-line. Her research has shown that since we are a government agency, we must adhere to the Section 508 regulations to offer reasonable accommodation to all types of audiences, including those who are hearing and visually impaired, and those with motor impairment. To be 508 compliant, NARA would need to provide captioning of the text to the hearing impaired; an audio description of what is captured in the video to the visually impaired; and verbalized commands for those who have motor impairment.

At this time, NARA does not have these capabilities; no staff to test this process; and the cost is prohibitive. However, NARA is looking into an agency-wide contract for these services.

Users stated that the Library of Congress (LoC) puts sessions online, and suggested asking the Foundation of the National Archives (FNA) to help with the cost. Susan Cummings asked Andrea to contact Pam Wright for updates on an agency-wide contract for these services.

Questions arose on the availability of the KYR recorded sessions and PowerPoint slides. Jessie White has sent the DVDs of the KYR sessions to NARA's library and library staff will be compiling a list of the sessions, making the sessions readily available to the public for viewing. Andrea will check on putting NARA speakers' slides online.

3. Update on Current Digitization Activities - Erin Townsend

Erin briefed attendees on the Ancestry.com digitization project. Both NARA and Ancestry employees work at the Silver Spring facility, which opened in April of 2009. NARA prepares records for digitization and conducts quality control checks. Ancestry scans the images.

Both staffs ensure that every page has been imaged. NARA does a page-by-page quality control check on 5% of the boxes scanned. If a problem arises, mistakes are rectified immediately and the percentage of review on that camera operator's work is increased.

Recently, 6.92% of the imaged boxes were reviewed from one project (9 boxes of 130 total boxes in this project). The highest error rate for any one box was 0.4%. The overall error rate for all the boxes reviewed was 0.07%. Erin said that the missing pages were digitized and inserted at the correct location in the files immediately, before transferring the electronic files for further processing.

Currently, there are over 300 collections from NARA on the Ancestry.com website, with all but one done by Ancestry before its agreement with NARA. Erin showed the post-agreement addition - Reports of the Deaths of American Citizens, compiled 01/1963-12/1974. Information with these records includes the box label elements: record group number and title as well as series title. This information is of course very important for both NARA staff and its experienced researchers.

Meeting attendees asked if other boxes are checked when errors are found. NARA does audit additional boxes of that particular operator until a box comes up clean of errors. [Post-meeting correction: An operator must image two consecutive boxes perfectly before the audit returns to the 5% level.] Although some attendees felt that anything less than a 100% check for accuracy is unacceptable, others felt that the low error rate suggests that the sampling is realistic and acceptable. The nature of most missed documents is a light stamp or mark on an otherwise blank page.

Susan Cummings stated that NARA does not want errors; but if there are errors, NARA can check the originals. She also asked users to report any inkling of missed records so that originals can be checked to clarify their concerns. In the meantime, NARA considers that digitizing thousands of documents and having them available online with unprecedented indexing is worth the small percentage of error. The amount of records online far surpasses what we have been able to make available in the past.

When questioned further about the unhappiness with any errors, Susan asked what they would like NARA to do. One response was that Ancestry should realize that mistakes are not acceptable and should be frustrated when mistakes are made. He objects to a company management mentality that allows for a small percentage of mistakes.

Public access to and cost of the Ancestry.com website was questioned. Mary Rephlo stated that, while there is a fee for users at home, there is no fee for using partner websites at any NARA facility nationwide, and many libraries provide free access to these websites as well. The partnership agreements, which are available on the NARA website, require the partners to transfer copies of the required descriptive metadata and the digitized images to NARA. The metadata may be added to ARC immediately. Five years after digitization by partners, NARA may use the digitized images with no restrictions. Not knowing what the agency's capabilities and resources will be in the future, NARA cannot commit now to specific plans at the five-year point,

Another comment was that when users feel that information is missing on the microfilm, NARA should allow researchers to order the box to check the records; and she has not been allowed this check of the records. Susan said that if there is a legitimate cause for thinking that there are documents missing on the microfilm, staff should at least check the records for the user, insuring that nothing is missing from the microfilm.

4. General Questions

Susan asked for additional general questions. NARA will study and address the following topics:

- Pull slips (still being studied)
- Access to bulk copy machine in the east room at Archives 1.
- Green bag use at Archives 1.

UPCOMING USER GROUP MEETINGS

June 25, 2010 (Archives I, in room G-24 at 1PM)

July – No meeting

Please send agenda items to Diane Dimkoff or Nancy Fortna, so that staff can attend to address the issues.

ADJOURNMENT - 1:45 PM