PRAIRIE DOGS AND TERABYTES:
A Brief History of Digital Archiving in Washington

Presented by Jerry Handfield and Larry Cebula
Deep in the Digital Archives Conference
September 21 – 24, 2010
Where’s the archives?
ARCHIVES AND POWER

• Archives are at least 6000 years old
• Property records, business records, laws and decrees, history
• Property of the ruler
• Booty of war—Alexander seizes “the royal skins” from Persia

Image: King Sennacherib and the royal scribes tour a battlefield, 700 B.C.
“By lot is chosen also a secretary called Secretary of the Presidency. He has supreme power over public records, keeps the texts of the decrees, keeps transcripts of all other business and sits in the meetings of the Council. Formerly he was elected by show of hands and the most illustrious and trustworthy citizens were appointed to the office. In fact, his name is inscribed on pillars at the head of the texts of alliances and degrees granting to aliens citizenship ....”

Aristotle, 384 BC – 322 BC
WASHINGTON STATE DIGITAL ARCHIVES

- Est. 2004
- Mission: preservation of electronic records from both State and Local agencies that have permanent legal, fiscal or historical value
- 32,567,592,285,770 records*—and counting
- Such as?

* as of 9 p.m. 9/22/2010
BIRTH, DEATH, MARRIAGE RECORDS

1913 Marriage Certificate for King Corn and Queen Alfalfa

Washington State Digital Archives
document # easpmca16087
Naturalization Records

1912 Naturalization Certificate for Frank Clare Brown

“I am not an anarchist, I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy…”

Washington State Digital Archives
document # eastvndec_259
**Census Records**

**DETAIL: 1860**

**SPOKANE COUNTY CENSUS**

**OCCUPATIONS INCLUDE**
CLERK, BOATMAN, LABORER, ATTENDANT, WOODSMAN, CARPENTER, PACKER
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS

Boeing 314 Clipper, with Mt. Rainier in the background, ca. 1945

Washington State Digital Archives document # AR-07809001-ph000158
...AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

25 available collections

- Audio Recordings
- Military Records
- Oaths of Office
- Plats and Surveys
- Property Records
- Court Records
- Ordinance Records
- Institution Records
- Etc. etc. etc.
WHY WASHINGTON STATE?

“Perfect Storm” of Factors:
- Local high-tech industry
- Robust economy, strong revenues
- Visionary Leadership
- Support of Local Government
- Proliferation of “born digital” records
- Tech advances in scanning, storing
- Legal concerns about preserving records

Digital Archives under construction, June 2003
(photo courtesy Sherry Bays)
WASHINGTON STATE = HIGH TECH
Tax Revenues in Washington State, 1985-2005


TOTAL STATE TAXES
VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Phil Coombs (1946-2001)

“He recognized that with so many documents being born digital, we had to find a new way to retain records that have historic, legal or fiscal value.” -- Sherry Bays, eastern Washington regional archivist

Vision continued under Secretary of State Sam Reed and Washington State Archivist Jerry Handfield
SUPPORT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

• Washington’s County Clerks and Auditors
• Politically powerful and in every corner of the state
• Proliferation of “born digital” records
• State archives not accepting
BORN DIGITAL RECORDS

• Increasing numbers, importance
• Email, spreadsheets, websites, electronic publications
• No analog counterpart
• All media degrade over time

“If Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address on a laptop we may not have it today.”

- Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed (2004)
LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Federal Freedom of Information Act (1966)

Washington Public Records Act (1972)
- “The people insist on remaining informed so that they may maintain control over the instruments that they have created.”
- Includes electronic records
- June 2009 Department of Labor and Industries ordered to pay $500,000 for ignoring a records request

Similar laws in most states, many local governments
DECLINING COSTS

Digital Storage Cost Trend

Source: Northwestern University
“As part of the feasibility analysis, alternatives to development of a centralized Digital Archives were discussed and subsequently rejected. No other alternative would meet existing legal mandates, adequately protect against the current loss of electronic archival records, or be as cost effective.”

-Washington State Digital Archives Feasibility Study, 8/2003
BUT WHY IN CHENEY?
Archived Website
Not All Functionality Is Available

Governor Gary Locke
STATE OF WASHINGTON

Welcome!
Thank you for visiting our website—your source for news and information from the Office of the Governor. Visit Access Washington for additional online government services and information. If you're planning a visit, be sure to Experience Washington. Enjoy your visit!

Handline News

1/11/2005 - Gov. Gary Locke's Farewell Address
OLYMPIA - Jan. 11, 2005 - Gov. Gary Locke today delivered his farewell address to a joint session of the Washington State Legislature. Locke served two terms as governor and will leave office tomorrow, Jan. 13, at noon. The text of his speech is as follows: [Read more...]

1/10/2005 - Gov. Gary Locke Announces Appointments to Boards and Commissions
OLYMPIA - Jan. 11, 2005 - Gov. Gary Locke today announced the...
INTERNATIONAL VISITORS 2005-PRESENT

• Pictured: 2005 delegation from China

• Also visitors from the British Library, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the National Government of Australia, Canada, and many states
LOC / MULTI-STATE PRESERVATION PROJECT

- Began 2007
- Funded by the Library of Congress via the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program
- Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon
- “The Other National Archives”
EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP WITH EWU
Starting in August 2008, a much more accurate method was set up to track...
The Future?