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**CENTER FOR LOCAL HISTORY EDUCATION:
AN OUTREACH PROGRAM OF THE
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY**

Alice Knierim

In 1979 the Georgia Department of Archives and History, with support and encouragement from Secretary of State David Poythress, significantly expanded its outreach programs. At that time it assumed the functions of the year-old Discovery Program of the Georgia Commission for the National Bicentennial Celebration. Later renamed the Center for Local History Education, this program added a comprehensive school outreach dimension previously lacking in the department's offerings and specifically required by its authorizing legislation to "promote the study of Georgia history in the schools."

It was the clear intent of legislation creating the archives that it was to be the Georgia Department of Archives and History. The archives not only would minister to state records but also would take an active role in nurturing a sense of Georgia history in the citizens of the state. The Georgia archives has always recognized this dual mission, and in 1979 Director Carroll Hart strengthened the history component with the addition of the Center for Local History Education.

Through the center, the Georgia archives encourages teachers and students on the elementary and secondary levels to become involved in discovering, recording, and celebrating their unique family, community, and state heritage. Curriculum guides, bibliographies, a newsletter, and school workshops provide guidance in identifying and studying various primary resources which document that

heritage-- government records, personal papers, historical photographs, old buildings, cemeteries, longtime residents, crafts, and folklore. And special programs such as Georgia History Day, "Local History Resources at Your Doorstep," and "Community Album" offer opportunities for students and teachers to work with original materials and discover the excitement and rewards of historical research in the holdings of the state archives and local records repositories.

Instead of concentrating on bringing increased numbers of students to the archives for research experiences, the director of the center has gone into the field to train students and teachers in the use of records available locally. In this way, the archives is able to work with large numbers of young people around the state and still avoid many of the problems that increased student visitation would create--a time and energy drain on the staff, crowded research areas, and possible damage to records from excessive handling. Given a staff of one, it seemed that the center could be most effective when working with archives' staff and consultants to develop a corps of teachers trained in the use of local resources. In turn these teachers could introduce hundreds of students to local historical records. Therefore, the center began working with teachers, helping them identify local resources, training them in their use, and suggesting classroom activities based on historical records.

Uniquely equipped to provide such training, archival institutions fill a real gap in the education of teachers of local and national history on the elementary and secondary levels. Most history and social studies education graduates receive teaching certificates, having had very little, if any, experience in the use of primary historical resources. Most methodology courses still concentrate on library, not archival, research. As a result, many teachers are unfamiliar with archives and uncomfortable about voluntarily entering uncharted territory.

Some very useful local history resource books for teachers have been published in the past several years.¹ Although they cannot serve as guides to records collections

in state and local repositories, these books can suggest the potential the collections hold for valuable classroom experiences. It is up to outreach programs to make archival collections readily available to the schools in whatever formats are most effective and practical and to foster an awareness of resources.

In addition to mailing materials to teachers and other interested individuals across Georgia, in late 1979 the Center for Local History Education sponsored a series of workshops on discovering local history in several cities. These day-long sessions covered the gamut of resources, from documents and photographs to oral history and architecture. Archival staff participated but most workshop consultants were drawn from local colleges, libraries, museums, and historical societies so that sessions would have local relevance and convenient resource people could be introduced to participants. Approximately 400 people attended these workshops, and they remain an active corps of local history proponents in the schools. Although most of these teachers and their students will never visit the Georgia archives, they are part of a statewide constituency and are able to benefit from the outreach services offered patrons outside the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Since that initial workshop series, the center has continued to expand the corps of educators familiar with the archives and its holdings, aware of the value of historical records, and generally supportive of the work of the archives and other records repositories around the state. In June 1981 the Georgia archives, in conjunction with the Atlanta Historical Society, inaugurated a two-week teacher course, "Local History Resources at Your Doorstep." This course, which carries five hours of staff development credit from the state Department of Education, is offered to teachers in the Atlanta area with the specific goal of acquainting them with the holdings of the archives and Atlanta Historical Society and how the collections may be used in the classroom. Archivists from both institutions served as faculty for the course, along with outside consultants from the Atlanta area. Teachers learned how to use city

directories, Sanborn maps, and tax records to document structures in their school neighborhood. They worked with diaries and photographs as the basis of classroom activities, and they discussed the kinds of records available to document the life experiences of members of various ethnic groups.

The final requirement of the course was for each participant to prepare a local history unit and to implement it in the classroom during the 1981-82 academic year. Results have ranged from oral history projects to classroom displays of historical photographs, from using photostats of architectural drawings of the state Capitol as the basis of a unit on the Capitol to creating a family "archives." None of the teachers in the course had ever done research at the state archives or Atlanta Historical Society, and very few had even visited the facilities. At the end of the two weeks, participants had worked with several staff members at both institutions, become familiar with the holdings and policies of each, and actually carried out research based on the collections.

While working to establish an effective network for reaching educators around the state, the Center for Local History Education has also become involved in programs designed specifically for students. The first step was to accept sponsorship of National History Day in Georgia. This program encourages sixth through twelfth grade students to conduct historical research and, then, to use that research as the basis of a paper, project, performance, or media presentation entered in a district contest. Initially, Georgia History Day served two purposes: (1) It offered the opportunity for the Georgia archives to inaugurate a program specifically for young people--a longtime dream of the director; and (2) start-up funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) offered a means of continuing the activities of the center until permanent state funds could be secured. Fortunately, pragmatic and idealistic goals were mutually compatible. The Georgia archives became the only archives in the country to sponsor a history day program. In the other thirty-eight or so states that

have been organized to date, prime sponsorship rests with either colleges or universities or state historical societies.

In Georgia the state program is subdivided into eight districts, with college sponsorship in seven of these and county board of education sponsorship in the eighth. District coordinators publicize the program in all schools in their areas and through local libraries, historical societies, regional education offices, and regional planning and development commissions. As a result, the Georgia archives has established a strong network of support among district sponsors and literally thousands of teachers, students, and parents across the state who have become familiar with the archives as an agency offering the opportunity for positive recognition of academic endeavors by both students and schools.

In addition, Georgia History Day promotes research in the holdings of the archives and other records repositories. Although entries do not have to focus on state history to be eligible for participation in district, state, or national contests, the center has encouraged students to work on local topics. Some of the Georgia entries that have advanced to the national contest have focused on Governor Ellis Arnall, Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Little White House, Tom Watson, a Coweta County mill, Crawford Long, and 1890 Augusta.

Georgia History Day has brought students into archives, county courthouses, local and regional libraries, historical societies, and other records repositories in larger numbers than ever. Along with researching what they hope will be a winning entry, students also learn--directly or indirectly-- where historical records are located, under what terms they are made available to the public, which records have been preserved and which have been lost or destroyed, and how to handle documents of historical value. Discussions with these young people and their parents and teachers reveal a growing awareness of the importance of historical records and their preservation. Through a program like Georgia History Day, the statewide constituency of the

archives has increased dramatically.

In 1981 the center expanded its programs for students by initiating "Community Album: Local History Through Photographs," a project funded by the Youth Project Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities. NEH funds have enabled the Georgia archives to subsidize local projects in fifteen communities around the state. School and community youth groups submitted applications detailing projects designed to document through photographs an important time period or theme in their community's history. Selected groups will locate and copy significant photographs, document them through research in records and oral history interviews, and then display them as part of a permanent community history exhibit.

The first phase of "Community Album" was a training seminar at the archives for eighty student and adult group leaders. During the day and a half seminar, participants attended sessions on handling, interpreting, documenting, and copying historical photographs; governmental records and maps and their interpretation; private papers and nontraditional printed materials; and oral history interviewing. This seminar marked the first time a session on archival research had been offered especially for young people by the Georgia archives.

In three years, the Center for Local History Education has established a successful program to promote interest among teachers and students in local history and historical records in general and in the state archives in particular. A key to this success is offering programs that meet the needs of educators as well as the needs of the archives. Many local history programs, like Foxfire, grew out of the 1960s and 1970s and reflected interest in relevant, back-to-basic, back-to-nature activities. By 1980 many educators were ready to dismiss these programs as irrelevant to the core curriculum, as "fluff" programs that just entertained the students. When "Local History Resources at Your Doorstep" was offered in 1981, it was in competition with other staff development courses such as "Teaching Special Education

Students" and "Teaching Reading Skills for Elementary Teachers."

It is incumbent upon archivists, librarians, and historical society and museum curators to prove that local history has a place in any curriculum. In talks at professional meetings, during teacher courses, and on trips promoting Georgia History Day, the center director discusses local history as an effective means of teaching various learning skills. Through work with historical records, students learn basic research skills and they improve map skills as they study their towns and neighborhoods. They develop critical thinking skills as they try to reconcile discrepancies in newspaper accounts, letters, and court records dealing with the same event. And as students prepare Georgia History Day entries or work on "Community Album" exhibits, they take extra care in their research, spelling, and grammar since they are working for an expanded community audience. In addition, they become better informed citizens as they learn about the functions of local government offices through the records they keep. By working with the state Department of Education, the center has been able to identify teacher and student needs, to meet some of those needs, and to present the Georgia archives and its staff as a valuable resource for numerous school activities.

One weakness of the center is that its programs are all "special" in nature--either onetime programs like "Community Album" and the teacher workshop series, annual programs like "Local History Resources at Your Doorstep," or specialized programs like Georgia History Day. At present, ongoing programs are limited to school talks and materials distributed by mail. A long-range goal of the center is to work with other sections within the archives in creating ongoing introductory research programs for students and in developing classroom workbooks or facsimile packets based on documents and photographs in the archives' collection.

The purpose of the center is not to insist that all records be made available to students at all times. Indeed, many documents are basically incomprehensible to students in their original format, and the information contained in

them is best presented in abstract form. Of course, students, just as other researchers, should have access to original records when their needs warrant, but most student and classroom projects can be successfully implemented by use of photocopies, fascimiles, or even slides of documents. It is the responsibility of the center and similar outreach programs to determine the most effective and efficient means by which archival records can be made available to school groups.

Although the Georgia archives has been better able to fulfill its mandate, to expand its outreach services, and to increase and diversify its statewide constituency, the Center for Local History Education is in its infancy and still has problems to overcome. In many respects the center and the archives' other outreach programs remain separate from records-keeping and reference functions of the department. Various outreach programs are developed and then implemented in conjunction with staff and outside consultants. Too often, however, ideas become programs without sufficient coordination with or support from other staff members. While cooperation is generally forthcoming, most staff members do not have the time and/or interest necessary to participate in outreach planning. And outreach personnel often fail to allow sufficient time in the planning process to solicit staff suggestions and reactions to proposed programs. Seldom are archivists asked to participate in evaluating outreach activities.

Since outreach programs specifically aimed at students could, over time, create problems for department archivists, their participation and cooperation are essential. For example, Georgia History Day and "Community Album" could significantly increase the number of reference requests from students and their parents and teachers. The center generates interest, but then it becomes the responsibility of other sections in the archives to cope with these extra demands. This problem becomes even more significant if staff members are not involved in all stages of program planning and implementation.

As teachers become more familiar with the archives, they are requesting services that cannot be made available to them now, i.e., intensive research "experiences" as an introduction to the archives, free copies of documents and photographs for classroom use, and extensive individualized reference assistance. In addition, department policies that deal with minimum age limits for school tours and research will need to be reviewed if the department is to continue encouraging young people to work with historical records.

Most importantly, the whole question of the relationship between the center, other archives' outreach programs, and the core functions of the archives must be clarified so that staff members share common, stated goals, support the actions of all sections, and contribute to outreach planning. Presently, outreach programs are an important, but not yet integral, part of the Georgia archives. There will continue to be occasional conflict as outreach programs stimulate public awareness, receive increased attention, and in so doing, generate additional work for departmental archivists.

Over the next several months, as the Center for Local History Education and the archives' other outreach programs are reviewed, strengthened, and incorporated into the core of the department, the Georgia archives will have the opportunity to serve as a model for other repositories by genuinely accepting public and educational outreach programs as essential to the basic purpose and functioning of the institution and to lead the way in the integration and implementation of these programs. The end result of educational outreach programs can be a broader-based, better informed constituency for archival institutions across the state and nation.

NOTES

¹ Fay D. Metcalf and Matthew T. Downey, Teaching Local History: Trends, Tips, and Resources (Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., 1977) and Using

Local History in the Classroom (Nashville: American Assn. for State and Local History, 1982). David Weitzman, My Backyard History Book (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975) and Underfoot: An Everyday Guide to Exploring the American Past (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976).