

# Tennessee Archives Month

## Action Guide Planning For Archives Month Society of Tennessee Archivists

### INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Archives Month, inspired by American Archives Month, gives archivists in Tennessee an opportunity and reason to celebrate our archives and historical records and, more importantly, promote what we do and who we are. We want to connect and gain exposure with the media and, especially, our elected and appointed officials. Although an event should educate, inform, enlighten, and/or entertain, it's important to remember that the first reason of an event is to promote who we are and what we do.

### WHAT IS ARCHIVES MONTH?

Archives Month is an annual, month-long celebration of the importance of archival and historical records to our nation, our state, and our lives. The reasons for holding Archives Month is to increase awareness with the public, with our public officials, and on a more philosophical level, accountability and access to our recorded past is the bedrock of our democracy.

### PARTICIPATION IN ARCHIVES MONTH IS IMPORTANT

Your participation in Archives Month is important, because increased public awareness of historical records translates into increased financial support of archives. Archives Month and other outreach efforts help the public, and resource allocators such as trustees, administrators, and state legislators, understand and appreciate that historical records have value not only for an understanding of the past, but that they also make a contribution to our modern society. By participating in Archives Month you get to promote your collections and the work you do, thus demonstrating the value of the records and the work you do with them. Archives Month provides a coordinated and concentrated opportunity to hold public programs that highlight your work and the ways historical records make it happen. The Society of American Archivists has an excellent Public Relations Kit for additional ideas and assistance. This downloadable document can be found at: [http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth/2009\\_AAMKit.pdf](http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth/2009_AAMKit.pdf) .

## **AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RECOGNITION**

Archives Month is a great opportunity for you to hold an event, or events, in your local community with local media coverage. It's also an opportunity to get your local officials involved in your activities. It's also a perfect time to acknowledge individuals and groups who have contributed to the success of your organization. Remember to invite, or get involved, your local officials, state legislator, teachers, and local community and business leaders.

An opportunity for recognition and an opportunity for media exposure could be the issuance of an official proclamation for Archives Month by the county mayor, municipal mayor or state legislator. Make a event out of it by inviting the media to the official's office and have a formal presentation.

## **THE MEDIA**

This is an opportunity to build relationships with your local media. Media outlets, whether print or broadcast, have four goals: to inform; to advise; to entertain; to make a profit. The key is to make it easy for the media to attain these goals. As important as this event is to you, it must compete for attention with a number of other news issues and developing stories. Be prepared to do follow-up calls, deal with many busy people, and be flexible to meet the media's needs for information.

## **TIMETABLE**

Disseminating press materials should generally begin about one month before the event will take place, and usually two weeks prior notice is needed by newspapers. It is helpful to identify the appropriate individual to contact at each media outlet. Once you have a contact name, mail or fax the "pitch" letter or press release, and follow up with a phone call a few days later. At that point you may be asked for additional information. Take pains to provide this in a timely manner.

## **TALKING HEADS**

Be prepared also to have an appropriate individual or individuals readily available for a radio, talk show, newspaper interview or photo opportunity. Make sure these individuals are knowledgeable about the event, and have the talking points and all important information committed to memory. Also, given the time constraints on the media, make such interviews as convenient as possible - work with the reporter's schedule, or arrange the interview at the studio or newspaper's office.

## **THE PRESS RELEASE**

There is a style or format that should be followed for writing up a press release. Many print media outlets will not consider a press release that is not properly formatted. Since media

people are usually racing toward a deadline, they don't have time to update your letter or press release. They need it in a format that they can use quickly and they will very often use the exact language that you use, with new opening, closing, and segue sentences. Thus, write what you want them to say.

## **EVENT IDEAS**

There is almost no end to the type of events you can hold during Archives Month (or for that matter, at any time during the year). Events can include interpretive displays, lectures, or workshops. Events can be thematic, historical, whimsical, genealogical, pictorial, etc.

Some examples are:

- Hold an open house or tours through your facility, highlighting unique materials, or arrange for public visits to several nearby repositories.
- Develop an exhibit using materials from your repository that would be of interest to researchers and the general public alike.
- Ask an author or researcher who has used your collections to present a lecture at your repository on the value of the collection/s they used.
- Present a film festival using films or videos held by your repository.
- Conduct lunchtime lectures and talks by archivists, local historians and others who are familiar with your collections.
- Organize historic site or house tours in your own town or county.
- Present workshops for teachers on how they can utilize your holdings to bring local or state history to their classes.
- Introduce your archives to teachers and their classes by inviting them to visit your archives for a tour.
- Organize a "how-to" workshop for beginners in genealogy in cooperation with the local genealogical group in your community.
- Ask a knowledgeable local photographer to do a workshop on identifying and preserving old family photographs.
- Tape record or videotape oral history interviews with older members of the community. Invite one of the interviewees to give a lecture for the community on family life in the community in their youth.

- Organize and “Antiques Roadshow”-type event with local antique dealers featuring family heirlooms from your community.
- Help local teachers to conduct class projects to write the family history of each child in the class. If possible have the children in to use your historical records in doing so. Bob Greene’s *To Our Children’s Children*, is a good resource for this activity.
- Based on records in your archives, try to recreate an appropriate period in the history of your community for a community-wide celebration.
- Host an archival scavenger hunt for students to search out significant events in the community’s life.
- Trace the genealogy of a property. Like families, buildings and properties have unique histories which can be traced through historical records.
- Organize a dinner dance/fashion show featuring foods, clothing styles and music popular in earlier times, as documented in local archival materials.
- Organize a historical reenactment, perhaps a Civil War-related event or World War II event. Encourage historical reenactors to participate, and urge veterans to visit and provide historical insight.

## FAMILY HERITAGE DAY

Perhaps the most important event during Archives Month will be “Family Heritage Day.” Family Heritage Day is an opportunity to get the entire community involved, using the “genealogy hook” to get people out to the event. Genealogical research is the fastest growing recreational activity in the country. Family Heritage Day can also include a number of events (as sampled above) so that there will be something for almost everyone.

## FUNDRAISING

Fundraising can be of several types. One is to raise money to conduct an event. Another is a fundraising event for your organization. And a third is when you do both. For a small event like an open house or lecture (especially where the lecturer comes free), only a small amount of money may be needed. For an event like Family Heritage Day, you may have a rental fee, furniture rental, hand out materials, materials costs, promotional materials, etc. Some events will require advance funding.

Ways to handle this are to seek outright money donations from individuals, businesses, organizations, etc., or for donations of goods, and or services. (The local flower shop might not want to donate money, but they would be willing to send a bouquet for a raffle or provide a gift certificate for one.) For this you’ll need to make contact through letters and personal visits, with the latter perhaps the best way. Sometimes you can approach a large business such as a bank that will be willing to underwrite the whole event. That certainly makes it much easier. Be aware, major corporations require advance notification for charitable granting, perhaps even a year in advance.

What’s in it for the donor? Promotion. The fact that including them as an event supporter on promotional materials is good advertising for them and shows that they are involved and committed to the community.

Many times, the event itself can be a fundraiser for a group. A workshop or lecture can have a paid presenter where you charge a registration fee. An “antiques roadshow” can also be an antiques sale, or a book and document roadshow and sale, and you can charge a booth or table fee, vendor fee, or have an auction or raffle (as permitted by state law). Another example is a certified genealogist that can discuss researching family information.

For more information, please contact the **Society of Tennessee Archivists**.

Our website is: [www.tennesseearchivists.org](http://www.tennesseearchivists.org). We are also available on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and a blog found on our website.