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Randall S. Gooden
Clayton State University

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Georgia's Circuit Rider Archivist Program: A Trip through Learning and Service

Randall S. Gooden

The term “circuit rider” harkens back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when judges rode from county seat to county seat and preachers took to the pulpit of a different church each Sunday. In 2005, a new kind of circuit rider appeared on the scene—the circuit rider archivist.

The Circuit Rider Archivist (CRA) Program is a creation of the Georgia Archives and the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board (GHRAB). It serves an outreach mission to local governments and historical repositories throughout Georgia in the continuing efforts of the two associated state government organizations to increase their range of service. The program provides on-site consultation on archives and records issues by a professional archivist.

This concept is rooted in two theories. The first recognizes the responsibility of service among members of the archival profession. The modern archivist recognizes that in order to gain support for programming goals, attract researchers, and compete for funding from both public and private sources, his or her world must extend beyond the limited confines imposed not only by physical surroundings, but often by one's own imagination. Service cannot be limited to the occasional committee meeting,

conference session, or journal article with only the satisfaction of fellow archivists or institutional expectations in mind. It must reach a broader community and bring to bear the true value of the profession for our society.

The second theory takes into account the diverse nature of archives and the ambiguity of the archivist's role. Archives do not exist only in repositories that follow the standards of the profession. They also lie in corrugated boxes in buildings without air conditioning where ceilings leak and silverfish roam. Yet, those surroundings do not diminish the value of the material as sources of state, local, family, and even national history. The people who care for these materials may lack knowledge of sound archival practices but share the professional archivists' appreciation for the records under their care. They may be people who hold other responsibilities—for instance, curating museum exhibits, cataloging library books, or recording city council minutes—besides archival functions, but their part-time role does not reduce the importance of the records they keep. These people acquire records and arrange, describe, and preserve them, just as professionals do. They provide access to researchers who want information no less than do the researchers in the professional archives.

David W. Carmicheal, director of the Georgia Archives, has captured the essence of these theories:

If we are to unlock the treasures that lie buried within the collections of local historical societies, public library history rooms, and countless other repositories, we must provide tools that can be applied by people who will never receive graduate degrees in archival education. To ignore this group is to write off as lost the majority of our country's historical records. There will always be a place for the professionally trained archivist, but that does not preclude our need to recognize the contributions of non-professionals and assist them with better tools....¹

¹ David W. Carmicheal, *Organizing Archival Records: A Practical Method of Arrangement and Description for Small Archives*, 2nd ed., American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Walnut Creek, Cal.: AltaMira Press, 2004), vii.

While professional archivists have an obligation of public service that extends to assisting non-professionals in local repositories, that service is meaningful only if it is accepted. Lack of information or resources does not excuse amateur or part-time archivists from their own obligations. They must continually seek to increase their knowledge and resources and accept the help that is offered. The American Association for State and Local History has outlined these obligations:

If you are responsible for historical records, you are probably doing at least some of the work of an archivist. You may not be professionally trained or have the job title, but you are caring for and protecting some pieces of the fabric of the historical record. With that role comes a responsibility to gain and use the knowledge, resources, and tools that are available for historical records care and preservation.²

Though some employees and volunteers in local repositories do not grasp their responsibilities, the majority of them do. Professional archivists are mistaken if they equate inability to meet professional standards with lack of concern or failure to realize responsibility. An inability to meet professional standards often signals a lack of “knowledge, resources, and tools.” When offerings of support from the professional community have been made available to them on a practical basis, non-professional archivists have taken advantage of them. However, these offerings must be practical and not encumbered by unrealistic prerequisites, tangles of red tape, or professional or bureaucratic jargon. Professionals must take into account the budget realities, travel distances, and time constraints that many non-professionals face in their work.

The combination of professional archivists' responsibilities to assist those lacking information and resources and an understanding of the importance of local collections led the Georgia Archives and GHRAB to take steps to assist local archivists and their repositories. The impetus was provided by the experiences of the two organizations between 1996 and 2004.

² American Association for State and Local History, *The Basics of Archives* (CD-ROM) (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, [2006?]).

In 1996, three years after its creation, GHRAB received a two-year grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and the Georgia legislature to support thirty-seven local government archival and records-management projects. These included work in inventorying, preservation microfilming, training, and creating regional records centers, as well as the development of records-management software and organization of records-management programs. During this period, GHRAB found a wide range of quality in the design of these projects. Some smaller organizations had difficulty developing their projects or had problems implementing them.

A second effort followed in 1998 with an NHPRC grant that targeted historical repositories. Forty-one organizations received assistance with program development, preservation, access, and outreach. Staff at the Georgia Archives and GHRAB coached the employees of these repositories on their applications and fulfillment of their projects. The staff saw the need for professional guidance at the project sites.

Recognition of the need for on-site assistance increased with the start of the state-funded Historical Records Project Grant program under GHRAB in 2001. From 2001 to 2004, GHRAB funded fifty-eight archival projects through this program. Most of these dealt with access and preservation and implementation of new technologies. Staff at the Georgia Archives worked diligently to aid grant applicants, but were limited by time. "Archives staff have found it increasingly difficult to devote the necessary time to work with prospective applicants and grantees which has led to a necessary reduction in services," GHRAB explained in its proposal for the Circuit Rider Archivist Program. "Archives have found it especially difficult to meet the needs of smaller organizations."³

Organizations continued to face problems in planning and implementing archival projects as assistance from the Georgia Archives became more and more limited. Staff at the archives pinpointed several common experiences among organizations: many felt uncertain about their needs and were unsure how to

³ Georgia Office of the Secretary of State, Georgia Archives, "Georgia Circuit-Rider Archivist Regrant Project Application for Federal Assistance," June 1, 2004, 7.

improve their programs. The evident solution was professional guidance, but such guidance from within the state was lacking. In the case of the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe, help was needed to preserve twenty-two linear feet of records and to establish an on-going archival program, but with limited available assistance in Georgia an out-of-state consultant had to be hired.

In other cases, organizations lacked basic knowledge of archival and records-management practices. While visiting one board of education office, a member of GHRAB discovered sensitive student data and personal financial information in an open, unprotected area.

Other organizations did not implement grant projects as intended because of the need for professional guidance. In one example, a city government fell behind on a records inventory, and without available staff from the Georgia Archives had to turn to the local regional development center for assistance.

Still other organizations hesitated to apply for available grants because the application process seemed daunting. This proved particularly true among smaller organizations with limited staffs and budgets, many of them in South Georgia. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that agencies in the southern part of the state often had neither the time nor the money to send people to grant-writing workshops, which often were held in the Atlanta area.

In this context, GHRAB unveiled a new strategic plan in 2002. It identified three issues and a series of actions to address those issues. The board observed in Issue 2 that “those who manage historical records must understand their responsibility and competently be able to preserve and provide access to the records.”⁴ As an action item under this issue, GHRAB set the goal to “hire regionally based ‘circuit rider’ archivists to provide technical assistance and training in every region of the state.”⁵

The concept of the Circuit Rider Archivist Program arose from an understanding on the part of GHRAB and the Georgia Archives that members of the archival profession must reach out to a broader community where the nature of archives is diverse and the role of the archivist can be ambiguous. In its 2004

⁴ Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board, 2002 *Strategic Plan*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

proposal to the NHPRC for support for starting the program, GHRAB outlined the short-term goal to “provide much needed assistance” through the work of the circuit rider archivist. The board also set the long-term goal of increasing the number of professional archivists in the state, and enlisted Clayton College and State University (now Clayton State University) as a partner to explore ways to provide formal archival education in Georgia.⁶

As outlined in the application to the NHPRC, Clayton College and State University, the Georgia Archives, and GHRAB set aside money to provide for salaries and benefits for the people who would be involved in the project, plus office supplies and phone costs. The NHPRC was asked to provide funding for meals and automobile costs for the circuit rider archivist’s travels to visit organizations across the state, as well as printing and postage costs. The organizations that would be visited were asked to pay for lodging for the archivist.⁷

A major part of the request to the NHPRC involved funding for regrants to local governments and historical repositories to help them complete archival projects. The Georgia Archives and GHRAB expected that the work of the circuit rider archivist would guide the organizations which he or she visited toward appropriate and realistic projects. The application included a request for \$110,000 to fund such projects and an additional \$3,750 that could be used to supplement local organizations in the purchase of small amounts of archival supplies.⁸

SEEKING A CIRCUIT RIDER ARCHIVIST

The Georgia Archives received the requested NHPRC grant and began seeking a circuit rider archivist late in 2004. Brenda Banks, deputy director, and Anne Smith, assistant director for public services, represented the Georgia Archives, and Gene Hatfield, chair of the Department of Social Sciences, and Ray Wallace, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, represented Clayton College and State University on the search

⁶ Georgia Office of the Secretary of State, Georgia Archives, “Georgia Circuit-Rider Archivist Regrant Project Application,” 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

committee. The advertisement for the position called for an archivist to conduct site visits to historical repositories and local governments throughout Georgia and to provide assistance with archival processing and preservation. The circuit rider archivist also would aid organizations in determining if grant assistance were needed and help them obtain and implement grants. The responsibilities outlined for Clayton State included teaching an introductory class in archives at the undergraduate level, developing recommendations for a graduate program in archives, promoting the graduate program within the state, and seeking input from archival educators for the program. The committee sought a mix of archival and academic experience and qualifications, including a Ph.D.⁹ The committee conducted two rounds of searches and interviews in an effort to find a candidate with the “knowledge, skill, and ability that best matched the job requirements.”¹⁰ In May 2005, final interviews were held, and a circuit rider archivist was hired to begin work in July.

In the meantime, GHRAB solicited applications for circuit rider archivist visits and applications for regrant projects, as part of the Historical Records Project Grant Program, through a broad online and print media campaign.¹¹ The publicity and application form itself identified consultation from the circuit rider archivist as a grant. The application form asked for basic institutional and contact information and asked several open-ended questions: What is the specific activity that you want the circuit rider archivist to do for your organization? How will this activity enable your organization to better care for its records? What records are involved?¹²

The application also gave organizations the choice of listing the preferred month for their visit. The choices reflected

⁹ *Archival Outlook* (November/December 2004), 36.

¹⁰ “NHPRC Regrant Progress Report January 2005-June 2005,” <http://sos.georgia.gov/archives/who_are_we/ghrab/grant_programs/progress_report_june_2005.htm> (accessed July 1, 2007).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Circuit-Rider Archivist Consultation Grants Application Form,” Circuit Rider Archivist Files, Georgia Archives, Georgia Office of Secretary of State, Morrow, Ga. (hereafter CRA files).

the original plan that the visits would be made between the first of May and end of August 2005.¹³

With the deadline to apply set for April 1, 2005, seventy-nine organizations applied. GHRAB chose fifty-seven of these to receive visits from the circuit rider archivist. The choices were based to a large degree upon recommendations from the staff of the Georgia Archives with a view as to whether the circuit rider could meet the organization's requests and whether other Georgia Archives staff might be better able to meet the organization's needs because of the staff member's specific expertise or prior experience with the organization.

Time also became a factor in choosing organizations to participate in the program. GHRAB had anticipated approximately forty applicants.¹⁴ With nearly twice that number applying, the timeframe for the visits was increased from four months to six months.

The chosen groups included sixteen historical organizations, five libraries, four museums, seven city governments, nine county governments, eleven court systems, three school systems, one college, and one state agency. The city of Statesboro and Georgia Southern State University Museum applied jointly, as did the Meriwether County Probate Court and Superior Court, and the Pickens County Government and the Marble Valley Historical Society. Most organizations requested assistance with program development, followed by microfilming or scanning, grant assistance, program review, inventorying, arrangement and description, storage, preservation, training, and indexing. One organization wanted help choosing and acquiring a movable filing system.¹⁵

Whitfield-Murray Historical Society in Chatsworth typified the situation of many of the organizations in its application. "Our records are not well organized nor well preserved," its president

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Georgia Office of the Secretary of State, Georgia Archives, "Georgia Circuit-Rider Archivist Regrant Project Application", 2.

¹⁵ "NHPRC Regrant Progress Report January 2005-June 2005."

wrote. "Most are at least 'sorted' but that's about all." He added that "they are not easily accessible for researchers either."¹⁶

Members of the GHRAB and staff at the Georgia Archives were pleased with the coverage that the Circuit Rider Archivist Program would provide across the state. The applications for visits represented forty-four counties, some of which had never been served by GHRAB programs.

"When Archives staff notified the organizations that they were approved for a CRA visit, it generated a lot of local excitement," GHRAB reported to the NHPRC. "Many of these organizations had never applied for or received a grant of any kind in the past."¹⁷

When the circuit rider archivist assumed his duties in July 2005, he immediately saw the excitement that GHRAB reported. The applicants expressed eagerness for assistance as he contacted them. Wilkinson County Historical Society in central Georgia was among them. "We look forward to seeing you . . . as we have much to learn on the organization and display of our collection," wrote the society's president.¹⁸

The circuit rider began contacting the organizations he would serve in July to make preliminary appointments to visit. He also met with colleagues in the Georgia Archives to learn about their experiences in serving local governments and historical repositories, become familiar with the requirements for government records management in Georgia, and coordinate his work plan. July also provided time for logistical arrangements such as lodging and vehicle use. During that initial month, the circuit rider also worked with archives staff to update resource materials for his visits. These included the resource manual "Preferred Practices for Historical Repositories" and a companion self-assessment form. These tools had been developed in 1999 after GHRAB had completed an NHPRC-funded effort

¹⁶ "Circuit Rider Archivist Program Application Form—Whitfield-Murray Historical Society," 2005, CRA files.

¹⁷ "NHPRC Regrant Progress Report July 2005-December 2005," <http://sos.georgia.gov/archives/who_are_we/ghrab/grant_programs/progress_report_dec_2005.htm> (accessed May 29, 2008)

¹⁸ Marty Dominy to Randall Gooden, July 15, 2005, CRA files.

that identified minimum standards for an active and effective historical records program. As a precursor to the Circuit Rider Archivist Program, that project also endeavored “to prepare to provide group training and individualized coaching focused on bringing historical organizations up to a minimum level. . . .”¹⁹

The circuit rider archivist approached his visits as part professional archivist and part small-town official. The professional perspective was needed to provide the core value of the program and to provide an ethos of respectability. The small-town and community perspectives allowed the archivist to earn the trust of his hosts as one who sympathized with their time and budget constraints and who would work toward practical solutions to their problems rather than the often-daunting professional ideal.

The visits began in August 2005 with a trip to the Washington Historical Museum in Washington, the county seat of Wilkes County, known as the site of the last cabinet meeting of the Confederate States of America. The gist of the visit involved the advisability of transferring original Civil War letters from an inaccessible bank vault to the secure museum building. The experience in Washington initiated a pattern of hospitality reflective of community and organizational pride on the part of the host institutions. The museum director, Stephanie Macchia, became the first of many to invite the circuit rider to lunch and she extended an invitation to return later in the year for the town’s Mule Days. Such experiences emphasized the need for the archivist to pay attention not only to the archival picture and the deficiencies which he might help to correct, but also to the strengths of the organizations, which included the support of the overall community.

The first set of visits demonstrated the invaluable support of GHRAB. While visiting Augusta, Thomas Dirksen, a member of GHRAB, welcomed the circuit rider archivist to his home for dinner and aided him in obtaining a local perspective of the area. Dirksen accompanied the circuit rider on a visit to the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History and a side trip to the Augusta Genealogical Society. The regional representation of GHRAB has

¹⁹ Anne P. Smith and Jill Swiecichowski, comps., *Preferred Practices for Historical Repositories: A Resource Manual* (Atlanta: Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board, 1999), iii.

added significantly to the ability of the Circuit Rider Archivist Program to take a local perspective.

The first week of visits in the Savannah River region established routines for the circuit rider archivist and provided first-hand insight into Georgia's local governments and historical repositories. Preliminary contacts and the information on the written application provided him with a snapshot of each organization and the problems and concerns that it faced. Armed with that knowledge, the archivist sat down with the contact person at each site to discuss the organization's situation. He then toured the records-storage areas and examined the archival materials. In general, the contact people were aware that they suffered deficiencies; otherwise, they would not have sought consultation with the circuit rider archivist. An often-repeated question, posed with chagrin, was, "Have you ever seen anything this bad?" The circuit rider invariably assured his hosts that their situations were not unusual for organizations across the country with limited resources and that the worst archival settings he had seen were not in fact even in Georgia.

Following the tour, the archivist sat down again with each contact person and made preliminary observations and suggestions. Away from the archival materials, the circuit rider hoped this conversation would seem less critical than if it had taken place at the moment that a problem was observed. Once back in the office, the archivist drafted a final report for each site and incorporated research on special problems. He circulated each report among key staff at the Georgia Archives, including David Carmicheal, director; Brenda Banks, deputy director; Anne Smith, assistant director for public service; Andrew Taylor, assistant director for Records and Information Management Services; Elizabeth Barr, deputy coordinator for the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board; Amelia Winstead, manager for state and local government records; and Christine Wiseman, manager of preservation services. Each of these people had the opportunity to provide input based on his or her experience and expertise before the reports were sent to the organizations.

In some cases, the circuit rider met with a group of officers or board members rather than a single contact person during his visits. These instances offered wonderful opportunities for training as the committee discussed their archives and records with the circuit rider. They also gave interesting views of the

complexion of the organizations, how the members or employees might work together, and their different expectations. For example, one county administrator in central Georgia guided the circuit rider through various government and court offices, which seemed open to cooperate with coordinated records management and storage efforts. In another county, a similar tour yielded no such cooperative spirit, with the reactions from officeholders ranging from tolerant attention to the guide and courtesy to the circuit rider to cold resistance to the notion of cooperation on records matters.

Another variation in the visits involved joint applicants. These differed considerably depending on the sites. In some places, the second applicant simply served as an overall partner in the records program of the organization of focus. This was the case in Statesboro, where the city government had applied jointly with Georgia Southern University Museum. The university's archival materials were not a focus of the circuit rider archivist consultation, but rather the museum provided advice to the city government in setting up a museum that would include a location for historical records. In another instance, the Marble Valley Historical Society and the government of Pickens County were joint applicants. Although the records concerned were county records, the historical society, with an interest in preserving the county's records, took the more prominent role during the visit. In still other cases, joint applicants each wanted advice on their own records, though they had common issues and concerns and shared a number of resources.

Meriwether County Probate Court and Meriwether County Superior Court were two such organizations. Judge Stiles Estes of the probate court and Louise Garrett, clerk of the superior court, both were interested in scanning and microfilming permanent and long-term records. During much of the visit, the two were present while the circuit rider viewed the other's records. A joint application for a Historical Records Project Grant seemed logical for funding the overall microfilming needs of the courts. Although the courts did not seek a grant, they have continued to cooperate on records-management issues. The superior court has received renovated space for records storage and use, and the probate court has worked to inventory records and dispose of eligible ones. Estes and Garrett also participated with Elizabeth Barr of the GHRAB staff and the circuit rider archivist in a session

about the Circuit Rider Archivist Program at the joint meeting of the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators, and the Council of State Archivists in 2006.

After the initial visits in the Augusta vicinity in August, the circuit rider began a trip around the state that took him to North Georgia and Stewart, Meriwether, and Dooly counties later in the month. Georgia experienced fuel shortages in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in September, and the circuit rider curtailed his travel in support of calls from the governor and secretary of state to conserve gasoline. He limited his visits to the metro Atlanta area in September. October took the archivist to middle Georgia, the upper Oconee River basin, and back to the northern mountains. November returned him to the heart of Georgia, the Altamaha region, and to North Fulton County. He ended the year in South Georgia and completed visits along the coast in 2006.

CASE STUDY: ROME AREA HISTORY MUSEUM

The circuit rider's trek into North Georgia during his early trips provided a typical example of a visit to a historical repository. Katie Anderson, director of the Rome Area History Museum, had requested a circuit rider archivist visit to provide a general assessment of the museum's archival holdings. She had asked for advice on issues of storage, processing, finding aids, and preservation. She hoped to develop a plan for archival development and an updated inventory of the collections.²⁰

Preliminary conversations with Anderson showed her to be enthusiastic about her work but somewhat overwhelmed. Like many museum professionals, Anderson, who holds an undergraduate degree in anthropology and a master's degree in museum studies, appeared to have more archival knowledge than she gave herself credit for. The director's enthusiasm and professional knowledge provided a key leadership component, but the organization suffered from inconsistency.

The Rome Area History Museum is located in an old store building on a main business street in Rome. It was founded in 1995 to acquire artifacts and historical records pertaining to

²⁰ "Circuit Rider Archivist Consultation Grants Application Form—Rome Area History Museum, 2005," CRA files.

the history of Rome and surrounding counties. The community was for many years an industrial center, largely based on the textile industry. The decline of industry had raised awareness of its history, and the museum plays a role in the preservation of that historical record. Rome also has been a center for medical care, stemming from its use as a hospital site during the Civil War. The town was in the path of Union forces moving south from Tennessee during the war, and that event has impacted the historical interests of the city.²¹

When the circuit rider archivist visited the Rome Area History Museum, he found that Anderson was aware that archival practices differ from museum practices in many respects and she sought a greater depth of knowledge to govern the museum's archival collections. The museum had received a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to hire an education specialist for the museum, and Anderson hoped that the addition of that staff person would free her to devote more time to collections, including the archives.

The museum was completing the self-assessment phase of the American Association of Museum's Museum Assessment Program at the time of the circuit rider archivist's visit. The evaluation of that assessment and the review of a peer surveyor under that program was expected to give greater direction to the museum, which in turn would assist in managing the archival holdings.

Anderson wished to update inventories for archival material and to catalog them. One handicap was unconfirmed and missing accessions information for a number of items. Former museum workers did not recollect much information or left incomplete or inconclusive records. The director understood the need for an accessions and collection-development policy. She had discussed the problem with Berry College archivist Rebecca Roberts and had a sample of the college's policy.

The circuit rider toured the two records storage areas as part of the visit. The first was located in a closet on the first floor of the museum. The second was in a larger room on the third floor. The materials consisted of scrapbooks, photo albums, laminated

²¹ Circuit Rider Archivist Report, Rome Area History Museum, Rome, Floyd County, 2005," CRA files. All information on the Rome Area History Museum experience can be found in this resource.

newspapers, rolled photographs, and maps and other oversize items. Substantial amounts of sheet music and phonograph albums were among the collections on the third floor. Some items were housed in plastic sleeves in plastic binders. Other materials were loose in cardboard boxes. A handful of archival boxes and folders were in use. An estimated 2,400 cubic feet of archival material was stored in the two locations. While the exhibit areas of the museum were climate controlled, no air conditioning or humidity controls were in place in the storage areas. A problem with silverfish and rodent infestation existed on the third floor. Insect traps were used but not monitored. There had been past concerns with mold, though none was evident during the archivist's visit.

Plans existed to turn the third-floor area into a reading room and planned storage area, and renovation of the space had begun. Anderson solicited input on the arrangement of the reading room, researcher policies, and tasks necessary to compile a reference collection. She intended to include climate controls as part of the renovation of the third floor. A grant was being sought from the National Endowment for the Humanities to purchase filters for fluorescent lights and window shades.

The circuit rider reviewed the user registration, deed of gift, and loan forms used by the museum. He also presented Anderson with a copy of *Preferred Practices for Historical Repositories* and discussed the manual by section. The Rome Area History Museum had no disaster plan, but Anderson had samples of such plans and understood the need to draft a plan and the elements which should be included.

The circuit rider archivist assisted Anderson in estimating the amount of archival supplies that would be needed to process the holdings of the museum. Anderson asked for assistance in this in order to prepare for seeking possible grant funding for the supplies. She was familiar with suppliers and had a number of catalogs on hand.

The recommendations of the circuit rider archivist aimed at providing realistic suggestions for a small museum to achieve greater archival responsibility. The suggestions took into account the challenge of implementing textbook practices on a limited budget and with manpower limitations. The key to implementing good archival practices in a small repository is not to dwell on achieving a set of standards but to emphasize how

best to make improvements that are specific to the individual repository and will best serve the constituency that is particular to that repository.

For the Rome Area History Museum, the circuit rider showed how a number of museum practices could readily be adapted for archival management and suggested changes that would benefit the museum collections as well as the archival holdings.

As he did with other historical repositories, the circuit rider identified opportunities for continued training. One of these was “The Basics of Archives” online workshop, produced by the American Association for State and Local History; another was consultation with the Georgia Archives. The archivist also pointed to the museum’s relationship with the archives at Berry College as a resource in archival education.

The circuit rider archivist recommended that the Rome Area History Museum consider seeking a Historical Records Project Grant from the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board to fund planning, policy development, training, inventorying, and processing, including the use of specialized consultants. The museum subsequently applied for a grant and received \$5,000.

The role of the NHPRC in the Circuit Rider Archivist Program included the funding of Historical Records Project Grants. This funding was aimed at circuit rider archivist sites, and the circuit rider suggested projects to thirty-two of the organizations he visited.²² Eleven chose to apply for grants and received them in 2006. Nineteen other institutions also received Historical Records Project Grants. Besides these grants, small sums of money were made available to seven organizations for the purchase of archival supplies. The awarding of this money was limited to organizations served by the circuit rider archivist and did not involve a lengthy application process, an obstacle for many organizations in applying for grants.²³

The inconsistency which Anderson had identified as a handicap was a result of changes in volunteer staff, officers, and

²² “NHPRC Regrant Progress Report July 2005-December 2005.”

²³ “NHPRC Regrant Progress Report January-June 2006,” <http://sos.georgia.gov/archives/who_are_we/ghrab/grant_programs/progress_report_june_2006.htm> (accessed May 29, 2008).

board members in a volunteer organization. It was also caused by frequent turnover in paid staff who moved from smaller organizations to larger ones. These occurrences prove common among small historical organizations, and the Rome Area History Museum experienced change once again in 2006 when Anderson left and a new director took over. Local governments also experience a great deal of change as elections bring new officials into office and new elected officials hire new appointees. In all, thirteen of the organizations served by the circuit rider archivist (23 percent) experienced changes in personnel involved with archives and records between the time that they applied for visits in 2005 and 2007. The consistent presence of the Circuit Rider Archivist Program, with its advice and support, offers a tool to aid in the transition of archival and records-management practices for these organizations.

While the experiences of the Rome Area History Museum are typical of the historical repositories in the Circuit Rider Archivist Program, government offices faced different issues. The Stewart County Superior Court provides an example of a government office.

CASE STUDY: STEWART COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

Patti B. Smith, clerk of the Superior Court, indicated in her February 2005 application for a circuit rider archivist visit that she would like to have four plat books (1962-1998) preserved and eighteen older deed books (1922-1942) reduced to smaller size for easier handling and preservation. She referred to deterioration in the plats, including loose bindings. In a telephone conversation with the circuit rider archivist, Smith expressed primary interest in work on the deed books. In another instance of the value of the local and regional contacts of the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board, Ross King, a member of GHRAB, suggested that the circuit rider arrange a courtesy call to the Stewart County Commissioners' Office when making appointments to visit Stewart County.

The visit took place in late August 2005, when the circuit rider met with Diane Babb, county clerk. Babb had a question about efforts to locate a 1930 edition of a county highway map and was referred to the reference services staff at the Georgia Archives. This was one of the numerous occasions when the

circuit rider drew upon the resources and expertise of the state archives.²⁴

Court clerk Patti Smith and the circuit rider discussed records retention, and Smith indicated an understanding of retention schedules. She was intent upon disposing of records when they qualified.

The records of the court were housed in a vault adjacent to Smith's office. Nominal climate controls existed, but no monitoring of temperature and relative humidity took place. The records in the vault consisted of bound volumes on wall shelves, file drawers of loose papers, and loose records in boxes on the floor. Smith had made significant efforts to inventory and arrange loose and unorganized files.

The plat books in which Smith was interested were coming apart. She wished to store the loose plats in a vertical file rack where other plats already had been placed. The plats in the rack were enclosed in polyester sleeves.

A number of deed books had been photocopied and reduced to 8 1/2 x 11-inch size by a vendor. These were enclosed in plastic cases with metal bindings. The original volumes had been maintained. Smith wished to have an additional fifteen volumes photocopied and reduced.

The circuit rider also discussed with Smith the need for a disaster plan to include computer records as well as paper records. He provided her with a copy of the Northeast Document Conservation Center leaflets "Disaster Planning and Worksheet for Outlining a Disaster Plan" and discussed ways to adapt elements of the worksheet to her needs. The circuit rider and clerk completed the site visit interview for local governments, visited Web sites for several archival supply vendors, and discussed the use of acid-free boxes, folders, and polyester envelopes and sleeves.

In his report, the circuit rider emphasized that the disposal of records as scheduled would free Stewart County Superior Court from the need to preserve and care for unnecessary records. He urged that the loose records in boxes on the floor be housed in appropriately sized acid-free boxes and folders and that the boxes

²⁴Randall S. Gooden, "Circuit Rider Archivist Report, Stewart County Superior Court, Lumpkin, Stewart County," 2005. All information on the Stewart County Superior Court experience can be found in this resource.

and folders be labeled in pencil or with archival labels with a typewritten description of the contents. He recommended that folded items carefully be unfolded if it could be done without tearing the documents and that the boxes be stored off the floor.

The report suggested that if sufficient manpower and supplies became available Smith might wish to consider removing metal fasteners from the documents in file drawers and rehousing the records in acid-free, buffered folders or envelopes. The arrangement of the vault and office and available space would not allow for the files to be removed from the drawers and placed in archival boxes. The archivist also suggested that Smith consider placing deteriorating bound volumes in acid-free archival boxes to better preserve them. The archivist observed that Smith's plan to place the plats in the existing vertical plat file system should be satisfactory. He noted that it was important that polyester sleeves or envelopes continue to be used.

The circuit rider urged that the plan to photocopy and reduce the deed books be examined more closely. If the plan proceeded, he recommended the use of acid-free, buffered paper for the pages and the placement of the pages in binders made of acid-free, buffered archival board and adhered with adhesive or other binding materials that were pH-neutral and would not bleed, rust, or stain the pages.

Microfilming was recommended as an alternative to the reduction of the deed books for the preservation of the books. Stamps inside some of the books indicated that they had been filmed in a joint project of the Genealogical Society of Utah and Georgia Department of Archives and History in 1966. A check of both the catalogs of the Georgia State Archives and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints showed microfilm of deed and mortgage books from Stewart County covering the years 1828 to 1907. The archivist told Smith that copies of this microfilm would be available for purchase at a lower cost than refilming.

The circuit rider archivist recommended that the court seek a Historic Records Project Grant to purchase copies of the microfilm for use in the clerk's office, for microfilming permanent records that had not been filmed, for purchasing a microfilm reader, and for purchasing archival supplies as part of a preservation project. He wrote that Smith might wish to consider submitting a joint application with another county office in order

to qualify for a higher amount of funding. Stewart County chose not to apply for a grant.

RESPONSE AND IMPLEMENTATION

The experiences of the Rome Area History Museum and the Stewart County Superior Court provide snapshots of the fieldwork performed by the circuit rider archivist and the types of problems and concerns that he encountered. His visits generated energy among many organizations which used his recommendations to move forward with their archival programs and to leverage support from boards, officers, and constituencies. Among them was Paulding County School District. The superintendent's executive assistant described the response of district officials to the visit:

We knew where we should be with our records management program and felt we knew the steps to be taken to reach our goals. But, while we were looking at the overall situation which seemed overwhelming, Dr. Gooden offered us very sound and timely advice. He helped us to see practical solutions and made the task seem less daunting. Since that meeting, I have called and emailed him several times with questions and he has been very quick in his response.

Dr. Gooden assisted us in the writing of our Historical Records Project Grant, reading through our grant several times and offering suggestions for improvement.²⁵

Another organization which shared its reactions and follow-up to the circuit rider archivist's visit was the Peach Public Libraries (PPL) in Fort Valley:

Dr. Gooden's visit to Peach Public Libraries and his subsequent evaluation of our local history/special collections resulted in needed and much appreciated guidance and advice.... Dr. Gooden offered many possibilities to improve our collection's organization and preservation. Based on Dr. Gooden's guidance (and especially follow-up advice), we were better able

²⁵ Pamela Taylor to Randall Gooden, n.d., CRA files.

to determine the specific organizing and preservation materials to purchase to best reach our goals, as well as the work required to meet those goals. We are more aware of the work needed to best evaluate, organize, and maintain both our existing collection and subsequent donations. Dr. Gooden's encouragement also led to PPLs applying for and receiving supplemental funding from the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board to purchase needed archival supplies.²⁶

The public-services librarian at the Peach Public Libraries also outlined goals which the organization had set after the visit. The library had determined to send a staff member to archival training workshops so that he or she could share information with other staff and volunteers, and take advantage of funding opportunities for archival processing and preservation, special projects, and exhibits, including online photo exhibits. The librarian commented:

Overall, Dr. Gooden's evaluation of our current collection and his subsequent recommendations have resulted in PPLs setting the goal to successfully organize and preserve our collections so that the resources are not only protected, but available and accessible to researchers, local community members, and library users, as well as our own library staff.²⁷

Not all organizations were able to implement the advice of the circuit rider archivist. Many expressed frustration with the lack of time which they could devote to archival work. In a survey completed in June 2007, 88 percent of those surveyed indicated that time was one of the biggest obstacles to their work in archives and records management.²⁸ In historical repositories, many leaders faced administrative, fund-raising, museum, and library duties exclusive of archives. For governments, records

²⁶ Sandra French to Randall Gooden, n.d., CRA files.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Survey of the Impact of the Circuit Rider Archivist Program," CRA files.

managers often doubled as purchasing officers, administrative assistants, public relations officers, and other positions. One librarian, with newly added responsibilities, voiced the problem, "I have little time for Archives since talking with you but plan to delve in after our holiday break."²⁹ Yet time commitment to primary duties kept people in a number of organizations from initiating applications for Historical Records Project Grants, even with assistance from the circuit rider archivist and GHRAB staff in planning and developing projects.

Another problem for many organizations was funding. Of those surveyed, 66 percent remarked that money was a significant obstacle to their archival and records management work.³⁰

Although some organizations have been unable to follow-up on the circuit rider's suggestions, 88 percent said that the circuit rider had provided useful assistance or information since his visit and that they felt that they could contact the circuit rider for assistance or information in the future. This undoubtedly had much to do with e-mail support groups that the circuit rider formed to share information about useful topics with the circuit rider sites and follow-up visits and phone calls as needed. Requests for information not only included archival topics, such as Crawford County Historical Society's questions about finding a conservator to restore an antebellum hymnal, but also included non-archival questions, such as one from the Aragon Historical Society for help in efforts to preserve a spring that figured in local Civil War action.

The ongoing relationship between the sites and the Circuit Rider Archivist Program led to the involvement of the sites in disaster-preparedness training offered by GHRAB in 2006. Two circuit rider archivist sites, Hall County Library in Gainesville and Thronateeska Heritage Center in Albany, hosted workshops taught by Christine Wiseman of the Georgia Archives.

In 2007 the continuing relationship with the contacts made at the sites visited in 2005 aided in laying the groundwork for a second round of visits. Ten organizations (Appling County Heritage Center in Baxley, Columbia County Government in Evans, Greene County Probate Court in Greensboro, Hall

²⁹ CRA Feedback," CRA files.

³⁰ "Survey of the Impact of the Circuit Rider Archivist Program."

County Library System in Gainesville, Lowndes County Board of Commissioners in Valdosta, Meriwether County Probate Court and Meriwether County Superior Court in Greenville, Rome Area History Museum in Rome, the City of Statesboro in Bulloch County, Stewart County Superior Court in Lumpkin, and Wesleyan College in Macon) offered locations for informational meetings at which organizations in the various regions of the state could learn about the circuit rider archivist program. Wiseman taught disaster-preparedness workshops on the same days as the informational meetings in Baxley, Greensboro, and Rome.

When the deadline for the 2007 round of circuit rider archivist visits arrived, fifty-two organizations applied. Of these, twenty-five had attended one of the informational sessions. Six of the applicants were referrals from organizations that had been visited in the first round.

The start of the second round of circuit rider archivist visits in July 2007 took the program from a pilot phase to one of constancy. With continued funding until 2010, the program has successfully shown how the two theories—the responsibility for service among professional archivists and the diversity of archival institutions and ambiguity of the archivists' role—outlined earlier can be joined. The outreach role of the circuit rider program has demonstrated that professionalism will be accepted or recognized by non-professional archival institutions if professionals treat the work of non-professionals as important and worthy of attention without condescension and with an understanding of the diverse level of resources with which archivists, professional and non-professional have to work. Unnecessary divisions between non-professional and professional archivists only prevent acceptance of sound archival practices and principles by those who need assistance and keep professional archivists from knowing and appreciating the archival resources present in local and regional institutions. This inevitably will lead to inattention and neglect of vast materials that form a part of the overall picture of our history.

The Circuit Rider Archivist Program serves as a bridge between the professional and non-professional archival worlds. It works in the spirit of outreach that many archivists have recognized and implemented in their work by providing a broad model for service that can be adapted by a variety of archival programs, government and private. In return, the organizations

that participate demonstrate their willingness to learn, to accept responsibility for their historical materials. They also serve as teachers in the realities of the diverse world of archives and offer laboratories for learning about archives in a variety of settings, conditions, and circumstances. It indeed is a partnership of learning and service.

Randall S. Gooden is an assistant professor of history at Clayton State University in Morrow, Georgia, where he teaches history and archives courses.