

# White Paper Report

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White Paper

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Planning for the Future: Professional Evaluation of the Samish Indian  
Nation's Archival Storage Facility

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Collections grant, which is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities

## Background and Institution History

The Samish Indian Nation was one of the Point Elliot Treaty Tribes who were never given a reservation. They were active in early tribal organizations such as the Northwest Federation of Indians, and later in Small Tribes of Western Washington. They managed to maintain their tribal identity during the Indian Claims Cases of the 1950s. They remained Samish when they were unrecognized after the Boldt decision in the 1970s. And they remained Samish when they had their status restored in 1996 as a federally recognized Indian Tribe after 26 years of court battles.

The Samish Indian Nation administration is based in Anacortes in Washington State, and the current membership is at about 1400 members. Most tribal members dwell in the greater Puget Sound region of Western Washington, though live in other states and even a few in other countries. Since the tribe's re-recognition in 1996, the tribe now has Programs serving its members include health, social services, natural resources, and the archives and cultural resources department.

The collections of the Samish Archives and Cultural Resources department include a wide range of information and media. The archival collections include correspondence, materials gathered by Samish researchers, legal documents from the various court battles the Samish Indian Nation has been involved in, papers donated by Samish members, papers from Samish grants, and a variety of other documents. The archival collections include photographs of Samish members, events, artifacts, the locations in Samish territory, business enterprises and other subjects. There are also a number of machine readable records which include audio cassettes, video tapes, CDs, and disks.

Tribal members are able to research the history of their families, explore tribal history, and research the collections. Employees and researchers are allowed differential access to collections, depending on the focus of their research.

### A. Major Activities

The Samish Indian Nation Archives and Cultural Resources department applied for the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant to identify ways in which the collections building could be improved. To accomplish this, an archives facilities consultant was needed. This grant project was comprised of three major activities. The first activity was the site visit by facilities consultant Thomas Wilsted. During his visit, Mr. Wilsted evaluated and assessed the Archives and Cultural Resources building, and met with department staff. He spent the day talking with staff, surveying the building's interior, exterior, and surrounding grounds, and discussing ways in which the facility could be improved. The second activity was the writing of the forma assessment report. Mr. Wilsted and the tribal archivist, Jason Ticknor settled on a format for the report, and Wilsted wrote it. The third activity was the review of the report by Mr. Ticknor, and the crafting of an implementation plan. This plan evaluated the consultant's recommendations, and prioritized the order in which the recommendations will be

implemented. Several recommendations were implemented immediately, and staff will implement the remainder over time.

#### B. Accomplishments

All objectives listed in the initial grant proposal were achieved. The first objective was the selection of the consultant, and this was carried out during June and July 2010. Department staff selected archives consultant Thomas Wilsted. Prior to Mr. Wilsted's initial site visit in September, Mr. Ticknor sent two documents to Mr. Wilsted. These included a map and a building evaluation prepared by an assessor before the building was initially remodeled. The second objective was Mr. Wilsted's site visit. He came to tribe's facility in Anacortes, and evaluated the building and site, talked with staff, and compiled his data. The third objective was to produce a final report. Following an email discussion, Mr. Wilsted and Mr. Ticknor mutually agreed upon a format for the report, and in late September 2010 the final report was delivered to the Samish Indian Nation. The final objective was the crafting of the implementation plan. Jason Ticknor has written the implementation plan, and delivered it to tribal management for review. All the objectives listed for the grant project in the narrative were achieved.

#### C. Audience

The audience for the final report funded by this grant consists of Archives and Cultural Resources department staff, Tribal Administration, and the Samish Tribal Council.

#### D. Evaluation

Two different evaluations took place during this grant project. The first was the Wilsted report. In this report, Mr. Wilsted evaluated the building and storage conditions of the collections, and offered recommendations the renovation, improvement, and repair of the collections building.

The results took the form of recommendations. Mr. Wilsted prioritized the recommendations, with number one being the most urgent. For example, the most urgent was the need for better fire protection. Each recommendation consisted of his observation/assessment, followed by his proposed solution(s), and culminated with his recommendation for action.

The second evaluation consisted of an action plan. The reason it was partly an evaluation was that Mr. Ticknor read the report and evaluated the relative feasibility of each recommendation. Mr. Ticknor's implementation plan discusses and explains why certain recommendations will not be implemented, and which will be implemented in the future.

#### E. Continuation of the Project

Collections preservation is an ongoing concern, and has no definite endpoint. This project will continue to progress in several ways. Several recommendations will be implemented by staff over time. Some require additional funds; others will wait for new buildings.

There is also the possibility of applying for future Sustaining Cultural Heritage Grants to partly fund some recommendations.

#### F. Long Term Impact

The greatest utility of the reports will be in guiding future program actions and facility designs and modifications. When the department eventually moves to a different building, the recommendations in the Wilsted report will assist with the physical design of the new building so that it will function as a first-rate archival facility.

The long term impact is really what this project is about. Improving the storage conditions of collections prolongs their life, and thus their ability to be used by the tribe and other researchers. These recommendations will improve the facility, and a better facility will in turn preserve the collections for the future.

#### G. Grant Products

The two main products to this grant project are the Wilsted report and the implementation plan. The first sets out the best options for improving the archives and cultural resources building. The implementation plan sets out which recommendations will be implemented, and some idea of when they will be implemented. Both reports are attached as appendices A and B respectively.

#### H. Lessons Learned

This grant opportunity taught the department key several lessons which will help us better preserve our collections. The first pertains to floor load: When converting a building for archival use, it is important to calculate if a building is built to withstand the weight of accumulated records. Records are heavy, and it is best to consult a structural engineer to see if a proposed archival facility can hold its own weight.

The second lesson is concerns fire protection. This is highly important for collections, since most are flammable. Sprinkler systems are not easily installed in all buildings, so it is best to find out if one can be installed before collections are moved to that building.

A third lesson addresses fire vaults. There are companies who are able to construct fire vaulting for buildings, and this greatly improves the chances for preserving collections in case of fire. Premade fire walls are highly useful for archives, and they could be implemented in new structures built near the archives.

#### Conclusion-

The Samish Indian Nation Archives and Cultural Resources Department has benefited greatly from the NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections Planning grant. Thanks to this grant, the department can take now steps to improve the tribe's collections facility, which in turn preserves the collections of the department. Both the report and plan will guide the department in making changes and renovations to the current collections building, and also in design of new facilities where collections will be kept.