

History of the Archives





Westchester County's formal records management program was first developed within the Office of the County Clerk in 1971. Later, in recognition of the increased use of new technologies and the proliferation of electronic records, the administration of the Archives & Records Center was transferred to the Department of Information Technology.

Since 1998, the program's director reports to the County's Chief Information Officer, who serves as the county's Records Management Officer and reports to the County Executive.

Management of Departmental Records


The May 8, 1973 purchase of the Records Center at 2199 Saw Mill River Rd. in Elmsford was the inaugural step in developing systematic storage and management of inactive paper-based records for all county departments. The pioneering efforts to set up model policies and procedures included surveying all county records, transferring appropriate ones to the new repository, creating an instructional manual and forms and training over 200 county employees. The expanding program called for a wing to be added to the original building in 1988-89. In subsequent years, secondary warehouse space was also needed, which today is now located at 375 Executive Blvd., Elmsford.

Initiation of an Archives & Micrographics Unit

Beginning in 1985, under then County Clerk Andrew J. Spano, the Records Management program's mission expanded to include an archive. Procedures were also established for creating digital copies of the county's most critical records. A director of volunteers was engaged and the [Volunteers In Archives \(/about-us/volunteers\)](#) Program was begun. The first archivist was hired and grants were sought to bring order to the county's rich historical records. The Lower Hudson Conference for Historical Agencies and Museums (now known as the [Greater Hudson Heritage Network](#) ) relocated to the facility in the early 1980s, as did the [Westchester County Historical Society](#)  in 1989. Environmentally controlled vaults were constructed to house both the county's and the Historical Society's collections. The public has enjoyed access to both at the same facility ever since.

The Archives and Records Management program was officially established in 1988 with a resolution adopting the NYS Records Retention & Disposition Schedule for Counties and the passage of Chapter 631 of the Laws of Westchester County (section of County Charter). The program's goals are to assist county officials to store, retrieve, preserve and dispose of their departmental records in accordance with federal, state and local laws -- all in an efficient, cost-effective manner. By 1989 a Records Commission was created and the Archives Reading Room was open to the public for research purposes. An ambitious program was begun to microfilm county land records and some of the oldest genealogical records; scanning of all the County Clerk maps and plans was also undertaken in the mid-1990s. Volunteers assisted the small staff with both reference and processing duties, including the development of indexes to the collections and other finding aids. The first Westchester County Archives Web site was launched in 1998 and databases were developed to increase access to the collections as well as to collect statistics on the entire records management program.

Growth of Archives Digitization & Records Center's 21st Century Operations


Bolstered by the public's interest in Westchester's rich history and the growth of the Internet, an educational outreach program was initiated in 2000 to scan the county's richest historical documents, to place them in their historical context and to publish them online. Known as the [Virtual Archives](#) , this Web site's first five sections were developed in collaboration with the Westchester County Historical Society, as well as with repositories from over two dozen Westchester communities. Special partners also included the U.S. Dept. of the Interior's Historical American Engineering Record division and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Additionally, the County Archives' Photograph and Maps Collections are scanned and catalogued using special library software that increases online search capability and access. County departmental historical maps and plans have also been imaged for inclusion in the county's Geographic Information System's levels of data. Batch scanning and the production of computer output microfilm rolls has further enhanced the county's support to preservation of records requiring long-term access, as well as to providing immediate access to files needed by various departments across servers and networks.

The Records Center program has been strengthened by the conversion of its manual, labor-intensive system for managing inactive paper records to an online program known as WESTARM. Over 5 years in its development and roll-out, this web-based system's infrastructure includes databases related to the various records and their retention periods; functions may be performed by the staff in a wireless environment with records and their locations identified by bar-coded labels. This tool has brought increased accountability to all records management activities and provided accurate and timely records' inventories for the departments' use.

Plans for Program's Future

In 2007, the Records Commission formally recognized the need for improved management of the county's electronic records and for additional support to both the legal discovery process and the retrieval of records requested under the Freedom of Information Law. To that end, a complete assessment of the county's records management policies and procedures has been undertaken in 2010 by an outside consultant with the goal of updating all policies and procedures, as well as developing cost-effective systems for the management of e-mail and other computer files.

In 2010, the Archives & Records Center's main facility underwent an \$8.2 million renovation program for all its building systems. A new, state-of-the-art archival vault was constructed within the current warehouse to provide needed added storage for the many county historical records that were stored in less favorable conditions for many years. The building was official re-dedicated on June 16, 2011. Additionally, the 25th Anniversary year for the Archives witnessed the launch of a completely revamped web site. It includes [Digital Collections](#)  for the first time; thousands of historical photographs, maps and other images from the County Archives have been scanned, cataloged for maximum search capability and presented with an easy to use web interface. With the Center's physical upgrades and the use of new technologies to improve preservation and access, the county government has reaffirmed its commitment to the County Archives & Records Center's mission to safeguard the public record and to promote future access to Westchester's rich history.

Program Management, 1973 – present

Eugene S. Page, Deputy County Clerk in Charge of Records, 1973-1983

Orial A. Redd, Second Deputy County Clerk for Records & Archives, 1984-1991

Cecilia Bikkal, Second Deputy County Clerk for Records & Archives, 1991-1994

Brenda Resnick Spano, Second Deputy County Clerk for Records & Archives, 1994-1995

David W. Carmicheal, Records Manager and Archivist, 1995-1999; Director of Knowledge Management & Archives, 1999-2000

Patricia N. Dohrenwend, Director of Knowledge Management & Archives, 2000-2011

Christopher Gratzel, Records Manager, 2011-2018

Christopher Gratzel, Director of Knowledge Management & Archives, 2018- present

Program Awards, 1978 – present

1978 "County Achievement" Award from the National Association of Counties, Washington, D.C.

1999 New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Archives Award for Excellence in the Educational Use of Local Government Records by a Local Government

2003 Lower Hudson Conference Award for Excellence in recognition of an outstanding collaborative initiative among national and local government agencies and private organizations, to create a Web site illuminating the historical significance of the landmark Bronx River Parkway Reservation

2009 New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Archives William H. Kelly Archives Award for Excellence in Local Government Archival Program Development

2010 New York State Forum Award for Best Practice in Management (WESTARM)

2010 Greater Hudson Heritage Network Award Towards Excellence for the Web site: "The Army's Century on Davids Island: Fort Slocum, New Rochelle, NY"