

Records preservation a benefit of new town vault

By Tom Shevlin

As island residents prepare to celebrate Jamestown's 350th anniversary, it will soon be easier to reach back into that history as major upgrades to the town's archive facility are realized.

From vital records such as birth, marriage, and death records dating back to the 1800s to land evidence documents dating as far back as 1680, much of the island's history can be traced through files kept for public view at town offices.

In the town clerk's office alone, deeds, plat maps, town council meeting minutes, and village or-

dinances dating back hundreds of years are all maintained with the utmost rigor.

However, despite the best efforts of town officials, those records have been at risk. Now, with the dedication of the new town hall scheduled for Aug. 12, as a part of the town's 350th celebration, vital town records will be secured

Even before planning had begun on construction of the new town hall the need to update the town's archives was evident. Several non-permanent books were lost to mold and mildew damage and town officials began to grow

concerned over the health conditions in the archives.

"It was a dangerous situation for everyone," according to Town Clerk Arlene Petit.

With growing concern over water, mold, and mildew in the town's basement archives, the decision was made to move the town's permanent records to a storage trailer facility adjacent to the town hall until appropriate accommodations could be made.

The new town hall project has provided the town with the opportunity to construct those accommodations, and after a tour of the island's current facilities revealed less than ideal conditions, its completion couldn't come soon enough.

Currently, much of the town's vital records are stored above the Jamestown Country Club restaurant and in an adjacent trailer while construction takes place on the new town hall. Though climate controlled, documents are vulnerable to fire, smoke, water, and even theft.

A look around the temporary office reveals stacks of files and walls of bookcases housing important town documents almost everywhere the eye sees. File cabinets are fire-retardant, however, they are by no means fireproof. Boxes of meticulously-filed documents are split between storage units in tight conditions with the weight of decades making access cumbersome, if not prohibitive.

According to Petit, should someone request information found in one of the older files in her office, staff members may strain just to reach the box the file is contained in. "Right now, any-

time someone wants a record it's not an easy task for anyone," she said.

That is sure to change when, starting in mid-September, the town hopes to begin moving its archives into the new town hall facility.

The new facility, designed by William Burgin Architects, will not only allow for more convenience, but for more secure storage as well. Constructed out of a concrete shell with plenty of space and security firmly in mind, the town's records will be kept safe, yet accessible. For example, unlike previous storage facilities, the new town hall vault will be fire-safe and climate controlled, ensuring that town records remain safe from both fire and the deteriorating effects of mold and mildew. Meanwhile, new storage bins, improved shelving, public workspaces, and files stored on microfilm - a process which began when the old town hall facility was deemed unfit - will make records more easily accessible.

In addition, a new computerized index of land records will provide visitors high-tech search capabilities. The system, which the town introduced in early 2006, is used often by title attorneys and

researchers as a reference tool to direct users to the exact page and book number in the town's archives, streamlining the search process. In addition, newer records that have been scanned directly into the system can be viewed and printed without ever referencing traditional hard copy resources.

While other towns have begun to move away from hard copy archiving, opting instead for electronic-based records, Jamestown's new facility will enable the town to maintain its dual archive system.

That's important to Petit. "It's the absolute history of the island" she said. "It's the legal history; it's the financial history; it's the planning...the building history."

Petit, who has also been working on preparations for 350th celebration, views the town's new archive facility as an important part of preserving the town's history.

"Working with the historical society has really given me some insight into the value of our history. It draws a picture...Families have owned land on the island for generations. You can see people looking at their parents and their grandparents' names; it's their history and their individual history as well as the island's," she said.

Rebecchi first to formally announce bid for council

Saverio Rebecchi announced this week that he will run for a seat on the Jamestown Town Council as an independent candidate.

"With the exception of the short period that I agreed to be a candidate for Town Council endorsed by the Jamestown Republican party, I have been a life-long unaffiliated voter because my personal preference is to vote for the person and not the party," Rebecchi said.

"Being a new arrival on the local political scene, I was honored that certain members of the Republican Party believed I had the right stuff to serve the community. When their council appointed me chair

of the 2001 Charter Review Committee, I took the task seriously, followed best practice guidelines, saw that everyone had equal input and that all recommendations were reviewed," Rebecchi said.

In 2004, Rebecchi was appointed to the Board of Directors at the Quonset Development Corporation to watch over Jamestown's interests and to help prevent the development of a container port.

Rebecchi has established a Web site www.lcandidates.org as an informational resource for other potential candidates who would prefer to run as an Independent/unaffiliated candidate.

"I look forward to the next few months of campaigning to discuss the challenges ahead for our community and the solutions I can offer. Hopefully, as they say, the third time will be the charm," Rebecchi said.

Chase wins academic honors

John C. Chase, of Jamestown, was awarded the Rensselaer Medal at North Kingstown High School.

The medal is given to junior-level students who have distinguished themselves in mathematics and science.



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It was not until 1984 that Rhode Island judges had a statutory basis for sentencing those convicted of murder in the first degree to life without eligibility for parole.

The extraordinary circumstances necessary for that enhanced sentence to be imposed, and the judicial procedures that must proceed that implementation, insure that its use is limited and appropriate.

First among the standards that the Parole Board is charged to consider in making a decision to grant or deny parole to a prisoner is whether he has "substantially observed the rules of the institution in which confined."

Given that standard, it is hard to understand the grant of parole to a prisoner who has a longstanding record of serious infractions within the prison, particularly where that prisoner, had he been sentenced after 1984, might have received life without parole eligibility.

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