



BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT REPORT 2007

1. Introduction

Significant progress was made in some areas of the 14-point Work Plan 2007. For example, a Government Archivist was appointed; outreach initiatives were introduced, namely, the Old Pictures Exhibition and competition designed to get the public involved in the archives project; the Archives and Records Management Newsletter and the History Research Awards Programme. Other strides made were the publication of the Records Management Procedures Manual; the partial restoration of the Old Fort Charlotte School, to be used as a temporary Records Centre; the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) Consultant's visit to assess current operations of the Unit and to deliver a costed proposal for a National Archives Repository and Records Centre; and in the area of training, five Records Officers completed the Records Management (RM) Certificate Course at UWI, Mona, Jamaica. In-service Workshops were also successfully conducted for Records Officers across the Service.

- 1.1 The Archives Indexing Project** and the consultants from the Caribbean Archives Association (Carbica) continue to generate media coverage, highlighting the value of archives in society and the need to preserve them.

2. Vision and Values

- 2.1 Short-term:** To lay the foundation for establishing and developing an actively functioning National Archives institution which is a fundamental infrastructure for national development generally, and specifically to support several of the Government's immediate objectives. To do this it is essential that: i) Legislation be enacted to legally establish the National Archives; ii) Appropriate staff be appointed; and iii) suitable accommodation, i.e. a National Archives and a Records Centre be made available.

2.2 **Long-term:** To act as custodian of the records of the Virgin Islands Government and of the Country. The National Archives will promote awareness of the nation's official and private archives and preserve the nation's memory. It will advise on and promote the preservation and safekeeping, to the highest possible standards of all documents, in all formats. It will make known the location of records, whether public or private, and advise all sections of the community about how records could be used for research and learning.

3. **Policy and Legislation**

3.1 **The first draft of the Archives legislation** (which embraces the general archives policy) was forwarded to and returned by the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) seeking clarification of some terms. A meeting was held with the Parliamentary Counsel for further discussions, after which a revised version was submitted. The document is being fine-tuned by the IRMT Consultant and the Parliamentary Counsel.

3.2 **On-line:** The policy, functions, activities and Newsletter of the Unit have been posted on the Deputy Governor's website at www.dgo.vg.org

4. **Records Management**

4.1 **International Records Day was observed on 1st May**, to encourage awareness for the protection of records against disaster. Deputy Governor, Mr. Elton Georges gave a stirring radio address. There were also press articles, highlights in the Newsletter and the distribution of banker's boxes to Departments who needed them.

4.2 **Records Officers across the Service received in-house training via workshops** conducted throughout the year. Thirty-eight (38) attended the **Transferring Files to the Records Centre Workshop** conducted in June/July and 37 attended **Appraisal Workshops** in September/October. Briefing sessions with 12 individual departments were also held. As usual interest was high and requests for more frequent workshops and sessions were made.

4.3 **The Records Management (RM) Procedures Manual** for the Civil Service was published and circulated widely across the Organization. It is the first RM manual produced in the history of the Civil Service and it is an invaluable tool for corporate training as well as for individual guidance in maintaining good records keeping in Offices and providing consistency of method across the board.

5. **Advisory and Consultation**

- 5.1 **Software package for Records Management (RM) functions:** A number of meetings were held with Information Services Unit (renamed DoIT), TrinTech Business Solutions, Portal Business Solutions and Infinite Solutions to assess their demonstrations, proposals, capabilities etc and to determine which package would best meet the current and future needs of the ARM function across the Service. This matter was still being researched and considered in December.
- 5.2 **After careful evaluation of proposals from three vendors** - TrinTech Business Solutions, CPMD and Dougal D Thornton Associates, it was decided to retain the services of DDTA to design and build the Unit's website. Much work has been done to determine the content of the site and it is expected that the first phase of the website will be completed within the 1st quarter of 2008.

6. **The Archives**

- 6.1 **The Indexing Project.** Although the project was regrettably curtailed to 6 weeks due to pressure on the Consultants' time and expertise in the Bahamas, it continued with (Carbica) consultants, Dr. Gail Saunders and Ms Elaine Tooté. They worked on various fronds including Records of the Presidency (1720-1938); Commissioner's Office (1872-1974)-559 files; interweaving new finds in the Chief Minister's Office Fond (1947-1991)- 52 volumes; and the Commissioner's Files (1869-1981)
- 6.2 **The Consultancy continues to generate much media coverage and interest.** There were articles in the local press and the 'Welcome Magazine' about the project. It is hoped that project will continue in the New Year.
- 6.3 **Saunders and Tooté submitted a brief report,** which will be forwarded to the Cabinet for information.

7. **Research and Resources**

7.1 **Acquisitions**

Virgin Islands historical materials on Microfilm: Approximately 22,200 legal size pages of historical material on microfilm were added to the archives. The series are: Virgin Islands Original Correspondence from 1711-1872; Virgin Islands Acts from 1771-1965 and Virgin Islands Miscellany from 1784-1896) These materials provide a rich resource for researchers. It is hoped that additions including Virgin Islands rare books will be made annually.

8. **Research Queries**

8.1 Access to the Archives continues to be a hurting need felt and expressed by local and international researchers. Queries involving the use of the Archives continue to come in. Although access to the Archives is still very limited due to lack of accommodation, researchers have been introduced to historical materials on microfilm and also to Virgin Islands materials available at the National Archives (UK) on-line catalogue.

8.2 The Virgin Islands slave records on microfilm was a useful component of the Slave Trade Exhibition held in July-August and attracted on-the-spot researchers.

9. **Out- Reach Initiatives**

9.1 The Old Pictures Competition/ Exhibition was planned and mounted at West Atrium, Central Administration Complex in association with the Friends of the National Archives. It was opened on 16th April, 2007 by the Chief Minister and attracted large numbers of residents and visitors. By popular demand it remained open for two months. Many images were digitally captured for posterity; hopefully a book of that historic and cultural event will be published in the near future.

9.2 ARM Newsletter: 'News From the Archives', the Newsletter of the Unit was initiated and published monthly. It provides current awareness with relevant news and guidance in archives and RM matters, to officers and the general public. Researchers from all over the world continue to contact us through the Newsletter, which is on the Deputy Governor's (DGO's) website.

9.3 History Research Awards: The Deputy Governor's History Research Awards initiative was launched to promote, encourage and recognize local history research in the Virgin Islands. The theme for 2007: 'Freedom and Liberty' was in observation of the Bi-centennial of the Slave Trade Act. A small sub-committee critiqued the work and interviewed the participants, and winners were presented with certificates and monetary awards during the Deputy Governor's Christmas party held at Long Bay Hotel. A report submitted by Dr. Patricia Turnbull, chair of the Committee raises concerns surrounding the difficulties of doing research in the Virgin Islands.

9.4 Breaking the Chains: Virgin Islands Experience - Exhibition held in July/August. In collaboration with the National Committee for the 'Breaking the Chains Exhibition' the Archives Unit researched and provided the framework on which the exhibition was developed. Much time was also devoted to mounting and hosting the show.

10. Accommodation Initiative

Temporary Records Centre: Mobile shelving worth over \$60, 000. was rescued from the Finance Department and the Old Fort Charlotte School was secured from a Sports Club and partially renovated for installing the shelving. Repairs to the ceiling, roof, windows and other areas will hopefully be completed soon. This will provide workable space for a Temporary Records Centre in which to appraise the inactive records presently stored in the basement of the Central Administration Building and across the Town; and then to arrange them properly for easy retrieval.

11. Technical Aid Initiative

11.1 International Records Management Trust (IRMT) Consultant's Visit: In pursuit of technical assistance for developing the project, the IRMT was contacted and while the CRMO was on holiday in the UK in August/September, she was invited to the IRMT London Headquarters for further discussions. There, the elements for a proposal to address the immediate needs of the Archives programme were outlined. Subsequently, an IRMT proposal was submitted to and approved by the Deputy Governor. An agreement was then made with the IRMT to contract a Consultant with terms of reference 'to assess the existing Archives and Records Management policy and processes, and to deliver a proposal with cost estimates for a new archives building and an integrated archives and records integrated programme.

11.2 Mr. Kevin Smith made a 10-day visit from Dec 13 – 23rd and held several meetings with Government Ministers, the Deputy Governor, Financial Secretary and other top officials, a joint grouping of the ad hoc archives Committee and the Friends of the Archives National as well as other stakeholders. The Consultant's report and recommendations were due in January. Solid advice is envisaged therein, to further develop the Archives Programme.

12. **Appointment of Government Archivist**

The term 'Government archivist' has for many years (as long as the General Orders existed) been referred to as the person whose permission must be sought to destroy any official record. Although the Chief Records Management Officer was appointed in 2004, in reality, no one was ever appointed as Government Archivist. until September 10, 2007, when Mr. Christopher Varlack filled the post. The recruit is a multi-talented and efficient person with a Master's in Communication (Cinema/Television emphasis); he is an asset to the Unit and the Service but it is hoped that he would be enabled to take the Master's ARM course (in the near future), which would further qualify him for the post.

13. **Staffing**

The 1997 IRMT Report recommended that the programme commenced with one (1) Director, one (1) Government Archivist, two (2) Assistants and that other staff should come on stream according to a specified plan. The Programme started with two (one professional and one clerical offer) which grand total was augmented only in the 4th year by one. The scale of the programme is calling for additional staff to move the programme ahead in specific areas as recommended by subsequent Reports.

14. **Visits**

The CRMO and the Government Archivist visited the Professional Micrographics Firm in Puerto Rico with a view to study their operation and to assess the capabilities of their equipment in terms of setting up a Micrographics section to initiate a records preservation programme in the Unit. By the end of the year some basic pieces of equipment to set up a Microfilming Unit were ordered through the Firm. We are hoping that the Budget would allow the two assistants to be recruited for training as technicians, in the New Year.

Antigua National Archives: Both archivists visited the Antigua National Archives, one of the few purpose- built repositories in the Eastern Caribbean States, and experienced the thrill of an actively functioning repository in the region. The building is set in 2 acres of lawn with a staff of 12, appropriate legislation and is headed by Dr. Marion Blair, a PhD in history.

15. **Committees**

15.1 The main ad hoc Archives and Records Management Committee met only twice during the year but in the interim decisions on crucial matters were made via 'round robin' circulars. The main concern was 'moving the building programme forward' and finding a way to shift the stagnancy which Council papers prepared by the CRMO on the matter, had encountered.

15.2 The Committee also added three other potential sites for the Archives Building, to be included in the appropriate Council paper.

15.3 Both the ad hoc Archives Committee and the 'Friends of the Archives' met with the IRMT Consultant and discussed the 'way forward' for the Archives.

15.4 The Friends of the National Archives with the Unit co-sponsored the Old Pictures Exhibition which was a remarkable success. A panel from the Friends also hosted a radio programme publicizing the Old Pictures Competition and Exhibition. In June, a welcome reception for the Carbica Consultants was hosted by the 'Friends' at the home of the Membership Secretary, Astrid Wenkze; and in December, the CRMO hosted a reception for Mr. Kelvin Smith, the IRMT consultant, at her home.

16. **Compliance with Government's Objectives**

The change of Government in August did not change the fact that the Archives and Records Management Unit is vital to the achievement of every aspect of the Government's goals and objectives. This Government emphasizes art, heritage and culture, recording Virgin Islands history; stimulating creativity in the youth, a stronger focus on Virgin Islands literature, governance and constitutional development, a system that will ensure our rights, protect our property, ensure our freedoms and protect our living.

The ARM programme is the bedrock from which the success of the Government's vision will spring. Furthermore, it is essential to the survival of the collective memory of the people. Efficient recordskeeping is essential in ensuring good governance

17. Conclusion

This report concurs with the Consultants Saunders and Toote's recommendations, which again emphasized the need for adequate support staff including, suitable accommodation, adequate archival legislation and the continuance of an integrated Archives and Records Management programme. To reiterate, the crucial need for archives legislation to be enacted and funds allocated for the building of an Archives Repository in which the 'nation's heritage and culture could be recorded, understood and preserved, remain top priority.

18. Appendices

- a. Gail Saunders and E. Toote – Mini- Progress Report, July 2007
- b. History Research Report, 2007
- c. Rescuing the Archives, 2004

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