

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” –Hosea 4:6

The Office of Historical Services has been in the process of building over the last year. This time has been used to clear the way in preparation for numerous projects to be completed in the following year. One such project is the digitization of the *Christian Intelligencer*, *Mission Gleaner*, and *Mission Field*. Approval was received to bring on an archival intern starting in January 2022, which has been going well at the writing of this report.

In April 2021, a group using the LEAN process met and reached the conclusion that archives are a vital ministry of and to the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The limited findings of the group painted a picture that the office has far-reaching clientele and ever-expanding duties. See the section below titled “LEAN Process Results” for some of the information identified during the LEAN process, which gives a glimpse into the responsibilities of the Archives. The RCA Archives used that experience as it developed plans for this year.

The 2021 General Synod adopted ONB 21-3, which instructed the Commission on History to study what constitutes a preferred process for keeping records permanently for report to the General Synod of 2023. At the November 5 meeting of the Commission on History, the digital archivist submitted a proposed response to ONB 21-3, which was accepted unanimously. See “Response to ONB 21-3” later in this report.

In December 2021, a General Synod Council task force convened to discuss the current issues faced by the denomination and its records management program. There the Commission on History made several proposals, which are coming as recommendations to this synod in the commission’s report; the Office of Historical Services endorses those recommendations. Of concern to the group, and to current and former archivists, was a lack of adherence to archives and records management policies set out in the Policy Manual for the Archives of the Reformed Church in America. See “Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives” later in this report.

“The church that really takes advantage of what it has lived through and accomplished in a past generation is a church that has a great future!” –John Beardslee III

LEAN Process Results

Customers (people and groups identified who use the Archives)

General Synod	Publishers
RCA staff	Reformed Church Center
Classes	Historians
Academic researchers	People interested in genealogy
Mission partners	Other archivists
Missionaries	Librarians
International universities	RCA Historical Series
Local churches	Foreign dignitaries
Ecumenical partners	Local municipalities
Regional synods	Authors
Adherents	

Values

Accurate information
Intellectual control
Timeliness
Joy of learning
Functionality
Easy virtual access
Authority
Security

Priceless artifacts
Keeps us honest
Taking care
Historic preservation
Caring customer service
Ethical management
Share stories with younger generations
Spiritual value of historical knowledge

Mission/Focus of the Archives

- To preserve institutional memory in an accessible way.
- To facilitate research of RCA church history.
- To preserve valuable physical items of RCA church history.
- To manage the long-term legal records of the various RCA institutions.
- The Archives is a treasure trove of church history that helps us and others appreciate and tell the stories of our denomination's rich theological rootedness, tradition, spiritual vitality, and identity.

Functions/Services of the Archives

- Collect, catalog, appraise, preserve, retrieve, and digitize records
- Institutional memory
- Make records available
- Facilitate research
- (Section 2.4 of the Policy Manual for the Archives of the Reformed Church in America was included here)
- Church/classis visitation and meetings
- Commission on History
- Historical Series work (production, sales, promotion, etc.)
- Researchers
- Indexing General Synod minutes
- Digest & Index
- General Synod operations
- Necrology report
- Records transportation
- New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) relations/Reformed Church Center
- Digitization (print/pictures, video and audio recordings)
- Server work/maintenance
- Social media/outreach
- Staff research requests
- Museum activities
- Accessioning/file work

Parking Lot (In a LEAN event, the “parking lot” is for questions and issues that arise that are beyond the scope of the current event, but that generally need follow up. Parking lot items from this LEAN event remain unresolved.)

- Who supervises the Archives?
- Who determines priorities of the Archives?
- Make the current location of the Archives permanent
- Lack of staffing/funding violating full compliance with General Synod mandates
- How will the Archives be sustainable with one staff person?
- Attitude of RCA staff toward the Archives
- Consider sources of funding beyond assessments
- Exempt status for Archives personnel

Response to ONB 21-3

File Naming Conventions

1. When adding a date to file names, it is best to put the date first, set as YearMonthDay, and separate the date from the file title with an underscore. (Example: 20210115_ConsistoryMinutes.pdf). This will allow all consistory minutes to flow by year and date on your file server.
2. Keep file titles brief. Instead of “Consistory Meeting Minutes Wednesday January 12 2022 7PM.pdf” use “20220112_ConsistoryMinutes.”

In previous iterations of Windows, there was a 259 character cap on file paths.
Example: C:\Regional Synod Minutes\Regional Synod of the Mid
Atlantics\Classes\Classis of New Brunswick\First Reformed Church New
Brunswick\Consistory Minutes\2022\20220112_ConsistoryMinutes.pdf
This is an example of a file structure that is 185 characters long, with a great deal of redundancy.

Instead, try: C:\RegionalSynod\Mid
Atlantics\CNB\FRCNB\Minutes\20220112_ConsistoryMinutes.pdf
This is only 79 characters long and has removed some redundancy in foldering and naming.

3. Avoid the use of special characters. \ / : * ? " < > | are all prohibited characters that Windows will not allow you to use.
4. Follow file naming conventions with all files!

Storage of Electronic Files and Backups

The 3-2-1 backup strategy is the current standard for securely backing up files.

The 3-2-1 strategy means: have **3** copies of the data (one working file and two backups), on **2** media types (hard drive, network drive, DVD, etc.), with **1** offsite copy (cloud, RCA Archives, etc.).

File Types

Compression causes a loss of data. Even so called “lossless” compression can still degrade a file. A key thing to remember is that storage is cheap; replacing lost memories is not.

- **Still image** – Uncompressed Tiff (Tagged Image File Format)
- **Document** – PDF (Portable Document Format), PDF/A (Portable Document Format/Archival).
 - PDF is the preferred format for documents. If possible, save in PDF/A format. PDF/A does not allow features that make long-term retention difficult.
- **Audio File** – Uncompressed WAV (Waveform Audio File Format) for preservation, MP3 (Moving Picture Experts Group Audio Layer III) for audio access.
 - MP3 is not a lossless format, but it does make access easier for use. WAV files, while large, are the leading widespread audio format. Lossless compression does have a noticeable quality difference versus an uncompressed audio file.
- **Video Files** – The native format that the camera uses. (Archives staff will re-encode it to an archival format if/when it is transferred to the RCA Archives.)
 - Accepted archival video formats and codecs are changing frequently, so to select one format that may be obsolete by General Synod 2022 is impractical.

Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives

The following sections are from the Policy Manual for the Archives of the Reformed Church in America and show the scope and breadth of the work of the Archives.

2. Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives

2.1. The Archives is responsible for the custody and preservation of the archives and records of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The archives and records of the RCA include all those produced by actions of the General Synod, regional synods, classes, and local churches. They include all boards, commissions, committees, and missions established by any of the above-mentioned bodies. In the event of dissolution of any of these bodies, their records and archives shall be transferred to the RCA archives for custody and preservation.

2.2. Records of the RCA shall not be disposed of without the authorization of the archivist. No assembly or agency of the General Synod shall deposit official records with another archival repository.

2.3. The Archives shall be made available by appointment to staff of the RCA for the conducting of business and to others who have a legitimate interest in studying the history of the denomination. The Archives shall endeavor to promote scholarly research concerning the RCA and to that end shall publicize these records.

2.4. The functions of the RCA Archives shall be to:

- a. Maintain, repair, and preserve the archives and non-current records of the RCA.
- b. Establish an effective records management program for the denomination resulting in the mandatory transfer of non-current records deemed worthy of permanent preservation to the Archives according to satisfactory retention schedules.

- c. Arrange, describe, and prepare suitable finding aids and guides to aid in accessing the records in custody of the Archives.
- d. Inspect and appraise the records and archives in the possession of the RCA and its staff and determine suitable disposition. The archivist shall be bound to observe the confidential nature of their contents if so restricted. Restrictions on access and use shall be determined at the time of transfer, but will not be less than 20 years from the creation date. Sensitive and confidential records must be identified as such by the creating office. The Archives may request a list of the records to be made in accordance with established format.
- e. Dispose of non-current records that have no further administrative, legal, historical, or other scholarly value with the agreement of the concerned bodies that produced or received the original record. The disposals shall be carried out in agreement between the Archives and these bodies. When no disposal schedules are available, disposal lists shall be prepared.
- f. Encourage the deposit of archives of private individuals and organizations that are deemed to be of historical interest and reflect some aspect of the denomination's work and mission in the world.
- g. Assist in the publication and promotion of the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*.

2.5. Official records are defined as all documentary materials (e.g. correspondence, publications, photographs, videotapes, etc.) received or originated by the RCA and its staff in the normal course of its activities, which serve as evidence of the organization, function, policies, decisions, procedures, and operations. Such records are the property of the RCA and all rights, interests, and use of those records belong to the RCA.

(MGS 1980, pp. 143-145)

Retention Rules

See Permanent Retention Schedule

RS Minutes

The RCA Archives will store electronic (PDF) copies of regional synod minutes and newsletters. Paper copies will be stored when electronic files do not exist. (October 5, 2012)

3. Access to and Research in the Reformed Church Archives

3.1. The Archives of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) are the property of the General Synod. They are preserved for the administrative, legal, financial, and historical needs of the church. Access to and use of these records is in accordance with the "Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives" statement (Section 2, above).

3.2. All research in the RCA Archives is by appointment only. Researchers must fill out a research application and return it to the archivist prior to undertaking research. The archives may not be borrowed or used outside of the RCA Archives. There are no inter-library loan privileges for archival materials. Researchers may not use pens with these records and they must be handled with the utmost care and are responsible for any damage to records.

3.3 Access generally is granted by the archivist. In the cases of the following records, access must also be granted by the appropriate office:

Mission records after 1967	Mission Services staff
Finance records	Financial Services staff
General Secretary records	Office of the General Secretary
Judicial business records	Office of the General Secretary
Personnel file	Appropriate office/Personnel Director

Minutes of GSC and GS Commissions

Restricted for twenty years after creation date. Access prior to that requires a written request (electronic or hard copy) to the Archives and then the permission of both the Archivist and the General Synod Office. Records may be accessed in the Archives of the Reformed Church in America by appointment.

3.4. Research is at a fee of thirty dollars per day. Research fees for long-term use may be negotiated as the occasion arises.

3.5. Researchers are responsible to determine the copyright limitations of all records used for their publication. The archives does not own the copyright to all records in its custody. No records may be reproduced for publication or transcribed without the permission of the RCA Archives.

3.6. In the interest of providing historical resources in various parts of the country, the RCA Archives may provide for the reproduction of pertinent records at the expense of the agency or assembly so desiring the reproduction. The reproduction is for personal research use only and may not be sold, published, or deposited elsewhere without the permission of the Reformed Church Archives. Copies of items for personal use may be requested also of some records if they are not in fragile condition.