

2006 Legislative Day Highlights by Michele Walfred

Thomas Summers and Susan Voshell were our hosts for the Archive Tour.

We learned that if you were born, married, owned property in Delaware - then there is a record of you at the Delaware Archives! Not only that, if you have ever attended a Delaware public school, your school records and report cards complete with teacher's comments are on file at Delaware's Public Archive. (Gulp!)

We were able to view the original and treasured charter dated in 1681 wherein England's King Charles II signed over the Delaware territory to William Penn, and the original 1787 document ratifying the U.S. Constitution thus making us the "First State." This document is kept out of sunlight after it was severely faded by being on public display over a long period of time. We learned that sunlight is paper's biggest enemy.

The Delaware Public Archives is currently displaying the original Bill of Rights until July 5. This is kept under low light and cannot be photographed. Later, the 4-H tour was invited to participate on a computer interactive allowing 4-H'ers to sign and print out their own copy of the document. That was a big hit!

Tom Summers, took us through the temperature controlled vaults where large metal stacks of records are kept. We could even see prison inmate records stored there!

Mr. Summers also demonstrated how Archive specialists clean and restore damaged documents. We used a product called Skum-X to clean surface dirt from paper documents. If documents are damaged by water - Delaware Public Archives uses a hi-tech method for recovery - straws! He also showed us how to make a humidity chamber using only a wet sponge, plastic table and a trash can with lid. We are now trained to restore fragile papers and posters if needed!

He shared with us, that like himself, many Archive employees are history majors, but that most of the training needed to work there is learned on the job. Applicants are asked what kinds of hobbies they like - those that enjoy solitary hobbies make good employees because much of the restoration work is painstaking and involves long hours alone with the document being restored.

Our hour and a half tour went quickly and was a special treat for all who attended!

It was a great tour and definitely a major draw to attend at our next Legislative Day!