National Archives Researcher Forum
Friday, May 18, 2012, 1:00 p.m.
G-25, Archives I, Washington, DC

Welcome

Jennifer (Jen) Nelson, Special Assistant to Chief Operating Officer Tom Mills, and Acting Executive for Research Services, welcomed participants to the meeting. This will be her last opportunity to lead the forum. Bill Mayer, University Librarian at American University in Washington, DC, has been selected as the new Executive for Research Services and will begin his tenure on June 18. He brings expertise in acquiring and managing collections and a strong commitment to customer service.

Rebecca Crawford, who oversees the Microfilm Research Room at Archives I, discussed the pending move of all but a small portion of the Microfilm Research Room on May 18-20 to accommodate the reconfiguration of the Robert M. Warner Research Center. Updated information on the progress of this construction project will continue to be announced via the NARAtions blog.

Meeting Agenda and Handout

❖ The focus of the forum was NARA's digitization partnerships.
❖ A handout on *What's New Online* was distributed and posted with the notes of this meeting.

Discussion with NARA's Digitization Partners

A discussion between three of NARA's digitization partners and forum participants was led by Rebecca Warlow. Rebecca works in the Open Government office of Information Services and is responsible for coordinating digitization and description activities. The representatives from the digitization partners were

- Sabrina Petersen from Ancestry.com
- Aaron Spencer from Fold3 (formerly Footnote.com)
- John de Jong from FamilySearch.org

Warlow updated the audience on NARA's digitization efforts, providing a one-page handout of highlights of digitized images of NARA records recently added to NARA's Archival Research Catalog. In the near future, the catalog will also contain approximately ¼ million digital photographic images from the Department of Defense for the period from the 1980s to 2007.

Researcher comment/question 1: Does the 1812 pensions digitization project involve surrendered warrants or the applications series?

Response by Rebecca Warlow: It is the applications series. War of 1812 Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (ARC 564415).

Researcher follow-up: It is important to say this.

Researcher question/comment 2: Are the Record Books of Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Offices of the Confederate Government, RG 109, that appear on the handout referred to as the "Chapter Volumes."

Response by Rebecca Warlow: Yes. There are approximately 2,800 volumes, and all will be digitized internally. It is an ongoing project. This is a project that none of the partners wanted to undertake. In the catalog, narrow the search to Record Group 109, then search on the chapter and volume.

1940 Census Index comment: Rebecca Warlow mentioned that the development of a free index to the 1940 census is projected for completion by the end of July—four months ahead of schedule. To participate, go to "the1940census.com." The same index will be available on all the websites of the group members collaborating in this effort. Ancestry and MyHeritage are each doing separate 1940 census indexes.

Researcher question/comment 3: Is NARA providing index arbitration?

Response by Rebecca Warlow: Arbitration is being done by FamilySearch. NARA provided the census images and is helping to promote the indexing effort.

Researcher question/comment 4: Jim Ferguson of FamilySearch says index arbitration takes place one day behind indexing. Then technical arbitration does a check on "no discernable image" and other issues.

NARA's partners were then asked to introduce themselves.

> **Sabrina Petersen** is head of Global Imaging at Ancestry.com. She began by saying that the September Researcher Forum was great. She loves receiving input from this group. Sabrina announced that the problems with T288, first mentioned at a forum three years ago, have been resolved! There are 544 rolls of film, a quantity that typically takes one week to digitize. Instead, for this project, they had to buy new machines in addition to some reels that required being sent to a specialist. Then there were 2,000,000 records to link to the new images. After that, Ancestry had to update the links to family trees on their site. The work is now DONE.
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> Sabrina notes that as of last year Ancestry has been online for 15 years. Last year they had 7 billion records, and this year the count is 10 billion. She would like to rescan all the early work, but that would be an overwhelming task.

Sabrina commented that she was happy to learn from forum participants of the importance of being able to review images in the same order as they appear on the microfilm. This order is now being observed.

John de Jong is the new FamilySearch liaison to NARA. He was born in Holland, is currently living in Cincinnati, and will be moving to Salt Lake City. He stated that FamilySearch is trying to do all they can to help researchers find the information they seek.

Aaron Spencer is a project manager at Fold3, formerly known as Footnote. He mentioned that their new focus is on military records, which pleases him since he is a veteran combat engineer of the 1st Armored Division. He touts Fold3 as small, agile, and quick. He stated that the researchers at these forums help Fold3 know what to improve.

Rebecca Warlow next revisited several issues raised in the September Researcher Forum:

- Charges of "errors in indexing" (e.g., keying "David" as "Fsbof"): as it turns out, the statistics cited during that meeting were based on searches that were not restricted to "exact matches." There are actually few, if any errors of this type. There are some OCR transcription errors, though. If researchers find any, please let us know, and we will pass this information along to our partners.

- Making corrections to website: Sabrina Petersen explained that in order to make many corrections, Ancestry must take the entire title off the website, make the corrections, and then return it to the website. This is a major operation.

- Color vs. grey-scale images: Rebecca Warlow noted that Fold3 and Ancestry are both providing color images to NARA now. FamilySearch cameras do not produce color images, but FamilySearch is exploring this issue.

Researcher question/comment 5: FamilySearch now has some images of NARA records on its website, but they are not hyperlinked from the list on NARA's website.

Response by Rebecca Warlow: Thank you for pointing that out. FamilySearch has acquired many NARA microfilm publications in the past, and they are digitizing all their holdings. We will talk with John de Jong to find out the links to use and add them to our list. It does not matter that these were not digitized as part of the partnership.

Researcher follow-up: Could FamilySearch have a page on their website that lists all NARA images? Ancestry and Fold3 have this type of page.

Response by John de Jong: I will ask.

Researcher question/comment 6: On Fold3 for T289, the USCTs appear erroneously under South Carolina.

Aaron Spencer thanked the researcher for this comment and indicated that Fold3 is developing a project plan to correct all the problems with T289.

Researcher question/comment 7: When will the USCT compiled military service records project be complete?

Response by Aaron Spencer: They will probably be on the Fold3 website next year. The goal is to try to put up 50,000 images a month.

Rebecca Warlow asked for suggestions for additional digitization projects. Responses were:
- The Seven States Index (relating to land records)
- Land entry papers
- Unindexed bounty land applications (there are 1 million of them)
- Name index to the FBI case files (to accompany case files on Fold3). Even if they were presented in browsing mode, researchers could get the number and track down the case file. [*Aaron Spencer responded that Fold3 needs to look at FBI case files, fix some problems, and add enhancements such as this.*]
- Post returns (some have been microfilmed, but others have not)
- Index to the 1812 applications case files.

Researcher question/comment 8: How does NARA prioritize digitization projects?

Response by Warlow:
NARA has two digitization goals:
1) *Preservation*: Records that NARA must digitize primarily for preservation reasons are digitized in our digitization lab. Many of these are audiovisual recordings.
2) *Access*: We have an overall strategy to provide more online access to NARA's records. To select projects:
   o We know what is used frequently (such as Vietnam-era navy deck logs).
   o We listen to you.
   o We consider partner requests (which often match researcher requests).
   o We digitize individual documents for exhibits, publications, social media, and presentations (we include these in the online catalog).

Researcher question/comment 9: Thank you for being so open during the 1940 census opening. The webinar was great.

Next Meeting of the Researcher Forum

After the new Executive for Research Services has had an opportunity to come on board and to review information about our Researcher Forums, we will set a date for the next meeting and announce it to you. In the meantime:

- ➢ Please address any questions or comments about NARA's digitization program to digitization@nara.gov.
- ➢ Visit the Researcher Forum page at http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-forum/ for meeting minutes and upcoming information on changes coming to the Robert M. Warner Research Center at Archives I.
- ➢ The NARAtions blog is available for discussion at http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access.
- ➢ If you have suggestions for questions we should ask our researchers and the public, please send them to us at socialmedia@nara.gov.

Thank you to our partners for participating in this meeting, and thank you all for coming.