

A COOPERATIVE URBAN ARCHIVES PROGRAM: THE HOUSTON METROPOLITAN RESEARCH CENTER

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The Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) is an ambitious program to preserve and make available for research documentary materials pertaining to the historical development of the fifth largest city in the United States. HMRC is also a cooperative inter-institutional program which has created an archival network of both an informal and formal nature. The research center, an agency of the Houston Public Library, is now in its eighth year of operation. The center has its own building in downtown Houston and is firmly entrenched in the community, its future reasonably secure.

As is the case with most programs, especially those intended to serve as models, the way to secure existence has been strewn with obstacles both large and small. As one who was intimately involved in the first six years of the institution's development, I believe that an examination of the HMRC experience can provide the stuff from which "lessons can be learned" by anyone planning a similar venture. What follows is a very general overview of HMRC as it has been and as it is today. The overview will include some personal and wholly subjective observations about aspects of the HMRC experience that, I hope, will be of some benefit to my fellow participants in this conference on archival networks. I must emphasize that I am no longer associated with HMRC and that the views expressed are completely my own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the research center's present staff.

To put one more wrinkle on a well-worn phrase, the Houston

Metropolitan Research Center was a classic example of an idea whose time had come. Its creation was firmly rooted in the fortuitous coming together of separate trends, needs, and events. I think it would be useful to examine briefly those circumstances that made an organization such as HMRC necessary.

Houston is widely perceived as an "instant city" without a history. Many of its own citizens believe Houston appeared magically on Buffalo Bayou on some foggy day after World War II. The city is in fact nearly 150 years old. It has been Texas' largest city for 60 years and a leading commercial center for well over 100 years. Nevertheless, because Houston has been a perennial "boom town," marked by the classic characteristics of such a condition, its citizens have not been much concerned with the past.¹ Houstonians are not alone among urban Americans in having this attitude, but I would argue that they have had a particularly bad case of historic amnesia.

This absence of a collective community memory placed the city's historically valuable records in a desperate situation. Houston had its own versions of the familiar "manuscripts wrapping water pipes in basements" story.² Over the years there had been some independent efforts by the University of Texas, Rice University, and the University of Houston to save the papers of a few economic and civic elites. The efforts, however, were spasmodic at best and never focused on archival records or the variety of material necessary for research in the new urban studies. For over forty years the Houston Public Library had attempted to do what it could through its small "Texas and Local History Room," but it lacked staff, money, and community support. As late as the early 1970's, the documentary record of Houston's past remained largely unidentified, scattered, and ignored.

Several events occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's that created a widespread interest in Houston's history and made it possible to create an agency to preserve and make available the documents needed for understanding that history. One important event was the increased national and international significance of independent efforts by the University of Texas, Rice University, and the University of Houston to save the papers of a few economic and civic elites. The efforts, however, were spasmodic at best and never focused on archival records or the variety of material

necessary for research in the new urban studies. For over forty years the Houston Public Library had attempted to do what it could through its small "Texas and Local History Room," but it lacked staff, money, and community support. As late as the early 1970's, the documentary record of Houston's past remained largely unidentified, scattered, and ignored.

Several events occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's that created a widespread interest in Houston's history and made it possible to create an agency to preserve and make available the documents needed for understanding that history. One important event was the increased national and international significance of Houston as a city. The rapidity of its growth and its excellent economic health attracted the attention of researchers in a variety of disciplines. Another factor was the emergence of the University of Houston as the second largest university in Texas and the parallel proliferation and expansion of new graduate programs, especially in history and in urban studies. Both the University of Houston and Rice University experienced a graduate student boom. Some graduate students and a few key faculty members were much influenced by historiographical trends emphasizing local, urban, ethnic, and other "new" concerns popularized in the 1960's. In addition, the increasing interest in genealogy, a concern for the preservation and recycling of "old" buildings, and preparations for the coming American Bicentennial all contributed to make many Houstonians more aware of the need to preserve historical records.

Indeed, a statewide need for records preservation was perceived by the Texas legislature during this period. The state responded by creating the Regional Historical Records Depository (RHRD) program. Administered by the public records department of the Texas State Library, this program seeks to preserve county and other local records by designating public or university libraries as central depositories for the counties in their region. The RHRD program includes a county records inventory which is attempting to survey each of Texas' 254 counties.³ The development of the state system had an influence on subsequent events in Houston.

By the early 1970's, conditions were ripe for some type of archival program. Nothing could have happened, however, without money to initiate a program, leadership, and a place to

house it. Fortunately, all three ingredients were readily available.

Dr. Harold Hyman, a distinguished member of Rice University's history department, provided the leadership. Hyman was personally interested in the legal history of cities and mentor to a covey of graduate students in need of primary sources for dissertations on aspects of Houston's history. Recognizing that no local institution existed to collect and make available the sources necessary to meet scholarly needs, Hyman conceived the idea for an inter-institutional urban archives program that eventually became HMRC. In 1973 he persuaded the University of Houston, Texas Southern University, the City of Houston, the Southwest Center for Urban Research, and Rice University to sponsor a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a two-year project which he named the Houston Metropolitan Archives and Research Center (HMARC). The Texas State Library pledged its cooperation as the proposed HMARC planned to inventory Houston's public records.

NEH, perceiving HMARC as a potential model for other cities, agreed to help and provided \$116,000. Local foundations matched this amount, and each of the participating institutions agreed to provide additional funds or in-kind contributions. Rice University provided space in its library basement to house the project for the two-year period. A key component of the plan was the Houston Public Library's agreement to assume permanent responsibility for the urban archives after grant funds were exhausted. Because of this agreement, the State Library designated Houston Public Library to be a member of RHRD. The public library was eager to participate because it was building a new central library facility and it needed a strong program to place in the old building. This event—the availability of a large, centrally located, architecturally distinguished, and highly visible structure—was the most significant one in the series of developments leading to the formation of HMRC. Without the building it is doubtful that HMRC would have been established. Rice and the University of Houston were the only members of the consortium capable of providing the necessary space to house HMRC permanently. Neither institution was willing to do so.

HMARC began in 1974 with plans to (1) conduct an inventory of public records in Houston; (2) compile an automated data base

composed of the public records inventory, a bibliography on Houston history, and a union list of archival holdings held by local institutions; and (3) initiate an oral history project. While the acquisition of archival and manuscript collections was not a major goal, it was understood that some acquisitions would be made. A staff recruited from the graduate programs of the cooperating universities hoped to achieve these goals in two years. A board composed of representatives from all consortium members provided overall guidance, with Hyman as the principal investigator. At the end of the grant period, the products of the project were to be transferred to the Houston Public Library. The public library would be the flagship of a permanent archival network, supported by and serving the needs of the institutions which had created HMARC.

HMARC's goals turned out to be overly ambitious.⁴ The planned automated finding guide, flawed in design, never worked. The records inventory left important offices and departments unsurveyed. Administrative problems at HMARC and misunderstandings and less than full cooperation among member institutions wasted time.

Despite failures in certain aspects of the program, HMARC has to be judged an overall success. HMARC assembled valuable information which provided a more accurate picture of the historical records problem in Houston. This information was useful to the Houston Public Library's permanent program. HMARC's oral history component was highly successful, completing nearly 300 individual taped interviews with a cross section of Houstonians. HMARC acquired several hundred feet of archival material which became the core of HMARC's collection. HMARC's real significance, however, is that it existed at all. By creating a product to transfer to the public library, HMARC provided the momentum to continue the effort in a permanent institutional setting.

Those of us closely associated with HMARC learned a few valuable lessons from that experience. HMARC was a subject-oriented project created by scholars in need of information. It was controlled by academic historians for the entire two-year grant period. This gave the project important intellectual credibility. Unfortunately, no professionally experienced archivist par-

ticipated in planning HMARC nor was one brought in to help manage the project. This oversight adversely affected the records survey and the attempt to produce an automated guide. Also, since HMARC's products were to be housed at the Houston Public Library, the project should have had more guidance from librarians there. The historians working at HMARC (including myself) paid scant attention to the need to shape and fashion the project to fit the Houston Public Library's policies and procedures. This omission caused unnecessary problems when HMARC became part of the library.

I believe that HMARC would have enjoyed greater success if it had been located at the public library from the beginning. Buried in the basement of Rice University's library, HMARC suffered a visibility and access problem. The location at Rice certainly enhanced HMARC's scholarly image, but it hurt its public image. While Rice qualifies as one of the Southwest's most prestigious centers of learning, it has always been *in* Houston but not *of* Houston. It has an elite "egg-head" image in the city, and, until the 1970's, its faculty had not been involved with the metropolis surrounding their campus. Most Houstonians, especially Blacks and Mexican-Americans, had little or no association with Rice. This image problem, and the problems caused by rivalries between the University of Houston and Rice, could have been avoided by locating HMARC at the public library from the start.

One other HMARC lesson bears directly on the network mission of its successor program, the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC). When the Houston Public Library organized HMRC in 1976 to continue the network effort, there was, in fact, no network. HMARC was an inter-institutional cooperative project that was supposed to continue after HMARC became HMRC. Theoretically and rhetorically it continued to exist; in reality it did not.

In October 1975 I was hired by the Houston Public Library to help manage the transfer of HMARC, to adapt the program and its products to the library system, to prepare for the eventual take-over of the old library building, and to expand and further develop the archival program and its inter-institutional network. Much to my surprise, I discovered that, with the exception of the Texas State Library, the various HMARC partners had no real understanding

that they were supposed to continue a formal connection with what was by then called HMRC. I felt very much like little Billy Pilgrim in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* when Billy's father tossed him into the swimming pool with the advice "sink or swim Billy-boy!" That was similar to the initial advice I got from the University of Houston and Rice University.

I soon learned that the formal inter-institutional arrangement dissolved, not as a result of the perversity and insincerity of the institutions involved, but because key decision-makers at those institutions never really understood HMARC's basic mission. They failed to realize that their support was supposed to continue after the center became a division of the Houston Public Library. It soon became clear that the university departments most important to HMARC were never formally tied to the program. The history departments, libraries, and archives units of the University of Houston and Rice University had all "endorsed" the idea of the NEH grant proposal and had cooperated with HMARC, but they had never agreed to support the permanent program. They certainly did not understand that an urban archival network would be created. This meant that a selling job had to be initiated to link the old partners back together again. This effort was partially successful.

The point of all this is to emphasize another HMARC lesson. Consortiums and inter-institutional projects are easy to form when based on outside financial support, but once the "soft" money is gone commitments are severely tested. It is crucial to the future of any archival network created with grant funds that the various decision-makers among the sponsoring institutions have a thorough understanding of what is expected of them. HMARC's partners had come together with only a hazy notion of the project's nature. They were never properly sold on the project, nor did they perceive any institutional stake in its future. This left an unnecessary financial burden on the Houston Public Library. The library director, David Henington, committed what extra funds he had to support the archives, but it was clear that the project would never result in the type of program originally intended without help from the outside.

The Houston Metropolitan Research Center as it exists today began in May 1976. Because of the problems discussed above,

procuring outside support became the agency's first priority. The summer of 1976 was a critical period in HMRC's development. The Houston Public Library lacked the funds to hire staff sufficient to make HMRC more than a custodial agency for historic records. The archival staff consisted of one archivist, one clerk-typist, and one half-time archival processor. The library administration believed that if seed money could be obtained to add personnel to process the archival collections inherited from HMARC the city government might make the positions permanent. Once again HMRC's future depended on the availability of grant funds. Happily, those funds were acquired and, once depleted, the City of Houston agreed to continue support of the four staff members hired with "soft" money.

While outside funds were being sought during 1976, HMRC attempted to piece the original inter-institutional consortium back together. Actually the search for grants and the negotiations with the old partners were related efforts. A successful replication of the consortium would alleviate HMRC's need for additional financial support.

Negotiations with the former partners soon revealed that a multi-institutional urban archives network as originally conceived was not to be. One former partner, the Southwest Center for Urban Research (SCUR), merely served as a device to administer grants for independent projects and had no money of its own. Texas Southern University, a predominantly Black institution, had severe financial difficulties and could not participate in a network. SCUR and Texas Southern's situations were well known and appreciated; their failure to join HMRC's formal network was not unanticipated.

Rice University struck the greatest blow to the network plan. It rejected HMRC's proposal to reestablish a formal relationship. This rejection was a great disappointment, especially since a Rice faculty member had originally created HMARC and Rice history graduate students had received academic and financial benefits from the program. Except for a statement of "no interest," Rice never explained its position. My personal view is that the rejection stemmed from the failure to tie key decision-makers at Rice to the early HMARC program. Unfortunately, I also believe that certain individuals in the Rice library encouraged the rejection out of fear

that HMRC would drain funds from the Rice archives. I hasten to add that this was not the consensus at Rice. Because of strong support by some faculty members in the history department and in the architecture school, HMRC and Rice arranged an informal network that has proven advantageous to everyone involved.

Despite Rice University's official rejection, an urban archives network has been created. The University of Houston accepted the offer to create an official relationship. The Texas State Library, through its RHRD program, had retained its formal connection with the Houston Public Library. Thus, by the end of 1976 the Texas State Library, the University of Houston, and the Houston Public Library were joined together by formal agreements, and HMRC was in business as a cooperative urban archives program.

Since 1976, the Houston Metropolitan Research Center has sought to locate, collect, preserve and make available for research the documentary, oral and visual evidence of Houston's past. To accomplish these goals, the Research Center has two departments: the Texas and Local History Library and the Archives and Manuscripts Department.

The Texas and Local History Library is a comprehensive collection of published source materials relating to both local and statewide subjects. The department has 17,000 volumes of books and includes a microfilm collection of 19th century Houston and Texas newspapers, extensive clippings files, maps, Houston city directories dating from 1866, and census records. The library is particularly strong in official municipal, county and state publications and documents. There is, for example, an extensive collection of Houston city charters, codes, city council minutes, annual reports of agencies and departments, budgets, and special government studies. The Texas and Local History Library also serves as the reading and research room for users of the Archives and Manuscripts Department.

The Archives and Manuscripts Department collects the noncurrent records of local governments, corporations, small business, private and public associations, religious institutions, cultural and civic organizations, labor groups, educational institutions, and any other organization or group that has played a role in the development of Houston. The department also solicits the papers of individuals whose records may shed light on

important historical episodes or trends in the history of the area. Nontextual materials such as photographs, maps, drawings, and architectural records are also collected. The department is the official depository for the collections of the Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association which include a variety of research material chiefly relating to regional business history. In eight years the Archives and Manuscripts Department has assembled collections totaling well over 4,000 linear feet.

HMRC is located in the Julia Ideson Building, former home of the Central Library and adjacent to the new Central Library building. The Ideson Building, a distinctive Houston landmark since 1926, was placed on the National Register of Historic Buildings in 1977. The City of Houston received a 3.3 million dollar grant from the Department of Commerce to rehabilitate the building. It contains 68,000 square feet of usable space on three principal floors and six stack levels and provides proper safeguards against fire, vermin, and theft, as well as an atmospheric environment conducive to preservation of historically valuable material. A large research room, located on the second floor, houses the Texas and Local History Library. The Ideson building has a small auditorium, meeting and seminar rooms, a reception area, an exhibition gallery, and a Special Collections room with a rare book vault. It also contains archival workrooms, restoration and fumigation areas, and microfilming and photographic reproduction rooms.

This paper has concentrated on providing an historical background and overview of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. At this point, however, I think it will be useful to consider specific aspects of the program and make some general observations that may be applicable to similar programs in other cities.

As mentioned previously, HMRC's network is a mixture of formal agreements and informal arrangements. By formal agreement, I mean independent institutions joined together in support of the research center by means of a contract, letter of agreement, or some other type of document. This contract defines the inter-institutional relationship and stipulates the obligations of each party. In addition, the formal agreement provides for an exchange of goods, services, and/or funds between the partners.

The research center has formal agreements with the Texas State Library and the University of Houston. The informal arrangements are usually verbal or agreed upon through letters between HMRC and individuals representing units of other institutions. HMRC's informal network does not receive official endorsement from the unit's parent institution nor is there any formal document compelling HMRC or its informal partner to exchange funds or services. Usually, the informal network is a cooperative effort between HMRC and its unofficial partners to conduct specific projects. The informal network connects HMRC with the Harris County Heritage Society and units of Rice University and Texas Southern University. All agreements and arrangements, both formal and informal, are bilateral. HMRC's urban archival network is based on a relationship between the center and individual institutions. In that sense it is not a consortium, it is a series of one-to-one arrangements.

HMRC's formal agreement with the University of Houston is the most involved as it brings the University and the center together in a number of ways. The University of Houston agreed in 1976 to transfer its archival and manuscript holdings relating to Houston and Texas history from the University Library to HMRC. This material included the historical records of the Port of Houston and the papers of several prominent Houston civic leaders. Most of these collections were unprocessed and inaccessible to researchers. Since the transfer, HMRC has arranged and described a large portion of the University's collections. The University retains ownership of the material and, with one year's notice, may cancel the arrangement and recover its collections. At the discretion of the director of the University of Houston Library, certain portions of its collections may be removed from HMRC and placed on temporary loan with the University Library for use by a faculty member or graduate student. The inter-institutional loan agreement also allows HMRC-owned items to be transferred to the University of Houston for faculty or graduate student use. Such requests, however, must be approved by HMRC's director and are not encouraged. As a part of its agreement with the University of Houston, HMRC provides the University with classroom space in its downtown building as needed. HMRC staff members work closely with University instructors, consult with

students, and speak to classes on campus and at the research center. HMRC's photographic laboratory services, which include preservation work, are made available to the University of Houston for the cost of material and a modest service charge.

The University of Houston pays an annual fee in return for HMRC's archival services, its storage space, classrooms, and staff consultation work. This fee provides a crucial source of unrestricted funds which make possible a variety of special HMRC programs. The University also grants released time to a faculty member to serve as editor of HMRC's journal, *The Houston Review*. This official meshing of archival services and activities between HMRC, which is a division of the Houston Public Library, and the city's largest university is, if not unique, certainly unusual. It is the only public library/university archival arrangement in Texas. I should add also that the University of Houston's annual fee is much lower than the amount it would cost that institution to operate a similar program of its own.

HMRC's other formal archival agreement is with the Texas State Library. As discussed earlier, the State Library and the Houston Public Library have signed an agreement designating HMRC as a Regional Historical Records Depository (RHRD). As an RHRD member, HMRC serves as the archives for public records (mainly at the county level) for a seven-county area. The RHRD program also allows HMRC users to borrow records housed at the Texas State Archives, a division of the State Library. The State Archives, located in Austin, will transfer a certain amount of material to RHRD libraries for six-week loan. The HMRC-Texas State Library agreement does not involve inter-institutional fees. It does involve in-kind contributions of some significance. The State Library has stationed one of its regional archivists at HMRC. This individual serves primarily as the collection development person for public records and has accessioned an important body of historically valuable material pertinent to Houston history. His activities coincide with HMRC goals and, as a result, his work has the effect of adding one full-time staff member to the research center. The State Library provides all of the boxes and accessory supplies for the regional archivist, while HMRC provides work space, furniture, and a storage area for public records. The regional archivist also helps

with public service related to his area.

HMRC's informal arrangements, since they tend to be project centered, change over short periods of time. Most of these projects have been cooperative efforts with units of Rice University. Rice's Woodson Research Center, which is the university's archives, has cooperated occasionally with HMRC's oral history component. Rice's Office of Continuing Studies and HMRC have cosponsored an educational lecture series called "High Noon," which was held at the Houston Public Library, and a symposium on Houston history in Rice's "Living Texas" program. The Rice Design Alliance, a program of Rice's School of Architecture, joined with HMRC in sponsoring a public symposium and exhibit on the "Civic Arts Movement" in Houston. Individual Rice faculty members help with different HMRC activities such as *The Houston Review* and the architectural archives component. As discussed earlier, however, Rice University has no official connection with HMRC, provides no financial support, and does not usually cooperate in archival and manuscript collection development.

HMRC's other informal or unofficial partners include the Harris County Heritage Society and Texas Southern University. The Heritage Society is a private organization which, until a recent change in administration, viewed HMRC much like Alexander Hamilton viewed "the rabble." Happily for all, the society now cooperates and has fashioned a verbal agreement with HMRC to refrain from collecting public records and manuscripts. HMRC, in return, is directing all artifacts and items of material culture to the society, which maintains historic houses in a city park. HMRC's relationship with Texas Southern University (TSU) is the most informal and tenuous of all, involving participation by TSU history department faculty in HMRC's Black archives project. The relationship between TSU and HMRC continues to grow firmer with the passage of time, and there is a possibility of a more formal relationship in the future.

HMRC's archival network of formal agreements and informal arrangements is not the best of all possible worlds. It is, however, the only world possible for now. HMRC draws great strength from its valuable formal relationships with the University of Houston and the Texas State Library. The extra funds and in-kind

contributions provided by those two institutions have made a significant amount of archival material available to the public. The bilateral agreements making up HMRC's network have the positive advantage of allowing HMRC's administration flexibility in decision-making since no inter-institutional governing board exists.

The present system has two distinct disadvantages, however. One is a cash flow problem. The informal arrangements do not provide funds to help sustain HMRC's program. The center could accomplish much more if it could depend on annual contributions from Rice and other educational and historical agencies in the metropolitan area. Another disadvantage is that the informal arrangements have done little to control competition in archival collection development.

Competitive archival collection development is a major problem, not only in Houston where Rice and HMRC compete, but throughout Texas. The founders of HMRC had hoped that a formal network would centralize archival and manuscript collections related to the history of Houston in one convenient location. The idea was not to close down the already existing archives at the University of Houston and Rice University, but to free much-needed space at those archives for storage of non-Houston related material which both institutions collect. As already stated, Rice has refused to cooperate. Nonetheless, because of the University of Houston and Houston Public Library agreement, HMRC is a cooperative model that other archival institutions in Texas could emulate. The problem is that archival collection development in the state has always been marked by chaos and conflict. There are now signs indicating a growing interest in some form of cooperation, but this is a very recent development. When HMRC was organized in 1976, the major archival institutions in Texas were engaged in a "macho" struggle, competing against one another for collections, usually not to help their clientele but to enhance their own perception of "prestige." One archivist at a major state university in Texas declared that competition was "the American Way" and was inherent in our tradition of rugged individualism. Such attitudes, which were pervasive, hampered HMRC's activities the first few years. Attitudes are changing, however, and I would like to think HMRC has had some influence on that change.

Another aspect of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center that I want to examine is its location at the city's public library rather than at one of the major university campuses. The public library has had the primary role in shaping and determining HMRC's philosophy and actions. I have already mentioned that HMRC could not have developed as well as it has if it had been located at one of the city's universities. In Houston, the urban archives has enjoyed three specific advantages as part of the public library. One is the public library's positive image in the community. Most of the public takes for granted the idea that the library is "theirs." It is truly neutral ground. It has no alumni or football team to create rivalries with other institutions. This neutrality and benign image provides HMRC with a reservoir of communal goodwill, greatly facilitating the center's overall effort. Much of that goodwill is derived from free access, another advantage of the public library. The public library is a democratic, egalitarian place which anyone may use. This freedom of access has appealed to many archival donors who feared they and their families could not easily view material given to so-called "elite" universities.

A third advantage of the public library location for HMRC is its access to public media. Reporters for Houston's radio and television stations and writers for the city's newspapers depend heavily on the Houston Public Library for background information on many stories and programs. They become acquainted with library personnel and vice versa. This is particularly true in the case of Houston's journalists, since their newspapers no longer maintain "morgues." As a result of this information service, a sort of symbiotic relationship has developed between the public library (hence HMRC) and the news media. The research center has frequently used this publicity resource to raise public awareness about its programs. The amount of publicity has been extensive and beneficial. This is not to suggest that it is impossible for a university-based program to generate publicity, but that it is much easier to achieve visibility at a public library.

A public library location has some disadvantages too. The egalitarian, public-oriented image that so often helps the research center sometimes hampers it as well. Some prospective donors

rejected our requests for their papers because they felt that the public library lacked the institutional prestige their papers deserved. The specter of "prestige" arose only with certain elites whose papers we were soliciting. It was never a factor in acquiring organizational archives.

Similarly the free access, open-stack public service philosophy important to all public libraries often creates an impression that security might be a problem. Some potential donors rejected acquisition requests because they had no faith in HMRC's ability to protect their documents from theft. This perception, based on the public library's own efforts to convey an environment of openness, is largely inaccurate. HMRC has the same closed-stack storage and supervised reading room arrangement used by all reputable archival centers. This is, however, a point of conflict between the public service librarians and archivists at HMRC. The laudable desire and inclination of the librarians is to provide the best service possible, sometimes to the detriment of security and good conservation practices. The librarians, on the other hand, think the archivists do not care about service and are too restrictive. The contention over security leads to another problem apparently inherent in locating an archival program in a public library.

The mix of public librarians and archivists, especially archivists with advanced academic degrees, often results in a clash of professional world views. This situation was true at the Houston Public Library and I know it to be true elsewhere. Too many public librarians suffer unnecessarily from acute feelings of insecurity primarily rooted in doubts about the status of their profession. Their lack of assurance is often matched by archivists suffering from a similar malaise. When the archivists happen to have doctorates, they sometimes exhibit an attitude of intellectual elitism and arrogance. As accurate or inaccurate as this picture may be, the reality is that archivists and librarians do not often mix well and this creates in-house tensions that usually affect the morale of those involved. Fortunately, these problems are not normally perceived by the public and most of the philosophical differences are either eventually resolved or suppressed. I realize that we deal here in the intangible area of the "human factor" and that generalizations can be unfair. I nevertheless think that this clash of professions is one of the disadvantages to locating an

HMRC type of project at a public library.

Another point about HMRC that I want to stress is the significant role that grant funding agencies have played in its development. This is a subject of some import since the two most crucial grants HMRC received were from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC): two federal agencies currently slated for debilitating budget cuts. The NEH provided a \$116,000 grant to create HMARC, the predecessor to HMRC. It is unlikely that the local funds raised to match the NEH grant could have been raised without it. The initial \$116,000 federal investment has certainly accrued a value many times the original amount as a result of the success of HMARC/HMRC. The NHPRC has also played a crucial role in the success of the Houston program. During the critical transition in 1976 when HMARC became HMRC, the commission provided funds that allowed the program to become more than a two and one-half person operation. The NHPRC funds served as actual seed money, since the high productivity of the workers temporarily supported by the funds convinced the city government of the staff's value. The city agreed to make the positions permanent. As in the case of the NEH money, the NHPRC funds produced local support worth many times the \$23,000 granted.

Federal money made HMRC possible, but local foundations, businesses, and governmental agencies provided monetary assistance which encouraged HMRC to extend and grow. The oral history project and the photographic preservation facility, as well as other special programs, were made possible by local gifts. Thus, grants have had a dramatic effect on HMRC's history. I think it important to emphasize, however, that at no stage in the research center's development have grants been sought for any purpose other than as seed money. In every case, outside or so-called "soft" money has led to hard, permanent support. The potential for such development has always guided the center's grant strategy.

Now that we have looked at certain aspects of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center and its cooperative network, it would be useful to consider how the center has responded to the community's needs and expectations. HMRC has achieved much in its brief eight-year life. In quantitative terms it has preserved

over 4,000 linear feet of endangered archival and manuscript material, nearly 500,000 photographic prints or negatives, several hundred feet of architectural drawings and specifications, and over 300 oral history interviews. In a measurable way, HMRC has responded to the city's need for an agency to preserve the records of its history. Just as important, however, has been HMRC's function as the city's quasi-historical society. While unmeasurable in quantitative terms, HMRC's outreach activities have helped raise community awareness about the past.

Special educational programs have been initiated to inform metropolitan area residents about the historical background of their region. For example, until recently KTRK-TV in Houston broadcast videotaped segments called "Houston Area History" three times a week; these segments were written and presented by HMRC staff. Slide presentations on local history topics are being produced and shown at area schools and civic group meetings. A Houston History Fair has been held involving public and private school districts.

As a part of its public education mission and its effort to disseminate knowledge about the urban Gulf Coast, HMRC publishes a journal, *The Houston Review*, which appears three times annually. *The Review* publishes refereed articles related to the history and culture of the region as well as news of the research center's activities and holdings.

In terms of community needs, I think HMRC's most valuable contribution is its intensive effort to document the history of Houston's Mexican-American residents. Conceived and directed by Dr. Thomas H. Kreneck, the program is multi-faceted, preserving the written, oral, and pictorial records of the third largest Mexican-American community in the United States. This program began during a period when tensions between the Houston Police Department and the city's Brown community had reached an alarming level. Aware that many Mexican-American leaders felt neglected and ignored by city institutions, Dr. Kreneck felt that HMRC could not only preserve historically important materials documenting the history of Mexican-Americans in Houston, but also demonstrate that city government cared about their contributions. The program has been an immense success and serves as a model for other cities. Buoyed by the success of the

Mexican-American history project, the center has recently initiated a similar project for Houston's Black community.

There have been problems, misunderstandings, and false starts in HMRC's brief history, but the program persists. HMRC's archival network is modest in comparison to others around the country, but its system based on formal agreements and informal arrangements has served a broad spectrum of Houston's citizens. The pattern of inter-institutional cooperation which HMRC initiated continues to develop. Dr. Louis Marchiafava, the research center's director, is devoting much of his attention toward solidifying the present network and adding more formal partners. I am confident that progress will continue. I confess to a bias here, but I believe HMRC has much to offer to its city. Houston is in a constant process of building itself up and tearing itself down. It is the "Capital of Rapid Change." As one author recently observed about Houston, "... we are a gumbo-cowboy city with no notion when to quit and little reverence for the past, ours or anyone else's."⁵ The Houston Metropolitan Research Center is doing what it can, with its partners, to restore a sense of the past to a city that somehow misplaced it.

FOOTNOTES

1. For an overview of Houston history, see Don E. Carleton and Thomas H. Kreneck, *Houston: Back Where We Started* (Houston, 1979).
2. For a discussion of Houston's archival horror stories, see James B. Speer, "Houston Metropolitan Archives and Research Center," *Rice University Review* (Summer 1974).
3. For a discussion of the RHRD program, see Marilyn Von Kohl, "Regional Depositories Preserving Local Records," *Texas Libraries* 35 (Fall 1973): 167-169.
4. For an evaluation of HMARC, see Margaret S. Henson, "Archival Research Centers," *The American Archivist* 40 (July 1977): 339-340.
5. Beverly Lowry, "Compared to What," *The Houston Review* 1 (Fall 1979): 104.

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