



TO: Cultural Education Committee

FROM: Jeffrey Cannell

SUBJECT: Identifying the Archival Record

DATE: May 12, 2014

AUTHORIZATION(S):

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

In making decisions about what materials will be permanently preserved to form the documentary record, archivists literally determine what we can know in the future about our past. Staff will provide insight into the approaches and techniques used by archivists to ensure that people of all ages have a documentary record that is comprehensive, equitable, and effectively reflects the history of this state and provides accountability, protects rights, and documents the people, institutions, and events that characterize this state.

Reason(s) for Consideration

For information.

Background Information

Archivists are faced with the unique challenge of selecting for long-term preservation the archival materials that will constitute the permanent record of the people and events of New York from initial settlement to the very recent past. When that selection is done with careful attention and planning, the archival record allows users from scholars to classroom teachers and students, to lawyers, surveyors, family historians, scientists, and many others to have access to an accurate and comprehensive historical record. These resources become the foundation from which they seek and assess information and employ it for a wide range of personal, educational, and professional pursuits. The selection process follows a rigor that relies on a thorough understanding of the context in which records were created, how they were used by people and organizations as they conducted their business, and how they document the cultural, economic, social, legal and human history of New York. Approximately five percent of all records and documents created over time have

sufficient value to warrant permanent preservation in an archives or manuscript repository. Records and documents selected as the essential evidence of this state are preserved in archival facilities with primary emphasis on ensuring the rich information they hold is made widely available to the public in New York, as well as nationally and internationally.

The archival value of records and documents is determined through an analysis of a number of factors including:

- the significance, uniqueness and usefulness of the information they contain
- the evidence they provide of people, groups, an action, decision or event
- the value of the content in documenting legal, fiscal, administrative or historical matters

Keith Swaney, Archives and Records Management Specialist I, will review for the committee some of the criteria archivists use in assessing records and will provide specific examples of how these are applied and the methodologies used in the effort to ensure an even and complete documentary record to support knowledge for the future.