University Archives and Community Organizations: Ensuring Access through Collaboration

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

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1879 The Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters (MCOF) is founded by a group of Irish immigrants to provide life insurance benefits for its members.

1964 The Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters (COF) is renamed the Catholic Association of Foresters (CAF).

1964 The Irish Ancestral Research Association (TIARA) is founded by a group of Irish immigrants to provide life insurance benefits for its members.

1983 The Catholic Association of Foresters transfers custody to TIARA.

1983 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records (spanning 1879 to 1935) to University Archives & Special Collections (UASC) in the Joseph P. Healey Library at UMass Boston for the purpose of preserving the records of the organization and making them available to researchers.

2007 After a flood in their storage area, TIARA approaches several Boston-area archives to find a permanent home for the Foresters records.

2009 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records (1879 to 1935) to UASC for processing and indexing.

2009 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records spanning 1879-1986 to University Archives & Special Collections (UASC) in the Joseph P. Healey Library at UMass Boston.

2011 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records spanning 1879-1986 to UASC for University Archives & Special Collections (UASC) for the purpose of preserving the records of the organization and making them available to researchers.

2011 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records (spanning 1879-1986) to University Archives & Special Collections (UASC) in the Joseph P. Healey Library at UMass Boston.

2011 TIARA transfers ownership of the Foresters records (spanning 1935 to 1945) to University Archives & Special Collections (UASC) in the Joseph P. Healey Library at UMass Boston.

2012 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records (spanning 1879-1986) to University Archives & Special Collections (UASC) in the Joseph P. Healey Library at UMass Boston.

2012 TIARA transfers ownership of the Foresters records (1935 to 1945) to UASC.

2013 The Catholic Association of Foresters transfers custody to TIARA.

2013 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records (1879 to 1935).

2014 TIARA and UASC develop a new initiative which allows TIARA volunteers to work offsite and continue processing and indexing the Foresters records spanning 1935 - 1945.

2015 TIARA receives the 2012 Joseph P. Healey Community Archives Award.

2016 TIARA transfers ownership of the MCOF records (1879 to 1935).

2017 TIARA transfers ownership of the Foresters records (1879 to 1935).

2018 TIARA transfers ownership of the Foresters records (1879 to 1935).

2019 TIARA transfers ownership of the Foresters records (1879 to 1935).

Abstract

How can a university archive establish a successful ongoing relationship with a community organization? What are the benefits and challenges of such a collaboration? University of Massachusetts Boston 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 University's 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.

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. For more information about the Foresters collection, visit blogs.umass.edu/archives/foresters.

Lesson learned: Community organizations are in love with their collections.

What worked for us:
- TIARA volunteers are granted special access and maintain a special relationship with the collection through indexing and processing activities.
- UASC created an exhibit and hosted a public event celebrating TIARA's work with the Foresters records that drew more than 150 attendees.
- UASC presented TIARA with the 2012 Joseph P. Healey Community Archives Award.

Lesson learned: Community organizations often fear bureaucratic gatekeepers.

What worked for us:
- UASC agreed to store the bulk of this collection onsite rather than in our offsite facility.
- UASC waives reproduction fees for TIARA members and CAF members.
- UASC uses university resources to improve and expand searching and look-up tools.
- UASC and TIARA recognize each other as equal partners and continue to build a mutually beneficial relationship.

Lesson learned: A university archives’ competing priorities can frustrate community organizations.

What worked for us:
- UASC consistently provided TIARA with clear, honest information about where the Foresters collection fits within UASC’s processing queue.
- UASC enthusiastically welcomed TIARA’s donation without making unrealistic promises about processing or access.
- UASC is careful to communicate any campus issues that affect TIARA’s involvement, such as parking, construction, staff changes or special events.

Lesson learned: Working with a single community organization can involve many stakeholders.

What worked for us:
- One long-time, well-respected TIARA board member and researcher serves as the primary project liaison.
- UASC and TIARA both engaged their institutional and organizational leadership during every stage of the project.
- UASC connects TIARA volunteers with other communities of interest on campus and beyond through academic programs, departmental activities, courses, and student engagement.