

Palm Beach County Historical Society

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On Thursday, September 1, 2016, I visited the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, Florida. The purpose of my visit was to find out how Palm Beach County became incorporated within the state of Florida. I was also interested in observing how the facility preserves materials. After finding metered street parking in downtown West Palm Beach, I walked through the doors of a 1916 historic courthouse, where the historical society was located. I met a receptionist who directed me to the archive room just in time for my 2:00 p.m. appointment with Nick, the archive director.

Carrying a Zephyrhills water bottle with me, as it was a hot summer day, I was quickly instructed to leave the water bottle on a desk, so that it would not get on any documents. From there, Nick proceeded to show me that their documented materials are preserved on a program, called *Past Perfect*. When I asked if that is the standard program for archives, he told me that it was the most economical program but that there were many other, more expensive programs that may be used by institutions, such as a university. Nick explained that every donated resource is given an accession number that begins with the year followed by the donation number for the year. For instance, the sixtieth donation in 2015 has an accession number of 2015/060. Object IDs are then assigned under each accession number to correspond with each item in a particular donation.

As Nick was showing me this process, I asked him if any of the documents in the archives' collection are available online. He explained and showed me that some of them are available, but that the quality of online images differs from that which is maintained in the archive. The archive maintains in house digital images with an industry standard of 600 dpi, but

online images are offered at a lower resolution. This allows the image to be accessed by the general public, but does not provide the quality needed for published materials. In order to obtain a copy of the archive's full resolution image for publication purposes, there is a licensing charge. Additionally, researchers must pay a per-day fee in order to conduct research and then pay a fee for any copies that they need to make. As I began taking notes, he also informed me that researchers may not utilize pens within the archive; they can only use pencils.

He told me that the archive (and associated historical museum) put together periodic exhibits that reflect the county's history. Their current exhibit is on baseball in the Palm Beaches, which runs from September 6, 2016 to July 1, 2017. He said that putting together an exhibit is a long arduous process. Archivists must make calls to facilities that house such objects, asking for permission to borrow them. He mentioned that facilities usually do not have a problem with lending their resources as a professional courtesy. There are also cold calls that are made to known collectors, asking them for permission to borrow their materials for an exhibit.

Afterwards, he took me to an upper floor in the building where, in a locked room, is an archive of rolling racks with files. Most of the files are categorized by subject headings. All documents that can possibly be collected are amassed within these files, including photographs and news clips. There is information on all aspects of the county, such as fairs, boats, railways, horticulture, and even businessman Henry Flagler's first hotel in Palm Beach, *Royal Poinciana*. He showed me books, yearbooks, city directories, magazines, and newspapers that the archive possesses, including Palm Beach's first newspaper from the turn of the twentieth century, *The Tropical Sun*.

Before heading back to the archive's work room, where other volunteers were cataloguing materials, he told me that the historical society was not owned by the county; he added that the society was a tenant in the government building. He told me that dealing with the county can be very political but that the historical society hoped to get more space in the building when a group on another floor moves to another building. Back in the work room, he asked me what other questions I had. I told him that I was interested in finding out how Palm Beach was incorporated within the state of Florida. He showed me a secondary source, where I could find the answer and also gave me access to a file box with news clippings from the time period. As I read through the materials, I learned that Palm Beach was incorporated in 1909. Palm Beach and Broward Counties were initially part of Dade County, Florida, which was incorporated in 1836. By 1907, Guy Metcalf, who founded *The Tropical Sun*, thought that Dade County was too large and that it needed to be divided into additional counties. He found two chief allies in the Florida legislature, George O. Butler and Frederick M. Hudson, who supported the measure and helped to win its passage. By 1909, Palm Beach became an official county in Florida.

Overall, I was very pleased with my visit to the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, Florida. I found Archive Director Nick to be very helpful in providing me with an overview of the historical society's operations and was glad to find out how Palm Beach County was incorporated within the state of Florida. Through observation and inquiry, I discovered that archives serve a similar function in comparison to libraries in that they help people to find needed information. However, archives are visited mainly by scholars in contrast to libraries, which receive the majority of their inquiries from the general public. Archives also tend to have more limited hours than libraries and an appointment may be necessary to visit one, as was the case with the Palm Beach County Historical Society. I asked Nick about the possibility of doing

an internship, in conjunction with my degree program at the University of South Florida and he told me to contact him when I was ready to begin.