

## State Historical Records Advisory Board

Meeting, February 29, 2024

1-2pm (virtual)

Present: Greg Crawford, Chad Owen, Heather Bollinger, Steve Landes, Ervin Jordan, Ruth Welch, Chris Bissex, Zach Hottel

Absent: Lori Ann Terjesen, Brittany Jones, Bernadette Battle, Audrey Davis, Sara Townsend

### Agenda:

1. Welcome new Board members
2. Review of Preservation survey and Virtual Town Hall; next steps
3. Role of SHRAB going forward

Greg opened the meeting by introducing himself and asking the Board members to introduce themselves as well. He welcomed Chris and Ruth as new appointees, and Prof. Jordan as a returning veteran Board member.

Greg opened the discussion about the Virtual Town Hall by noting that there were about 60 participants, which was very positive. Roughly half of the participants were court clerks. One of the main takeaways was that local historical societies are suffering – they are often volunteer-only but have very valuable historical material and there is concern about their preservation both now and in the future when the present generation retires. Another big question was grants: what grants are available and how one can learn to write a successful grant application. Heather noted that there was quite a bit of conversation about administrative issues such as HVAC being turned off over weekends, building issues, etc. that were difficult to address. Steve pointed at the survey results as showing that local governments in particular, whether supporting a local historical society or managing their own records, seem to have a lack of understanding of the importance of retaining and preserving them. Zach echoed Steve's thought that SHRAB might be able to help with the education of the overhead agencies of the importance of the records. He also expressed surprise that there were fewer cries for things like digitization and the like than just basic support like staffing or supplies.

Ruth discussed the realities of dealing with a smaller county where fiscal resources are already stretched to the breaking point. Most of the grants that she sees being received are for digitization which may not be where priorities should lie. Prof. Jordan observed that archives and history are the forgotten stepchildren of local government; localities have a strong tendency to look to the state and federal governments to support and fund such pursuits. He also noted that in his prior experience with SHRAB that often Virginia institutions would apply for grants but would be unsuccessful even after extensive effort was expended. He looked to the SHRAB and to the LVA to take a leadership role in thrusting this issue further to the fore in state government.

Greg expressed a wish for some sort of granting program for local historical societies roughly equivalent to the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program, but it would take a significant groundswell from the Commonwealth to make that happen. But with new leadership at LVA, this may be an opportunity to pursue that. In the meanwhile, the question to be posed is what SHRAB can do in the short term to help. Greg believed the town hall format worked well, and looking forward to Preservation Month in

May we look to have an LVA conservator provide an online workshop to local and state repositories. In addition, looking ahead to Archives Month in October, if we could offer some form of education on grants and grant writing, he believes that can be well-received. SHRAB has added, and will continue to add, granting organization links to its web site, but moving forward to training on how to write a good grant application would be a concrete step to help connect our users with the granting agencies. SHRAB would also encourage Virginia applicants to send grant drafts to us for review to make sure we can help them present the best possible application.

Prof. Jordan pointed out that the major funding agencies, NEH and NHPRC, have largely ceased offering grants on preservation in favor of accessibility grants. He also suggested that local historical societies might tend to paint themselves to their local governments as “look what wonderful things we have” without being willing to acknowledge their shortfalls and problems; perhaps SHRAB could help educate repositories on how to best lobby their local governments. Ruth agreed and emphasized the importance of tailoring your grant applications carefully to the mission and focus of the granting agency. Heather observed that the Virginia Association of Museums offers an opportunity for museums or historical homes to nominate objects for preservation grants. Zach followed up Prof. Jordan’s thoughts in suggesting that SHRAB could act as an advocate in terms of calling attention to the successes of our constituent repositories to the wider community. He also noted that not only do the clerks have access to CCRP grant funds, but the in-person visits from LVA local records archivists are also extremely helpful, so a parallel for that sort of in-person support could also be valuable.

Greg expressed a willingness to make a personal appearance with local repositories and try to leverage his visits with local government or media to highlight the repositories’ needs. Prof. Jordan noted that there might be an unexpressed expectation that SHRAB or LVA provide monetary support, and Greg agreed that that expectation would have to be gently deflected.

NHPRC offers SHRAB programming grants, Greg said, but neither LVA nor SHRAB have the staff to process them, and in conversations with other state archives, many consider the effort put into applying for, managing, and reporting out the grants is a situation of “the juice isn’t worth the squeeze.” With new leadership at LVA, we may be in a different position to have staff directly dedicated to SHRAB, but at the same time, NHPRC’s grants coordinator position having been open for roughly two years is also resulting in a lot of frustration from state archives and SHRABs around the nation in terms of timing and responsiveness with the NHPRC.

Looking forward, Heather suggested hijacking LVA’s social media presence in lieu of starting a separate SHRAB media presence. Greg believes that is a possibility. Zach suggested looking at training opportunities that SHRAB could provide to create some value for our constituents and thereby create some buy-in in terms of showing them that we are willing to provide something for them even if it’s not direct financial support. In response to Greg’s question, he recommended some virtual training as a start. We might also be able to set up a sort of showcase for repositories to present their projects and accomplishments. Prof. Jordan raised the possibility to piggyback on any meetings like VAGARA or MARAC or the like, just to raise our visibility. Zach pointed out the Virginia state MARAC caucus will be June 14<sup>th</sup> in Lexington and they can carve out some time for SHRAB. Heather suggested even something as simple as a virtual walkthrough of archival suppliers’ web sites and making supply orders, perhaps setting up a “\$200 donation drive for archival boxes” or similar. Steve concurred with the idea of starting with virtual training but offered his support for the creation of a local historical grant program,

noting that it would surely be a long road but it has to start somewhere. He suggested leveraging the circuit courts and CCRP to build relationships with those local repositories. In discussing whether there was a central group of local historical societies, Zach offered that the closest equivalent would be VAM, the Virginia Association of Museums. No one else was familiar with another overarching association of local repositories.

For next steps, we're going to move forward with working on the conservation workshop for Preservation Month in May with LVA's conservator as speaker. Heather suggested that if Greg does an "official" visit to a local repository, if he made a sort of bullet point list of what he did and didn't do, she might be willing as a SHRAB member to make similar visits, and Steve concurred.