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Twenty years ago four historians embarked on what then seemed a risky experiment: to see whether they could sell history as a commercial product. They set out to write scholarly books but were soon looking for new ways to apply the talents, insights, and knowledge of historians in the larger world outside the academy. Within a few years the company branched out from book writing into creating and operating archives and records management systems for corporations, compiling large collections of technical documents for federal departments, searching historical records to support individual claims, conducting oral history interviews and producing transcripts for corporate executives and government officials, tracing the environmental history of industrial sites, and, more recently, burrowing through long-forgotten records both in the United States and abroad in the search for Nazi gold.

The flexibility and imagination needed to pursue these activities have come from a staff of diverse talents that has brought to the company a steady supply of intellectual curiosity, fresh ideas, and a willingness to take up the challenge to create a new kind of historical enterprise. As the company has grown over the last two decades from three to nearly fifty full-time employees, management has been able to keep that initial sense of adventure alive and to give members of the staff at all levels an opportunity to share not only in the company’s profits but in its accomplishments.

Without the success History Associates has enjoyed over the last twenty years, there probably would have been no interest in having this history written. But financial data and the list of hundreds of clients the company has served during these years justify at least a moment of celebration. That sense of achievement no doubt sparked the adoption of a company motto: The Best Company in History™. Those words of course reflect commercial success, which is the goal of any business enterprise. But even more important is the company’s success in demonstrating that government, corporations, and nonprofit institutions by the hundreds are finding the talents of historians and those in related disciplines a unique and valuable resource. I expect that History Associates will continue to offer its services in the decades ahead.

Richard G. Hewlett
February 2001
HAI’s Founding Four

PHILIP L. CANTELON
graduated from Dartmouth College, earned his M.A. at the University of Michigan, and received his Ph.D. in history at Indiana University. He taught at Williams College in Massachusetts, where he established and directed the oral history program, and in Japan as a senior Fulbright professor. President and chief executive officer of HAI since 1981, Cantelon was a founding member of both the National Council on Public History and the Society for History in the Federal Government.

RODNEY P. CARLISLE
is a graduate of Harvard College and received his master’s and doctoral degrees in history from the University of California at Berkeley. A specialist in maritime and energy history, he has taught at Rutgers University for more than three decades. Carlisle has commuted for twenty years between Rutgers and HAI headquarters, keeping up both his academic commitment and his role in managing and writing for History Associates.

RICHARD G. HEWLETT
attended Dartmouth and Bowdoin Colleges and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago. He established the historical office and archives at the United States Atomic Energy Commission and served as chief historian of that agency and its successors until 1980. Hewlett has received many awards in his field, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Atomic Energy Commission.

ROBERT C. WILLIAMS
studied at Wesleyan University and earned his master’s and doctoral degrees from Harvard University. A Russian historian, he has taught at Williams College and Washington University in St. Louis, where he was also dean of the University College. He is currently the Vail Professor of History at Davidson College in North Carolina, where he served for ten years as vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty.
A Nuclear Disaster and a Disgruntled Texan

At four o’clock in the morning on March 28, 1979, something went wrong at the Unit 2 nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Control panels blazed with flashing red and green lights and alarm bells pierced the air. At first, flustered technicians could not identify the problem and made a bad situation worse, though a full-scale disaster was eventually averted. During the next few days, scientists, reporters, and even the president of the United States descended on the site, while worried residents left in droves. United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission and United States Department of Energy (DOE) officials investigating the accident called in professionals of all kinds, from radiological assistance teams to experts on reactor safety. But perhaps the most unexpected professionals to arrive on the scene soon after the accident were the historians.

“My God, that just happened,” Philip Cantelon replied when he got the phone call from the DOE asking him to write a history of the Three Mile Island crisis. How could an event still unfolding on the evening news be history? Richard Hewlett, the chief historian at the DOE, was ready with an answer. Hewlett was responsible for recording all of the DOE’s actions, and the
Three Mile Island accident provided a chance to document a crisis and better prepare the agency to meet future challenges. Hewlett believed that trained historians would know what questions to ask and which documents to retain. His conviction was partly grounded in his own work as author of award-winning histories of the Atomic Energy Commission. But he was planning to retire and his assistant, Jack Holl, was busy with other things. Holl suggested Cantelon and Robert Williams, former colleagues from his teaching days at Williams College, for the job. Hewlett was impressed with the pair and convinced them that they, too, could successfully apply their historians’ skills to more contemporary issues.

Cantelon was unemployed and living in New Hampshire in the spring of 1979. A Ph.D. historian, he had gone the route of a traditional academic. He taught contemporary American history at Williams College, a small liberal arts institution in Massachusetts, published scholarly articles, and spent a year in Japan teaching American Civilization as a Fulbright professor. But the late 1970s proved to be a bad time for academic historians: the supply of new Ph.D.’s far exceeded the demand for professors, and Cantelon needed a job. His former colleague Bob Williams had embarked on a career as a history professor, first at Williams and then at Washington University in St. Louis. But he, too, was interested in doing history outside the academy. When they got the unusual request from an old colleague, Cantelon and Williams accepted the challenge.

The historians formed a partnership: C&W Associates/Historical Consultants. In July they contracted their services for the nine-month job for just under $100,000. They interviewed important participants and reviewed the institutional records from Three Mile Island to reconstruct the hours and days leading up to and following the accident. They learned the intricacies of operating a nuclear power plant and figured out how to navigate the DOE’s chain of command. The two were already seasoned historians but the work taught them many new skills, not the least of which was how to hire research assistants and support staff outside the structure of an academic department.
While researching nuclear power, they learned how to operate a historical consulting business.

To write the history, Cantelon and Williams moved temporarily to suburban Maryland, near the DOE’s Germantown headquarters. The Washington, D.C., area turned out to be a perfect place to explore new outlets for their historical training. There they met historians who worked not for colleges and universities but for government agencies, museums, and libraries. At the time, these professional historians were beginning to organize. They formed two new groups: the National Council on Public History (NCPH) and the Society for History in the Federal Government (SHFG). Both of these groups went farther than existing academic associations in addressing the particular concerns of historians outside the university. The founding members of both of these new organizations—Hewlett and Cantelon included—believed that there was room for growth in the historical field. The Three Mile Island project had convinced Cantelon that historical methods could be applied to contemporary events and non-traditional subjects. One historian later recalled talking to Cantelon at the time about the possibilities of doing professional history outside the academy. “He thought it was all a shame,” she remembered, “all the unrealized potential. He was really interested in pursuing the possibilities.”

Cantelon, Williams, Hewlett, and Rodney Carlisle, then a visiting scholar at the DOE, became the founding fathers of a new company, to be called History Associates Incorporated (HAI). They would pursue those possibilities, always guided by the core conviction that historians could do excellent, professional work in a non-university setting. Each person brought something different to the new venture. Hewlett, by this time retired from a distinguished career at the DOE, brought, as Cantelon later recalled, “instant credibility” to the firm as well as the wisdom gained from long experience. Carlisle brought a wealth of ideas, a sense of humor, and boundless energy—he was undaunted by the weekly commute between New Jersey and Washington, D.C. Hire” would prove
and Washington necessary to keep up both a teaching career at Rutgers University and a management role at HAI. Williams chose to keep both feet in the academy but provided staunch support when his co-founders needed it most. From the beginning, the four understood that Cantelon would be the one to hold the enterprise together, making the day-to-day management decisions necessary to realize their shared goal.

Cantelon had good reason to believe in the success of the firm. In the summer of 1980, even before the incorporation of the company, he began collecting resumes, consulting with colleagues, and getting contracts. While at the National Archives doing some final research for the Three Mile Island project, he overheard a conversation between an archivist and a frustrated visitor from Texas who was angry that no one from the Archives would do his research for him. Cantelon handed his card to the Texan, who in turn asked Cantelon to meet him the next day with a contract. Cantelon had never written a contract, nor had he lined up any historians to do the work. But twenty-four hours later he had done both. This opportunity to research ownership of offshore Texas islands for a legal dispute helped convince Cantelon and his colleagues that their new company could find a market.

HAI’s first publication appeared even before the company officially existed. By the fall of 1980, the four founders had decided to transfer C&W’s contracts over to HAI to start with a good client base. Hewlett was already writing a history of nuclear weapons testing for the Interagency Radiation Research Committee and, to help things along, he requested that HAI’s name appear on the finished product. Working around the clock during his first few months of retirement, Hewlett produced HAI’s first published history in October 1980.

Hewlett had recommended incorporation from the start, but the attorney suggested filing at the beginning of the new year, so History Associates Incorporated was officially estab-
lished on January 2, 1981. The founders invested enough money—along with C&W’s assets—to meet the basic needs of the operation. They printed stationery, established a board of directors (themselves), elected a president (Cantelon), and bought a company car for research trips. The four founders hoped that “history for hire” would prove both profitable and rewarding. None had any management training or small business experience, but they did have solid reputations and helpful connections in the Washington historical community. Cantelon touted his new company at an early meeting of the NCPH, where noted public historian Page Putnam Miller heard his ideas. She recalls thinking at the time, “This is a statement. This is going to be on the map.”

The Four Founders.

The logo looks terrific,” Phil Cantelon wrote to designer David Ryan in August 1980. “I like the classical border.” But there was a problem with the design: the use of only the first two initials in the company name created a whimsical “HA” instead of a more serious impression. “I wonder if we could get away from the HA look if we used the company’s full name,” Cantelon mused, “I think I would prefer it.”

The final version, which debuted in November 1980 before formal incorporation, used the three letters “HAI” and established the company’s nickname. The letters were enclosed within a meander pattern, or Greek Key labyrinth, an ancient symbol for eternity. The logo was trademarked in 1985.
“Histories should be relevant,” Cantelon wrote in 1981. “Histories should be put to use.” In a sense, History Associates Incorporated was a forthright challenge to the academic conception of the historical profession. “Phil was always very contentious about academia,” Rodney Carlisle recalled. Too often, HAI’s founders thought, academic trends and pressure to publish led to studies on narrow topics read by few people outside a particular academic specialty. Carlisle, himself an academic historian, maintained that “it’s really perverse for historians to write [only] for historians.” HAI’s founders were ready to challenge the public’s impression that scholarly history was at best uninteresting and at worst irrelevant. They also wished to counter the academic charge that writing for the public compromised the intellectual integrity of historical work. The company would be a history consulting experiment, a test to see if it was possible to convince a wide variety of clients to invest in the idea that history could be a valuable asset and that it could be of practical use. These historians wanted nothing less than to change the field of history and to make a living in the process.

HAI’s founders understood that their historical research and writing endeavor would need to be a business as well. At first,
they believed they could make do with limited secretarial help and hired a high school student to help out in the afternoons, but they soon needed further assistance. Gail Mathews interviewed for a part-time secretarial position with HAI but explained that she really needed a full-time job. “They thought they could probably find enough to keep me busy full time,” she remembered. “It was kind of an understatement. . . . I was definitely busy, every day from then on.” Mathews got the files in order—“things were kind of disorganized”—and took on more and more responsibility for general office support services. The company struggled with a succession of capricious computers, including a pair of early DEC units dubbed “Adam and Eve.”

Margaret Belke joined HAI in 1982 as a part-time bookkeeper. She got the financial paperwork in order with only a calculator and a typewriter until Adam and Eve arrived. She established procedures regarding time sheets, expense vouchers, bills from vendors, and other financial matters. “Phil was very involved” with the accounting procedures, Belke remembered, wanting to know where HAI stood at all times. Luckily for him, Belke recalled, the new company was “profitable from day one.” Nonetheless, during the first few years payroll costs sometimes exceeded available cash reserves, and some paychecks were delayed. Carlisle recalled that “meeting the employee payroll was very dicey” at first. It took time to build up the cash reserves necessary to tide the company over between the time payrolls came due and payments from clients arrived.

Keeping the quarters temporary and the staff small helped the young company stay solvent. HAI did not have its own offices, but since much of the early work was with the Department of Energy’s History Division, staff members worked at the DOE building in Germantown, Maryland. HAI did have its own address, an apartment in nearby Gaithersburg that the founders used as home base when they were in town. On one such occasion Cantelon and Carlisle found themselves snowed in for a week. “We got to know each other pretty well,” Cantelon recalled. That was an important week, cementing a relationship that provided a firm foundation for the young company.

The founders were continually asked, “What does a history company do?” One answer was simple. They advertised their firm as providing “historical and archival services for business, government, and the professions.” But in practice they found the declassification work to be an important job, and over the years HAI has sharpened its capabilities and worked on a host of skills working for the DOE. Historical studies done for the department covered subjects ranging from arms control negotiations to nuclear testing in the Pacific islands. To complement the declassification work, HAI’s historians also conducted dozens of oral histories detailing the nation’s Cold War nuclear testing program.

The department has similarly tested the company’s archives and records management expertise, calling on HAI to develop records schedules, conduct document inventories, and prepare files management plans. Even the work begun by the founders at Three Mile Island continued, with HAI’s compilation and administration of a database documenting decades of energy-related incidents and accidents that remains close at hand for DOE emergency management officials.

DOE: A Testing Ground

In the fall of 1979, President Carter promised to make records related to nuclear testing available to the public. In subsequent years, HAI did the declassification work. It was an important job, and over the years HAI has tested its capabilities and sharpened a host of skills working for the DOE. Historical studies done for the department covered subjects ranging from arms control negotiations to nuclear testing in the Pacific islands. To complement the declassification work, HAI’s historians also conducted dozens of oral histories detailing the nation’s Cold War nuclear testing program.

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Nuclear testing in Nevada. Courtesy of NARA.
themselves redefining existing categories. They had imagined that their main occupation would be writing histories of companies and government agencies but soon relied heavily on contracts supporting Department of Energy functions. One of the company’s earliest and most extensive projects, for the DOE’s Nevada Operations Office, involved selecting and processing documents related to fallout from nuclear testing. Since the collection was to be placed in a public archive, all references to still-classified information had to be removed. To do the work, HAI hired a group of professional declassifiers, including former pilots who had flown planes carrying nuclear weapons near the Soviet border during the Cold War. These HAI employees and consultants “sanitized” the documents, blocking out passages inappropriate for public release.

The DOE work caused HAI management to reevaluate the goals of the company. The DOE contract “set my teeth on edge from the very beginning,” Hewlett recalled. But Cantelon was less troubled. Remaining a “pure” history company—defined in terms of Ph.D.’s writing books—was not going to pay the bills. They would have to expand their definition of what “doing history” really meant. Some of the work undertaken for the DOE, in fact, such as policy studies and oral history work, was at the cutting edge of the profession. Equally important, HAI’s continual efforts to apply historical skills to new opportunities and develop new business models provided valuable marketing and management experience.

In the fall of 1981, through contacts made during lengthy research trips to the Santa Fe area for the DOE, HAI got an opportunity to do litigation-related historical research for the State of New Mexico. It soon became apparent that the contract would be a large one. “This is a much bigger deal than we thought,” Carlisle wrote to the other founders, “and a fine opportunity to open new lines of business.” The New Mexico research concerned a water rights dispute between Mescalero Apache Indians and the residents of the small town of Ruidoso. The case hinged on the state’s transfer of land and water rights to a Native American reservation in the nineteenth century and deepened HAI’s involvement in litigation-oriented research. In fact, HAI already had considerable experience with litigation cases. Ruth Harris, originally hired for C&W’s Texas project, had since done research in a Maryland constitutional case that ultimately saved Montgomery County $210 million. Harris’s
extensive experience in federal records research had given her what Carlisle called “mental mastery of the archives.” During the thirteen years she worked for the company before retiring, Harris’s work in litigation research helped establish HAI’s reputation for thorough fact-gathering and analysis. Her research techniques and note-taking procedures set the standard for the company and became the basis for training future employees.

Three years of steady success paved the way for sudden expansion. In 1983 the firm still operated out of borrowed space in government offices and had only a handful of employees. But in order to build a stronger identity and gain more clients, HAI management realized the company had to establish itself apart from the Department of Energy. The year 1984 was a turning point. With revenues growing every year and new contracts coming in, Cantelon and his co-founders finally decided it was time to expand. Within the year, the company moved into its own office suite. To protect the company’s cash reserves, several members of the staff formed a group, “Lowe Joint Venture,” and pooled their funds to buy new office space: a townhouse on Crabb’s Branch Way in Rockville, Maryland. Lowe bought the building, rented it to HAI (“high”), and later sold it for a profit.

But the company also set its sights outside of Maryland in the mid-1980s. A history of Texas Instruments (TI), one of HAI’s first contracts, spawned an archives project in 1984, after historians working in Dallas saw mountains of unprocessed documents in a TI warehouse and recommended an archives program. Cantelon took the idea to TI management, even though he had no archivist on his staff. When the proposal was accepted, he scrambled to find someone in the area who was capable of establishing a major corporate archives. He called Nancy M. Merz, one of the Texas State Library’s regional archivists. With a master’s degree in history and twelve years of archival experience, Merz had been planning to move east and had sent a resume to HAI. But she agreed to stay in Texas and complete the project, with the understanding that afterward she would set up an Archives and Records Management Division for HAI in Maryland. It was Halloween when she called to accept
“Well, that’s the best treat I’ve had all day,” Cantelon told his first archivist.

It was also in 1984 that Brian Martin went to work for HAI in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Cantelon hired the recent graduate of Carnegie Mellon’s applied history program to work for the Southwestern Power Administration (SWPA) on a history and library project. After an early visit to the project’s headquarters, Carlisle reported that Martin was “very green.” But the young historian learned fast, and his co-workers commended him only two years later for his willingness to “go beyond requirements and enthusiastically support us.” The work in Tulsa began with a study of SWPA’s history of labor relations, so Martin sat in on the organization’s first joint labor-management meeting to help clarify issues from a historical perspective. Working with Merz and Cantelon, Martin also successfully bid for a new contract to provide records management services to SWPA and thereby extended his stay in Oklahoma for two more years.

Cantelon believed that HAI should be a national company, rather than a group of local free-lancers. In its first few years, HAI had project staff in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Washington state. One historian was in New York working on a history of Consolidated Edison and another was in Dallas writing the history of Texas Instruments. Cantelon worked with consultants to try to develop regional markets for HAI in Chicago, New Orleans, and Louisville, but HAI’s most successful satellite office was in Los Angeles. When HAI later won a contract to set up an archives for Los Angeles County, Cantelon, Merz, and senior officer Ruth Dudgeon went out to interview potential project managers. They set up the interviews in a local hotel room and spoke with a stream of candidates. The trio interviewed Gabriele Carey, unfortunately—or fortunately, as it turned out—while eating lunch. At the end of the day, the three HAI managers agreed to write the name of their top choice on a slip of paper. Each, it turned out, had chosen Carey. “We promised never to tell,” Merz recalled, “because no one would ever believe we would all agree on anything.”
HAI’s managers were historians, not business school graduates. But they were flexible and willing to learn the rules of operating a small company. None made the transition from history to business administration better than Ruth Dudgeon, who joined HAI as a senior historian in 1984 after earning a Ph.D. in Russian history and teaching at West Virginia University and Howard University. She came to work on history projects but soon displayed an aptitude for administration. Her first official management role was as staff director, and she became a vice president in 1985, eventually taking on increased responsibility for financial and personnel matters. A decade after she began working for HAI, Dudgeon wryly claimed to be “struggling to maintain an existence as an historian,” but her training was a crucial asset in writing proposals and conducting interviews. Dudgeon, in fact, remained active in her field, attending Russian history conferences and participating in professional historical organizations.

HAI’s growth brought both monetary and professional rewards to all employees. Rather than convert profits directly into dividends for the shareholders, Cantelon and his colleagues decided to put most of the money into employee benefits and annual bonuses. A profit-sharing plan, instituted in 1983, was an example of the founders’ desire to support historians in their work and instill a sense of shared accomplishment. The company also encouraged employees to socialize through annual picnics and holiday parties, even hosting an infamous pig roast at Cantelon’s home, where the main course remained uncooked until far into the night. Dudgeon started up HAIlight, an internal staff newsletter, to chronicle the personal and professional milestones of the employees. The first issue introduced the rapidly growing staff, provided project updates, and noted that “we hope to... learn more about the ways history can be used outside the academic world.” Over the years, HAIlight has recorded the comings and goings of a huge number of people who have worked at HAI for a year or two before moving on to graduate school or other employment.

In January 1986 HAI management convened the first annual company symposium. Casually dressed staff members gathered in Phil Cantelon’s home to discuss the future of the company. #302
company. Meeting in small groups, they expressed concerns and shared ideas. One result of the first symposium was the formation of three internal standing committees. The communication committee addressed some of the morale issues facing the growing company, the marketing committee explored ways for HAI to find new business, and the professional development committee encouraged management to make HAI a learning environment. These committees continued to meet and develop new approaches to old problems for the next several years.

HAI attracted the attention of the national press in 1986. Recognition by *Inc.* magazine as one of the 500 fastest growing companies of the year gave the firm a new sense of self-confidence and plenty of media exposure. The magazine’s figures showed that since 1981 the company’s revenue had increased from $130,000 to more than $1 million, while the staff had grown from three to eighteen full-timers. “Now comes Philip Cantelon,” announced the magazine, “who has figured out a way to turn a profit on institutional history.” In fact, income from the history projects only amounted to about 27 percent of the company’s 1985 revenue. More than half of the company’s sales came from the DOE contracts, with the remainder split between litigation and archives projects. But the success story was irrefutable. Phil Cantelon and his staff had taken a dubious proposition—making money doing history—and turned it into fastest growing company number 302 in just five years.

The themes you have chosen to highlight are an historian’s delight,” wrote HAI’s Arnita Jones to the dean of the University of Louisville’s School of Nursing. The two were outlining a book on the history of the school, a project involving forty oral history interviews as well as research in the school’s records. The finished product, distributed to several hundred nurses, helped establish HAI’s Kentucky office in the mid-1980s.

Jones framed the history of the school in the context of women’s education, the growth of Louisville, and the field of health care. Her introduction noted that “it is also the story of the individual nurses who lived and worked there.”

Senior Historian Arnita Jones worked for HAI in Louisville, KY, and has served on the board of directors since 1990. She is currently executive director of the American Historical Association.

As president of Inc.’s Fastest Growing Company #302, Phil Cantelon accepted an award in 1986. Courtesy of Inc. magazine.
DOE: A Cautionary Tale

“It has always been company policy,” affirmed the board of directors in March 1987, “that we will accept work that does not always require the more sophisticated talents of a professional historian.” Many staff members struggled with this policy, since their idea of a historian’s job involved more thinking and less photocopying. They came to HAI to experience the romance of history but, as one staff member remembered, “ended up down in the basement with no windows in this building [DOE headquarters] that was designed to withstand a nuclear attack.” However, careful review of documents is part of the job for any historian, and HAI’s management understood that the DOE contracts, in addition to more traditional corporate and industrial histories, provided a good balance for the firm. Rapid growth generated by the interest of a variety of clients in HAI’s services convinced senior managers that they were headed in the right direction.

In 1987 HAI moved to a historic building with far more character than the previous office in a suburban townhouse.
Cantelon loved the idea of a history company being in a historic building and had urged the board to approve the new location, the former Montrose School in Rockville. As part of the opening ceremonies for the new offices, HAI’s landlord, a historic preservation group named Peerless Rockville, welcomed alumni of the old one-room schoolhouse back for a reception. They installed a blackboard, hung old classroom photos on the wall, and planted trees and flowers. A sign with the HAI logo went up next to busy Randolph Road. The new location inspired the “Montrose School of History,” a series of Friday afternoon “sherry hours” highlighted by seminars led by local historians and staff members. The Friday lectures and socializing helped build staff morale, which needed the boost, since rapid company growth had created new challenges in internal communication, delegation of authority, and project management.

Small businesses must invent creative ways to foster dialogue between management and staff. At HAI this fell to the communication committee, which handled complaints about the “tone of criticism on writing” and the “rising sarcasm level” in discussions with upper management. Even Carlisle noted that employees often had problems dealing with Cantelon’s sometimes “brusque manner.” A popular session of the late 1980s annual symposia, “HAI’s, Lows, and Me,” offered staff members a chance to both praise and criticize the company. Employees were encouraged to write positive attributes of HAI on pink index cards and suggest things that would make HAI a better place to work on white cards. Consistent themes appearing on the pink cards included “excellent support staff” and praise for the flexible hours, the good benefits, and the yearly bonus. But there was room for improvement, and comments on the white cards indicated persistent problems. Staff faulted HAI management for behaving like an academic department in which “the Ph.D.’s get all the glory.” When asked in post-symposium evaluations to identify the most critical issue facing HAI, one employee wrote: “Turnover ratio: specific problems concern salaries, morale, and communication,” and another, “Decline of history contracts. The mission of the company seems to be changing.”

Dick Hewlett received a curious letter in March 1986. The Jessie Ball duPont Religious, Charitable and Educational Fund of Jacksonville, Florida, wanted its history written, but the letter came from the Washington Cathedral. What was the connection? HAI’s Hewlett had been doing historical and archival work for the Cathedral. In turn, the Cathedral depended on the Jessie Ball duPont Fund’s generous grants. Within a few weeks, Cantelon and Hewlett visited Florida to talk over the idea.

HAI research historian Margie Rung spent eight months in Florida reviewing decades worth of correspondence and other documents. “I find the research fascinating and am enjoying it tremendously,” she assured Hewlett. The biography of the philanthropist “Miss Jessie” pleased George Penick, the executive director of the Fund.

“Your ears must have burned yesterday,” he wrote to Hewlett after a meeting with the Fund’s board of trustees. “The interest in and energy for the project that you exhibit is contagious.”
Staff members were right: the company certainly was changing. But many of the changes were necessary to ensure that HAI continued to prosper despite the downturn in history contracts (which fell to a record low of 11.8 percent of total sales in 1990). Management encouraged growth in new directions, especially archives and litigation. HAI’s first official project division, in fact, was Archives and Records Management, formed in 1987. Nancy M. Merz had completed her work in Texas and had begun to attract clients from her new post at the Rockville office. She and her colleagues became quite successful in answering “RFPs,” requests for proposals circulated by government and other agencies, and getting work by word of mouth. Archives projects came in from federal offices, such as the DOE’s Office of Naval Petroleum and Oil Shale Reserves; from private agencies, such as the United States Catholic Conference and the American Association of University Women; and from corporations such as Herman Miller. HAI’s archives division posted consistent sales of about 11 percent of the company’s total throughout the late 1980s and grew steadily in the 1990s.

As HAI expanded, management reached beyond the company for advice. In 1989 Cantelon assembled an advisory board composed of senior scholars and others he described as “individuals who would add a luster to HAI by their association.” One of the board’s first members was McKenna & Cuneo attorney Herbert Fenster, a firm believer in applying historical research to litigation. Former Acting Archivist of the United States and University of Maryland Professor Frank Burke suggested ideas for the archives division. Other experts in litigation, corporate history, and library science rounded out the committee.

The internal advisory board was soon merged into the board of directors. HAI began to welcome outside trustees, though an “insider,” Vice President Ruth Dudgeon, was the first nonfounder to join the board, in 1987. Over the years, the board also included university presidents and government agency heads. Arnita Jones, a former HAI senior historian, joined the board in 1990. While on the board, she also served as executive director of both major associations for academic historians, the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association. Other early outsiders included accountant Jack Dewey and attorney Richard Saltsman. HAI’s board operates mainly in an advisory capacity, although it has...
not shied away from controversy over issues such as Cantelon’s persistent desire to keep the company in a historic building. As Burke explained, the HAI board is friendly “but we don’t write blank checks.”

The quest for what Cantelon called “a cutting edge in which we can apply our historical training” led HAI management to try many different kinds of work. Some big ideas, like a major records storage center, would have cost too much money to be considered reasonable experiments, but Cantelon and the board were generally willing to bankroll an idea and see what happened. One such venture included the Historic Preservation Division, formed in 1989. This foray into cultural resources management, the special passion of one staff member, never succeeded. An Information Services Division found several clients in 1991 and 1992, but the growth of the Internet in the 1990s quickly rendered a lookup information service obsolete. As these attempts illustrate, HAI was open to new enterprises but just as quick to back off from operations that proved unworkable or unprofitable.

Litigation research proved to be HAI’s sleeper hit. Ruth Harris, James Lide, and others slowly but surely developed HAI’s expertise. Contracts with major law firms, including McKenna & Cuneo of Washington, D.C., enabled the litigation researchers to prove that they could do sophisticated work and gave them critical experience at the National Archives, especially in World War II-era federal research. The growth of the division was spearheaded by government contract projects. Michael Janik, a partner with McKenna & Cuneo, trusted HAI with confidential litigation cases and recommended the company to others. “It’s not so much what HAI finds,” he noted, as knowing “you’ve got someone with professional expertise who can say what’s out there or not out there.” In some instances, Janik’s clients have saved millions of dollars due to HAI’s findings. This kind of success led to the creation of the Litigation Research Division in 1992. Harris was named director of research, and Lide and Brian Martin—back from Oklahoma and having gained management experience with the DOE contracts—became co-directors of the new division.
Despite expansion in new directions, Cantelon recalled, “we really thought of ourselves as doing books.” Indeed, several major projects kept the historians busy. HAI benefitted greatly from the varied expertise of its senior officers. Dick Hewlett, even after his retirement from the DOE, continued to contribute to the field of nuclear energy history. Rodney Carlisle had been working on Sovereignty for Sale when he first met his co-founders, and he continued to research and write about naval history for the next several decades. His centennial history of a naval ordnance facility, Powder and Propellants: Energetic Materials at Indian Head, Maryland, 1890-1990, covered everything from smokeless powder to NASA rockets. Carlisle’s books on the U.S. Navy also included Supplying the Nuclear Arsenal: American Production Reactors, 1942-1992, co-written with HAI’s Joan Zenzen and published by The Johns Hopkins University Press, and Where the Fleet Begins: A History of the David Taylor Research Center.

Cantelon’s contribution was a history of telecommunications giant MCI, covering the phenomenal rise of the company between 1968 and 1988. The project involved more than fifty oral history interviews conducted between 1988 and 1992, traditional corporate archival research, and some records management work. The book itself made history by being the first professional historical work to use e-mail as a source. As a former senior manager at MCI noted, “Phil was able to understand what the people in charge wanted, adhere to those specifications, and create an excellent product.” MCI Chairman and CEO Bert Roberts noted that “new generations of employees will learn from HAI’s insightful history.” Though Cantelon wrote the 500-page book, his acknowledgments thanking seven different people among the research, archival, and support staff emphasized the collaborative effort of every HAI project.

While chronicling the rise of a major corporation, Cantelon supervised the expansion of his own. One response to the growth of the company was to establish a more formal divisional structure. The divisional breakdown applied mostly to senior officers; management remained reluctant to separate the research staff into distinct divisions, knowing that employees inevitably would need to be reassigned on the basis of the available work. Senior officers also wanted to avoid strict hierarchies and job specialization that could prevent flexibility or cause trouble down the line if one division became more successful than other divisions.

**MCI**

MCI became a household name after the breakup of the Bell System. The background—and results—of this challenge to AT&T was detailed in Cantelon’s The History of MCI: The Early Years, 1968-1988. In writing the 500-page book, Cantelon used oral histories, annual reports, newspaper accounts, and even e-mail messages.

MCI company executives reviewed the weighty manuscript before publication. Like most of HAI’s clients, they wanted the book to be a scholarly history rather than a public relations piece. When the head of stockholder relations suggested that a story about pre-Christmas layoffs should be edited out, the CEO disagreed. “It happened, didn’t it?” he asked. In the end, MCI requested only two changes. One concerned details of a severance package that had to be kept confidential for legal reasons. The other problem? “I had someone’s title wrong,” remembered Cantelon.
ers. Under the pressure of business, new divisions gradually took shape, though management stuck to a “one company” policy and continued to think of the firm as a single entity. The organizational chart for 1992 shows several divisions: Support Services, the short-lived Information Services, Litigation Research, History, and Archives and Records Management. All of these divisions, as well as the office and administrative services, reported directly to Executive Vice President Ruth Dudgeon. HAI’s top managers were pleased with the status quo in 1992. They did not realize that the bottom was about to fall out.

After the 1992 annual symposium, staff members filled out evaluation sheets about the day’s event. One employee presciently anticipated the impending disaster: “I expected the subject of ‘what can/should HAI do if we do not win the OC contract?’ to be discussed, or at the very least mentioned,” she wrote. “It is a subject on the minds of all employees.” The writer referred to the long-standing Office of Classification (OC) contract between HAI and the Department of Energy. At its height in 1990, DOE work—including both the OC and the Nevada contracts—accounted for 69 percent of the company’s total revenue. Despite general success with the OC project, there were potential competitors on the horizon and staffers had reason to worry. The Nevada contract was scheduled to be completed in 1992, and that summer HAI lost not one but two DOE contracts and suddenly faced its biggest challenge by far since its founding. HAI had to lay off employees for the first time and was forced to reevaluate its policy of depending on large government jobs. The remaining staff members both worried and wondered: was HAI strong enough to survive? 

HAI’s ever-growing library of published works:

- **History of MCI**, MCI Communications Corporation, 1993.
- **Supplying the Nuclear Arsenal**, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- **Where the Fleet Begins**, Naval Historical Center, Dept. of the Navy, 1998.
- **Where the Fleet Begins**, Naval Historical Center, Dept. of the Navy, 1998.
Diversification

“History Associates closes an era,” lamented the lead article in the September 1992 issue of HAllights. The loss of the DOE contracts was indeed a turning point for the young company. But HAI’s staff remained proud of their work for the DOE, which “contributed significantly to the available historic record” on nuclear testing, as HAllights pointed out. The newsletter then said goodbye to those whose association with HAI ended with the DOE contracts—seven full-time employees and eleven consultants. Cantelon remembered struggling with his partners, determined to make it through the crunch without letting people go. Although he later realized that he “kept people on too long . . . trying to be nice,” in the end layoffs proved necessary. “Those are tough lessons to learn,” Cantelon said. But as HAllights reminded those who remained, there was much to look forward to as well. Several new contracts came through. And 1992, despite its trauma, also provided a spark for the future: HAI’s first international contract, an archives project for the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

Because of its willingness, even eagerness, to innovate, HAI

Epidemiologic and Health Data

In August 1993, still recovering from the loss of two long-term Department of Energy contracts, HAI won a major contract from—all places—the Department of Energy. Nancy M. Merz and her team took on the challenge of writing guides for the Office of Epidemiologic and Health Surveillance (EH). The contract required HAI historians and archivists to identify and describe those DOE records that would be of use to scientists and medical professionals doing health- and disease-related research.

The EH contract extended over several years and involved many separate tasks including work at nuclear energy facilities such as Rocky Flats in Colorado, Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, and Oak Ridge in Tennessee. HAI staff examined documents, developed research guides to records with epidemiological value, and conducted training workshops for DOE records managers. In 1997 DOE approached HAI with “an urgent need” to microfilm epidemiological data from two sites in Russia. The project, it was hoped, would enable health officials worldwide to do vital research about the health effects of nuclear testing.
recovered quickly and the crisis was short lived. The company did not go into debt, revenues never dipped below $1.3 million, and sales had surpassed $2.5 million by 1998. HAI got through the lean stretch with the help of a major contract with the Office of Epidemiologic and Health Surveillance (EH). So many new employees came on for the EH contract, in fact, that the company again found itself seeking new quarters. Cantelon had looked for a historic structure, but the board was wary of another aging building. Instead, the move brought the company to a modern office suite on Choke Cherry Road in Rockville. The company made some changes along with the move. Though they kept an interest in government contracts, senior officers decided to put more emphasis on private work, such as the contract with MCI. Revenue from private companies finally exceeded government contracts in 1996. Most importantly, management now saw litigation as the best place to find new business and decided to emphasize marketing in that area.

The Litigation Research Division expanded greatly in the 1990s. Helped along by board member and lawyer Herbert Fenster—who pushed HAI to explore the issue—environmental contamination projects proved to be the best match for the company’s expertise. Numerous contracts stemmed from cases developing out of the Superfund Act of 1980. This act, with its retroactive liability provisions, laid out the rules for establishing responsibility for paying the costs of cleaning up contamination caused by industrial manufacture, based on who owned or operated the plant in question. In a landmark decision in 1992, the Pennsylvania Eastern District Court held the United States government liable for paying cleanup costs for environmental waste caused by a World War II-era rayon plant. This case, *FMC Corporation v. U.S. Department of Commerce*, changed the face of environmental litigation.
Suddenly, large corporations that had typically been defendants in environmental cases brought by government regulators were eager to document the government’s former involvement in their activities. HAI’s researchers also brought their mastery of obscure public records collections to bear in a host of other environmental litigation matters, including claims for injury or damage caused by pollution, insurance cost recovery efforts, and natural resources damage claims. Employees crafted detailed site histories and company chronologies, and attorneys pleased with the company’s work spread the word among other law firms, generating still more new contracts.

The Litigation Research Division became more formal and tightly managed as it expanded. Martin took over the division when Lide left HAI in 1993 to pursue doctoral research. Most employees understood that there was little chance of achieving a leadership role in the company without an advanced degree. Lide handled consulting projects on and off before returning in 1998, Ph.D. in hand, and Martin took a sabbatical to complete his own doctoral work. Reflecting the healthy economy of the mid-1990s, litigation project revenues went from 23 percent of total sales, or $352,427, in 1993 to almost 34 percent, or $713,467, just four years later. Though early litigation projects were staffed by only a few people, as the division grew so did the size of individual contracts. To carry out some projects, researchers spent weeks at the National Archives, going through hundreds of boxes and thousands of documents in search of evidence. This period of exponential growth, according to one senior historian, forced managers to find ways to handle hiring, training, and other issues “less contentiously and more deliberately.”

Senior project managers helped Martin run the Litigation Research Division and also extended HAI’s expertise to new sources and new topics. Kathy Nawyn built on her DOE-related experience to explore government relations with other industries and develop better ways to help clients understand the historical record. Applying his extensive knowledge of state and local sources, Mike Reis took up the challenge of documenting manufactured gas plant operations in various localities nation-
Panama Canal

The Panama Canal, under the control of the United States since 1903, was turned over to Panamanian officials on December 31, 1999. Several years before that event, the Panama Canal Commission (PCC) hired HAI to train staff to take inventories of textual records and to schedule and appraise audio-visual records and electronic systems. In an additional task, the PCC hired HAI to write a report on its vital records program and develop a plan for its protection “in the event of a disaster.” Vital records were those necessary to reconstruct the PCC’s central operations after an emergency such as flooding or “explosion due to nature or political unrest.” These records included everything from engineering and construction drawings to documents related to marine traffic management and employee medical records. The PCC had an evacuation plan for United States citizen employees, but it was up to HAI to devise a plan for protecting the records.

HAI worked on an inventory project for the Panama Canal Commission in 1995. Courtesy of Panama Canal.

Wide. John Kinzie used his broad understanding of the federal records system to refine HAI’s targeted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process. These senior staffers worked closely with Martin to further standardize proposal and narrative writing, archival research, and note-taking techniques. In part because of the accumulated body of knowledge and large library of reference materials, HAI could offer its services at what McKenna & Cuneo attorneys called “highly attractive” rate structures. Though Martin remembered being rather bemused when he realized that his job was to write the history of sewer systems and waste facilities, he and the HAI litigation teams have turned these subjects into lucrative projects and have found them curiously fascinating as well.

History and archives projects, both small and large, continued to be an important part of HAI’s business. Always a steady revenue producer, the Archives and Records Management Division kept growing in the 1990s. Projects included a contract with the National Library of Medicine beginning in 1993, work for the Panama Canal Commission in 1995, and a records management program for the city of Billings, Montana, that began in 1996. A major contract with IBM began in 1998. This project, directed onsite in upstate New York by Ph.D., historian and archivist John Roberts, has kept a staff of five busy for several years. These and other projects involved conducting inventories, evaluating current storage and retrieval systems, and preparing retention schedules for records. HAI archivists also trained clients’ staff in inventory techniques and monitored their progress. One satisfied client who worked with HAI on a records management program recalled that HAI helped her agency make the transition to managing its own records and that the new records manager “was able to roll up her sleeves and get in there and work with HAI and really learn.” To reflect changes in the field that included shifts toward electronic records keeping, the division changed its name in 1995 to Information Resources Management (IRM).

General interest in electronic records led to a 1997 national conference concerning the future of records management. While working on the MCI book, Cantelon had used executive e-mail correspondence as a major source and began thinking of how these types of records could be preserved on a large scale. His
idea for the conference started, as he put it, “where else—but in a series of e-mail messages” pondering the future of a web archives. Co-sponsored by HAI, Microsoft, the National Science Foundation, and MCI, the conference, “Documenting the Digital Age,” featured panel discussions about how to preserve electronic records. HAI’s stated goal for the conference was to “bring greater physical and intellectual order to the documentation of the Digital Age,” but the company also took the opportunity to build relationships with the sponsoring partners and test the market for conference planning. HAI briefly advertised a new division called “Meeting Planning” but soon decided to focus on its traditional strengths in research and records management instead of the more organizational aspects of conference planning.

Meanwhile, history projects continued to roll in. Cantelon and historian Kenneth Durr set out to document the history of the trucking industry, first for Roadway Express and then CNF Transportation Inc. Both books made use of extensive oral histories and benefitted from free access to company records. Cantelon noted in the introduction to *The Roadway Story* that “there are few histories of trucking companies and none that provide a serious treatment of the entire industry,” and the trucking companies shared with HAI a determination that the books would make a scholarly contribution. Other senior staff members also took on new book projects in the 1990s: Joan Zenzen’s 1998 *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* achieved some of its great success because it appeared only a few years after a major controversy caused by the Disney Company’s proposed theme park near the Civil War battlefield. Peggy Dillon worked on a study of the Public Welfare Foundation, and Kathy Nawyn wrote a history of the National Electrical Contractors Association. Smaller projects also filled the time of HAI research staff as they read through annual reports, obtained photographs, and drew up corporate chronologies for a variety of clients.

Many HAI books were published with university presses, a measure of prestige in the academic community. However, when HAI could not get the attention of an academic press, or when a client needed to publish a book quickly, HAI used its

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**Oral History**

“I hope you will feel free to talk with Dr. Hewlett frankly and fully,’ one of HAI’s clients wrote to the subject of an upcoming oral history interview. “He is a professional historian with long experience.” HAI oral historians like Hewlett craft open-ended interview questions to spur long-dormant recollections and are attentive to visual cues that indicate when persistence may yield new information—or cut off promising avenues of inquiry. They are especially eager to elicit descriptions of transactions, places, and people—“what so-and-so was really like”—impossible to glean from the documentary record. Cantelon’s most important advice to budding oral historians is “don’t be afraid of silence.”

Pregnant pauses… usually are.
own resources. Montrose Press helped make HAI a full-service company, with the capability to take a book from research to publication. Though Cantelon notes that many scholarly journals will not review corporate histories, in fact many of these books make an important contribution to public and academic knowledge. One scholarly journal, The Public Historian, praised Cantelon and Durr’s history of the Roadway trucking firm for not shirking difficult issues in providing an honest and engaging look at the story of an important company.

Always willing to tackle contentious historical issues, HAI took on a project with international ramifications in 1996. That year, congressional and public pressure convinced President Clinton to appoint a special committee to investigate the United States’ role in the so-called “Nazi gold” incidents. Gold and other assets looted by the Nazis during World War II became the subject of intense scrutiny. Museums discovered stolen art in their possession, and several began to identify and return the property. Though World War II was fifty years in the past, new discoveries in formerly classified records and renewed effort on the part of elderly survivors and veterans sparked media interest in the story. In the midst of all this, the president asked government agencies to investigate their roles in the identification and disposition of looted assets during the war. The United States Treasury Department hired HAI to research Treasury records for information related to looted gold from World War II and to write a historical summary based on the findings.

The successful completion of the Treasury project opened up new areas of inquiry. HAI’s only previous international work had been the 1992 archives project in Munich, but the Nazi gold contract soon led to other work dealing with Nazi activities during the war. Just as they had scoured the records related to government control of United States manufacturing plants, HAI re-

new generation of
searchers developed expertise in records related to Nazi Germany. American companies with foreign subsidiaries began turning to HAI to discover their role in using forced labor: some companies made large contributions to survivors’ funds and client settlements based on HAI’s findings. James Lide, who became director of the International Division when it officially separated from Litigation Research in May 2000, noted that some of his researchers must study things—such as Nazi concentration camps—that are “extraordinarily disturbing.” But there is great interest in research for the International Division among HAI staffs not only because of the high profile of the work but also because in many cases they use collections that have never before been looked at by scholars, journalists, or the general public.

Despite its profitability, litigation research raised a new set of concerns. Should senior officers decide whether to accept certain clients based upon the types of companies or industries involved? Although individual cases may be problematic, HAI’s willingness to become involved in controversial issues rested on two principles. First, in litigation as in other types of work, HAI historians acted not as advocates but as fact finders. Second, in all legal matters there has been a built-in incentive for the company to maintain its impartiality. Sophisticated clients do not want surprises, and they hire historians to uncover the bad news as well as the good.

As the company grew during the 1990s, corporate symposia gave way to formal annual meetings. The half-day sessions, moved to an offsite location in 1998, featured the distribution of service awards, including a plant for five-year employees (“as a symbol of our desire for you to continue to grow with us”), a pewter Revere cup for ten years, and an engraved silver Revere bowl for fifteen.

The company also continued a tradition of awarding a monetary prize and company stock to an Employee of the Year, nominated by the staff. As HAI celebrated its 20th anniversary, senior management had good reason to carefully evaluate the employees moving up in the company. They were preparing for yet another challenge: the smooth transition to a new generation of leadership.
Vision for the Future

At the HAI holiday party in December 2000, employees, consultants, board members, and their families socialized amidst an eclectic assortment of artwork at the Rockville Arts Place. Early company parties had been held at Phil Cantelon’s home or at the Montrose Schoolhouse, but like the symposia, holiday parties had become more formal affairs by the late 1990s. At party number 20, Cantelon distributed gifts bearing the new company motto coined by senior historian John Kinzie: The Best Company in History™. The party also featured special wines, microbrews, and an elaborate catered buffet. Music, both traditional and contemporary, helped set the mood. When Cantelon got up to make his speech, he praised his employees for their diligence and hard work, and noted that they had done well—“perhaps too well”—without him during a recent leave of absence. Although certainly not ready to let go of his company for good, Cantelon was preparing both himself and his staff for the end of his tenure as HAI’s only president.

In fact, HAI had long been preparing for this transition of power. The 1998 Annual Report noted that the senior management “expressed a desire to reduce its participation in the daily operations of the company” and turn its responsibilities over to a younger management team. A stock option program, increased corporate responsibilities for division directors, and more formal
recognition of mid-level project managers helped instill a sense of purpose in those destined for management roles. But HAI also focused on providing new opportunities—and challenges—to employees at all levels. In the fall of 2000, senior management, led primarily by the division directors, revamped HAI’s employment structure to make advancement—as outlined by more clearly defined promotional criteria—possible for all employees. Along with the reorganization, instituted in January 2001, came pay increases in keeping with the founders’ commitment to hire historians at reasonable salaries and encourage them to do outstanding work through a generous bonus and benefits program.

HAI’s rising generation has new ideas for the business of history. Division directors Nancy M. Merz, Brian Martin, James Lide, and Kenneth Durr (who took over the History Division in 2000) plan to couple existing expertise with new technologies to keep HAI on the cutting edge. IRM and History are already using digital imaging and other electronic technologies in their work. In Litigation, John Kinzie is exploring web-based databases—“not an idea that would ever occur to me,” admitted Cantelon. While continuing to pursue new marketing opportunities, HAI knows that its best advertising has always been good word of mouth. As Rodney Carlisle notes, the “clients become our sales force.” The regularly updated HAI company web site, www.historyassociates.com, touts a multilingual research team with extensive experience from Berlin to Budapest and Rome to Rabat. Expertise gained in U.S. history and sharpened in cases related to Nazi Germany is ready to meet the needs of an increasingly global society.

“Every time you successfully sign a contract,” said long-time HAI board member Arnita Jones, “you will have convinced somebody” of the importance of historical research. Jones and others who have been witnesses to the extraordinary changes in professional history over the past several decades understand the significance of companies like History Associates in changing the face of the historical profession. Anna Nelson, an American University historian who remembers the early days of HAI, be-
Mastering the National Archives

What do researchers at the National Archives do all day? How do they know where to look? For HAI litigation historians the process sometimes resembles the proverbial search for a needle in a haystack.

A first step is to apply general historical knowledge in figuring out which collections might hold relevant documents. Did a particular industrial site produce materials for the government during World War II? If so, a good place to look might be Record Group (RG) 179, the Records of the War Production Board. If the Navy supervised company operations, perhaps RG 71, the Navy Bureau of Yards and Docks, is the answer—then again it might be RG 72, the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, or even RG 385, the Naval Facilities Engineering Command. There are countless ways to narrow down the search, and HAI’s years of experience often indicate which path is most promising. Once the best collections

believes that over the past two decades the company has become a model for the future of professional history: “Nothing succeeds like success,” she notes. For twenty years, HAI has pushed the boundaries of what historians do. Cantelon, Williams, Hewlett, and Carlisle had a message: history can be relevant, useful, and cost-effective. As more and more companies and individuals sign contracts with History Associates, the message spreads.

So the history consulting experiment worked. As Cantelon and Williams wrote in the introduction to Crisis Contained, professional historians, whether in the academy or elsewhere, use the same set of traditional skills: “telling the story, distinguishing the significant from the insignificant, comparing planned or intended actions with what actually happened, and making known the unknown.” Despite rises and dips in the company’s fortunes, History Associates Incorporated has changed the ways that hundreds of clients around the country—and, increasingly, around the world—see history and use history. HAI’s clients, whether state and local governments, corporations, or individuals, have learned that history can work for them. The founders, in turn, are justly proud of the success of their company. In a recent letter closing a contract with a corporate client, Cantelon noted that he and his staff had thoroughly enjoyed the project. “Thanks,” he concluded, “for the privilege and your confidence.”

Board of Directors meeting, 2001.

Beth Ciha investigates documents at the National Archives.

can work for them.
Note on Sources

Sources for this history included company correspondence, contract files, monthly reports, annual reports, company publications, and other materials held in HAI’s corporate archives. The project benefitted greatly from a few earlier efforts to document the company’s history. The HAI archives contains six transcripts of oral history interviews done in 1989 and 1993. Nine additional oral history interviews were conducted for this project. Many of the details in the narrative were worked out through less formal telephone, e-mail, and personal conversations with the participants.

Oral History, transcript, 1989
Jack M. Holl

Oral Histories, transcripts, 1993
Margaret G. Belke
Philip L. Cantelon
Rodney P. Carlisle
Ruth A. Dudgeon
Gail O. Mathews

Oral Histories, tapes only, 2000
Frank G. Burke
Philip L. Cantelon
Rodney P. Carlisle
Ruth A. Dudgeon
Ruth R. Harris
Amita A. Jones
James H. Lide
Brian W. Martin
Gail O. Mathews

All pictures are courtesy of HAI unless otherwise noted. NARA is the National Archives and Records Administration, and DOE is the United States Department of Energy.

Photo Research: Christine A. Anderson
Editor: Kenneth D. Durr

About the Author: Sarah A. Leavitt graduated from Wesleyan University and holds an M.A. in Museum Studies and a Ph.D. in American Civilization from Brown University. She is currently a Woodrow Wilson Postdoctoral Fellow at History Associates Incorporated.
HAI’s Clients Include:

American Academy of Physician Assistants
American Institute of Physics
Arizona Attorney General
Arthur Andersen
The Bank of New York
California State Historical Records Advisory Board
City of Billings, Montana
CNF Transportation, Inc.
Delaware Department of Transportation
Deutsches Museum
Ford Motor Company
The Foundation Center
Fulbright & Jaworski
General Electric Company
Hale & Dorr
Hart Crowser
Henry P. Kendall Foundation
IBM Corporation
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National Geographic Society
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
National Electrical Contractors Association
National Institutes of Health
National Library of Medicine
New Mexico State Engineer Office
Olin Corporation
Organization of American States
Panama Canal Commission
Perkins Coie
Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro
Public Welfare Foundation
Special Olympics, Inc.
Texas Instruments Incorporated
U.S. Department of the Air Force
U.S. Department of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Epidemiologic Studies
U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Department of the Navy
U.S. Department of State
Washington National Cathedral
Weyerhaeuser Company
Wiley, Rein & Fielding