Connecticut Historical Society Unveils “New” Resources for Historians & Genealogists

Using digitization from Merritt Scanning, CHS makes documents available

Hartford, CT (May 30, 2012) – Stories from the past have been handed down from one generation to another through various means. The most consistent of these have been documented in newspapers and books. Historians face challenges such as the degradation of paper and the fading of words and images. In order to preserve antique books, librarians store books in climate controlled rooms, avoid their exposure to UV rays, and limit how much books are handled. Keeping a book free from dust will also prolong its life. While all of these methods assist in preservation, they also limit the access to the knowledge within these books and, therefore, are not convenient for historians.

The Connecticut Historical Society (CHS), in Hartford, Connecticut, has faced the issue of degradation due to aging documents. Their collection documents social, cultural and family history. Founded in 1825, CHS is a museum, library and research/educational center. Conservation has been a priority for CHS for years. In the past, CHS copied fragile collections, including paper documents, on to microfilm. Obituaries—valuable resources for genealogy and social history research—were some of the first documents to be copied. However, other collections needed to be preserved as well.

In the early-20th century, Mary Morris compiled two collections of scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, mainly from the Hartford Courant. The clippings included obituaries, but more notably, she also collected clippings of social events. Morris’s scrapbooks included information about weddings, social events, coming-out parties and the like from the local paper. These clippings ranged in date from 1889 to the 1920s.

While the obituary notebooks had already been preserved on microfilm, the social scrapbooks had not. Barbara Austen, the Florence S. Marcy Crofut Archivist at CHS, was concerned about the significant collection of social events being destroyed. Austen observed, “The papers were literally turning into confetti.” These scrapbooks did not just document social engagements; they also shed light on the lifestyles of our citizens during this time.

Merritt Scanning, a division of the Joseph Merritt Company, contacted the CHS to see if they had any documents that could be preserved through digitization. A donor had just made funds available to the CHS for the purpose of preservation. Austen knew at once which project she would select —Mary Morris’s social scrapbooks.

With their state-of-the-art book scanner, Merritt Scanning was able to digitize the scrapbooks without harming the originals. The scrapbook pages were turned into PDF documents. The scrapbooks can be safely stored again, but their information is now accessible. “Merritt Scanning did a beautiful job, and most importantly, digitizing gave use of the knowledge back to the public,” Austen commented.

CHS is located at 1 Elizabeth Street in Hartford. To learn more, visit www.chs.org.
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About The Connecticut Historical Society:
Founded in 1825, the Connecticut Historical Society is a non-profit museum, library, research and education center. CHS strives to inspire and foster a life-long interest in history and ignite a passion for learning about history through research assistance, exhibitions, tours and programs for all ages. Visit www.chs.org or call 860.236.5621.