UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS: ENSURING ACCESS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Jessica Holden, Andrew Elder and Joanne Riley | Joseph P. Healey Library, UMass Boston

A presentation at ARCHIVES*RECORDS 2014: Ensuring Access, the joint meeting of the Council of State Archivists (CoSA), the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA), and the Society of American Archivists (SAA), Washington D.C., August 10-16, 2014.

To learn more and to view the full poster, visit scholarworks.umb.edu/hlpubs/19.

ABSTRACT

How can a university archives establish a successful ongoing relationship with a community organization? What are the benefits and challenges of such a collaboration? University of Massachusetts Boston’s Archives and Special Collections (UASC) explored these questions while working with The Irish Ancestral Research Association (TIARA) to preserve and provide access to 79,000 mortuary records from the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters. Elements of the collaboration included shifting stewardship of the records from the Foresters to TIARA to UMass Boston, integrating TIARA’s efforts in processing and indexing the records into the Archives’ workflow, providing in-person and electronic access to the records, and hosting public events that celebrate the partnership and educate the public about the records. This poster illustrates the lessons learned during the records’ journey from an active business to a community organization to a university’s Archives and Special Collections.

ABOUT UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AT UMASS BOSTON

University Archives & Special Collections in the Joseph P. Healey Library at the University of Massachusetts Boston was established in 1981 as a repository to collect archival material in subject areas of interest to the University, as well as the records of the University itself. The mission and history of UMass Boston guide the collection policies of UASC, with the University’s urban mission and strong support of community service reflected in the records of and related to urban planning, social action, alternative movements, community organizations, war and social consequence, and local history related to neighboring communities, including collections associated with Dorchester, the Boston Harbor Islands, and Boston bicycling history.

To carry out its mission, UASC recognizes a formal commitment to working with, promoting, and assisting community archives in the Greater Boston area through facilitating cross-organization collaboration and access to informational, educational, and practical resources relevant to archival procedures and best practices. Learn more: blogs.umb.edu/archives.

ABOUT THE IRISH ANCESTRAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (TIARA)

TIARA is a non-profit organization established to develop and promote the growth, study and exchange of ideas among people and organizations interested in Irish genealogical and historical research and education. Learn more by visiting tiara.ie online.

ABOUT THE FORESTERS RECORDS

The Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters (MCOF) was founded in 1879 by a group of Irish immigrants to provide life insurance benefits for its members. The organization
grew from one small group in Boston to branches across the state. By 1893, the ninety-five Forester Courts spread throughout Massachusetts included several German Courts. Women were admitted to the Foresters in 1894. By 1930, there were 60,000 members of the Foresters in Massachusetts. There was also at least one Court in Rhode Island. The MCOF was renamed the Catholic Association of Foresters (CAF) in 1960. The Foresters still exists as a fraternal life insurance society. TIARA rescued the archival Foresters records from consignment to the dumpster, and in 2011 transferred ownership of the MCOF records to UMass Boston for the purpose of preserving and making available to researchers the records of the organization.

Each prospective Forester applying for coverage completed an application that included personal data, family information, and a physical examination. Subsequent death benefit disbursements named beneficiaries. Any correspondence regarding beneficiaries was also included in the record. This material reveals a wealth of information about family structure, health, mortality, mobility, and occupations of predominantly Irish immigrants and descendants.

For more information about the Foresters records, visit blogs.umb.edu/archives/foresters.

RESULTS SUMMARY

Since the beginning of our collaboration in 2011, UASC and TIARA have developed a mutually beneficial working relationship. Together we have made available nearly 30,000 Foresters records and have responded to hundreds of reference requests. The lessons we learned while working to develop a strong partnership with TIARA have helped UASC develop models for working with other community organizations and archives.

To learn more and to view the full poster, visit scholarworks.umb.edu/hlpubs/19.