

State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB)

Zoom Meeting

November 3, 2021

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Board Members Present: David Carmicheal (SHRAB coordinator), Martina Soden, Robert Stakely, Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Nancy Avolese, Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh, Jack McCarthy, Adam Bentz, Jack Ertell, Heidi Mays

PA State Archives Staff Attending: Cindy Bendroth, Josh Stahlman, Tyler Stump

David Carmicheal (DWC) started the meeting at 2:05 by welcoming everyone and taking a quick roll call for members present.

DWC then asked for approval of the minutes from the last SHRAB meeting (January 25, 2021). Jack Ertell (JE) made a motion to approve and Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh (RGR) seconded. All members voted to approve the minutes with none in opposition.

DWC then asked Nancy Avolese (NA) to discuss the SHRAB strategic plan and her proposed updates to it. NA said that SHRAB had completed a survey of historical repositories in 1997 and strategic plan in 1999 (these documents were sent to SHRAB members after the last meeting for review). While both documents were well done, they are over 20 years old and out of date. NA would like to talk about these documents more: review what SHRAB has done since they were written and what still needs to be done to achieve all the strategic plan's goals.

NA reported there were five basic challenges in the strategic plan, and recommended SHRAB break up into teams of two or three members to review each. And see if they are still reasonable goals for SHRAB today. She would like the strategic plan to be a guiding document for SHRAB, and the plan should be updated if it does not reflect current goals. She also said this could impact future SHRAB grant applications (NHPRC, etc.) as they may require an updated strategic plan in future applications.

Several members said they were unfamiliar with the 1999 strategic plan and would need time to review before making any discussion. Cindy Bendroth (CB) said she would re-send the strategic plan to all members.

NA reiterated she wants SHRAB's work to be aligned with its strategic plan, as it gives us an idea of what SHRAB is supposed to be doing. She asked if all SHRAB members could review the plan by the time of the next meeting so there can be a group conversation about it.

DWC noted that the strategic plan is 20 years old, so future NHPRC grant applications could ask for funds for updating it. He thought that would be well received if the grant had a clear vision of how the plan would be updated. He also commented that much of the strategic plan appears to be accurate still since its objectives were written in a broad way and still apply to SHRAB's basic goals. He recommended any

updates should have specific metrics and tangible objectives so that SHRAB can measure progress towards them on a regular basis.

NA said SHRAB should be reporting on its progress towards strategic plan goals annually, we can't just let it sit and not do anything with it.

DWC asked CB to put a discussion of the plan on the next meeting agenda. NA recommended keeping strategic plan discussion on all future meeting agendas (even if just for a few minutes) to help keep it at the forefront of SHRAB's attention.

DWC asked for volunteers to assist NA with strategic planning work. Adam Bentz (AB) volunteered. NA will talk to AB to plan next steps.

DWC moved on to give an update on plans to create a Pennsylvania-wide historical repository database.

PHMC's strategic plan calls for the commission to create a state directory of different repositories and organizations that PHMC works with around Pennsylvania. This would include archives, museum, sites, partners of the historic preservation program, etc. The goal is to create a centralized database with information we know about them. Previously, SHRAB offered to be the test case for this to see if we could get a database created starting with archives and repositories and then other bureaus would piggyback on that. The plan is to start out simple and grow the database over time.

DWC reported that archives staff have identified a tool we think could be used for this: PA-SHARE. This is a custom database created for the State Historic Preservation Office (to document cultural resources in Pennsylvania) and we're hopeful it can be modified to be used for this directory as well. It was built a few years ago by a company that had a large contract with PHMC to build it. We can't add to that contract, but we are looking for ways to hire that company with a separate contract or hire someone else to add to the database if we want to use it. The PHMC Communication Office says they think we can do this without too much cost.

DWC shared some screenshots of PA-SHARE's public-facing and back-end sites. Information is publicly viewable, though users need a Keystone login to update or add new information. DWC hopes this can be used for repositories to add and update their own information for our database. The database allows for free form or specific structured entry fields and add users can add attachments. It can also be set up so that archives staff (or SHRAB) reviews all information before it's posted online. It can also generate an auto-reminder to all submitters asking them to update their entries in the future.

NA was very excited to see this and commented that this repository database will meet several goals and criteria on the current SHRAB strategic plan. Jack McCarthy (JM) and several other members also agreed that this proposed database sounds very good.

Celia Caust-Ellenbogen (CC) asked what format the database's data will be in? What if we need to migrate information out of the system in the future? DWC said that when the system was originally created for SHPO, it had migration functionality built in (because the records in the database have permanent retention and by state policy must have this). He said data could be exported as XML (this is how data is put online as well).

AB said he likes the current fields listed in DWC's sample, but wondered if it would be helpful to have a drop-down menu or button for submitters to select if their organization has professional staff? DWC

said we did ask if we should do a full survey with questions like that. But we decided it would be better to start small and then expand from there. This would be something to add later, though those details will be up to SHRAB. DWC said he suspects if we ask for too much information at the start no one will add anything to it.

JM asked if the database will include corporate or commercial entities? Or just non-profits? There are many corporate archives in Pennsylvania with valuable information. DWC noted that currently HARC grants require that an organization must have public hours (even if by appointment) to be eligible, and that something like that would be appropriate for this database too. It's hard to justify public tax dollars to document private records with no access to public. JM agreed that the database should only include organizations with public access to their records. He also recommended adding high schools and ethnic groups (i.e., Lithuanian, Italian heritage groups) to the database. DWC said that he would continue exploring the feasibility of getting a contract and funding to create the directory.

DWC then moved on to discuss updates and news from the PA State Archives. Construction on the new archives building in Harrisburg is shaping up and still close to schedule. He expects the building will be completed in about a year.

Josh Stahlman (JS) then gave a brief update on the State Archive's Community History Dialog program. The archives held its 11th event in August- Barbara Zaborowski of the Cambria Memory Project spoke about scanning and digitization. Since September 2020 CHD program events have had 1,922 registrants. In the spring of 2021, the archives sent out a survey to all previous CHD attendees asking if attending a CHD survey had prompted them to preserve or share their community's history in some way. 63.5% responded yes. This response was significantly higher than expected.

NA commented that she had attended several CHD events this year and the most recent one on digitization was the best one yet in her opinion.

JS said the next CHD event will be in December on audio/visual preservation the speaker is Sandra Yates from Community Archiving Workshops, all SHRAB members are invited to attend.

DWC then asked all SHRAB members to share any news or updates from their own institutions.

JE reported the Historical Society of the Phoenixville Area has had a group studying if they should stay in their current building or not. They're located in an 1876 church building. Its great location but the age of the building poses issues for their collections and work. They decided their location is so ideal they will just decide to "reinvent" their building, so it better serves their needs by converting some inside spaces and renovating. They are doing a feasibility study and are working with an architect for plans and are about 2 years away from any construction.

RGR reported Elizabethtown College has a new exhibit opening next week in the High Library's IDEA Lab which will showcase photographs from the Dennis L. Hughes Photographs of the Amish collection. The exhibit was partially funded by a Mellon grant which is also supporting some digitization and cataloging work with the collection. The exhibit will be on display for about a month and RGR invited all SHRAB members to visit.

AB reported the York County History Center got a HARC grant to fund an archival assistant to work in their archives last summer to digitize records and work on finding aids for several collections. After the

grant ran out, they got a private donation to keep the intern on for a few more months to work on records related to the first commercial wind turbine (Smith Putnam wind turbine) as it's the 80th anniversary of its construction.

JM reported on the new Philadelphia Jazz Archives. Temple University has agreed to be a home for this collection and newly acquired materials will be put into their Blockson Collection. They are planning to physically move collections there soon.

With no other news or new business, DWC moved on to thank John Paul Deley and Heidi Mays for their service as both of their SHRAB terms have expired. John Paul served two three-year terms and Heidi four three-year terms.

DWC told everyone they would receive an email with an update on NHPRC and HARC grants soon. He reminded everyone that SHRAB members *cannot* share any information on grants publicly until the PHMC commissioners vote to approve the grants and PHMC puts out a press release (jointly with elected officials from the areas where grant recipients are located).

With no other new business, DWC concluded the meeting at 2:54.