

# HAIpoints

25th Anniversary—Spring 2006

HISTORY ASSOCIATES INCORPORATED

## Introduction

It's been twenty-five years since four historians, convinced that history could be valuable in the market as well as the marketplace of ideas, founded History Associates Incorporated. Since then, dozens of imaginative and hardworking historians and archivists turned their talents to proving this concept. Having served hundreds of clients worldwide, HAI has developed a continuum of services: from discovering the past, to preserving the past, to putting the past to work.

Today a new generation of histori-

ans and archivists is determined to build upon their firm's reputation as The Best Company in History®. All of us are committed to delivering to customers the highest quality services and products and providing to colleagues an excellent working environment. Just as the founders did, we know that these goals will be realized chiefly during everyday efforts on behalf of our clients. In this issue of *HAIpoints* we invite you to help celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to let us help you put your past to work.

## Discovering the Past



One of the few good things to arise from the TMI disaster was HAI. Here (from left) are founders Phil Cantelon and Bob Williams and research assistant Bruce Siegel across from Three Mile Island in 1979. Source: HAI archives.

It starts with a question that leads to others: "what happened?" Then comes "when?" or "who?" or even "why?" Scores of related questions usually follow, each demanding an answer and a lot of research. The image of the narrowly specialized academic dominates the public perception. But for most of our clients—beginning with the Department of Energy, our very first—expertise in the craft of history is a more valuable asset. Our knowing how to discover the past has led us into new and unexplored territory over the years, and many a historical generalist has turned specialist

Three Mile Island incident, there was no World Wide Web. Nor was there an archive to provide an obvious starting point for the investigation. Instead, the founders applied their fundamental historian's skills—uncovering the pathways through which critical information traveled and developing ways, sometimes unconventional, of tapping those veins. Regardless of the media, sure knowledge of the historian's craft continues to be one of the most valuable things we can offer our clients.

Recently, documentary producer Southland Tales asked HAI to find

## When It All Comes Together

*HAI's researchers regularly put together important stories over the course of research projects, but on rare occasions they come together all at once, as this one did for historian Will Armstrong.*

"We went to the archives looking for some material on a World War I-era training camp in California. The client knew nothing about it except that it existed. We did the usual research, making sure to look at some Quartermaster Corps files to see if there might be a record of what was going in and out of the camp. . . . We found a full string of correspondence about the disposition of a small canister of mustard agent.

"The discussion goes back and forth—someone suggests throwing the canister in the ocean—but the order is finally given to bury it over some objections. One forward-thinking guy wrote that 'it could result in a harmful damage claim against the United States government later on!'"

HAI senior historian Kenneth Durr, oral history interview with Will Armstrong, February 15, 2006.

public-domain video footage on atomic testing and emergency preparedness—in twenty-four hours. Armed with comprehensive knowledge of the federal government, the National Archives, and a good sense of what was easily available, HAI got the reels rolling quickly and by the end of the day the footage was speeding cross-country to client Heather Elwell. "In my business," wrote Ms. Elwell, "it's important to be able to trust the people you are working with because we need so much so quickly all of the time. If I can't rely on a company to take my requests and then make them happen in a very quick way, then I look bad. You guys were able to make me look good!"



# Preserving the Past

The question: which comes first—the history or the archives? The answer: HAI's historical services came first, but the archives was close behind. Today HAI fields a team of more than twenty archivists and records managers, working from four different offices. Accounting for this growth is the knowledge by dozens of clients over the years that their past was a valuable asset and that preserving it made good economic sense.

HAI's archivists draw on both academic training and practical experience to identify, preserve, and make historical assets available. As its clients' needs have changed over the years, HAI has broadened its archival expertise: in the mid-1990s we introduced records



Archivists Caris Brown (left) and Julie Schweitzer at work in HAI's processing room. Source: HAI digital photo collection.

management services, helping clients properly handle current records. In 2002 we opened a secure, climate-controlled

in raising the comfort level of Edison management and facilitating a happy outcome for all parties."

archival storage facility in Rockville, Maryland.

Milestones along the digital path have included joining the team building the Electronic Records Archives for the National Archives and working for Southern California Edison (SCE), evaluating and organizing its historic assets. It might be easy to get lost in the technology, but HAI's archivists never forget that their clients are people, not papers. HAI's "personal presentation, style, and political acumen," wrote SCE's Thomas Taylor, "was a significant factor

## Putting the Past to Work

Think of it as potential energy: those old stories recaptured; those archives all arranged. "What's next?" might be the next question. Our services and products have answered that question many times over the years.

Books like *Durable Legacy*, our recent anniversary history of the Wilmington, Delaware, law firm Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnell, remain popular. But today, with clients asking for shorter, more highly illustrated but no less authoritative products, HAI is as expert with photographs and artifact images as with the printed word.

New media skills make the critical link between the best of the historian's craft and ever more cutting-edge forms of presentation. HAI entered the world of virtual exhibits in 2002 with a historical website for DuPont. Today, working closely with some of the top exhibit designers in the business, we provide display, multimedia, and interactive content for venues like the International Spy Museum.

Litigation research clients have also asked our help in putting the past to work. Our corporate genealogies document

divestitures and acquisitions, and our interactive maps make documents and details easily accessible—all to help the lawyers make sense of the wealth of information our research turns up. Some senior historians craft expert witness reports and provide testimony in court. HAI also helps tap a resource organizations often overlook—the knowledge of a veteran insider. Oral history interviews might go to work as part of a book, as an exhibit, or as a resource posted on the Web.

Every historical puzzle can be elegantly simple or frustratingly complex—it all depends on the expertise brought to bear. It takes a historian's sense of story, knowledge of context, and practiced hand with the tools of the trade to produce work like our soon-to-be-released *The Sound of Freedom: Naval Weapons Technology at Dahlgren, Virginia, 1918-2003*. "The professionals at History Associates were able to bring the diverse elements together and present our history in a thoughtful, contextually appropriate, and engaging manner," wrote Janice Miller of the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Dahlgren Division. Just living up to our potential.

### "We're Getting Archives"

*HAI's expanding into archival services was all due to a chance question by Phil Cantelon.*

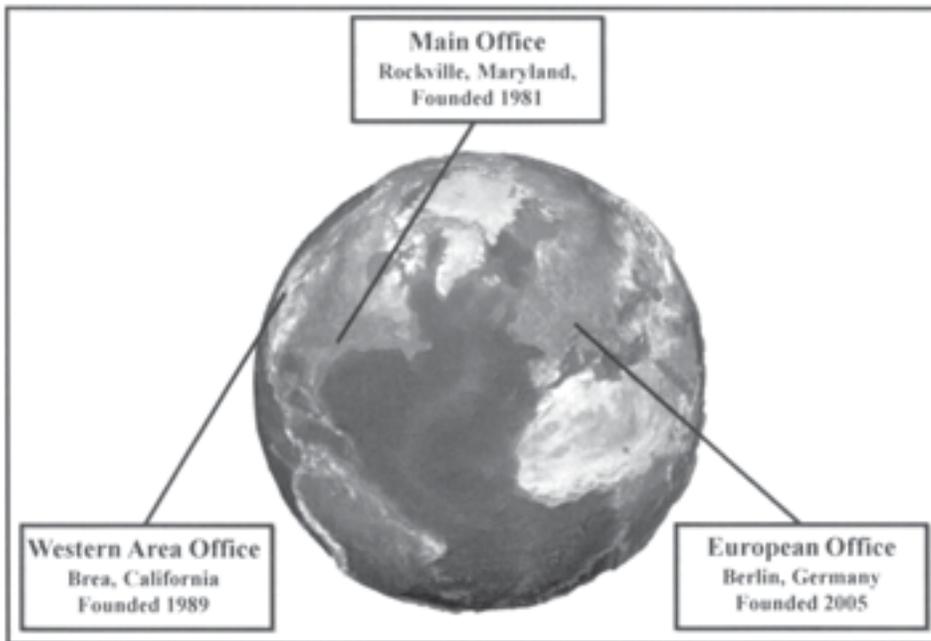
"We were doing the history of Texas Instruments. I asked the Chairman one day where the records were. . . . I was in his office and I said, '[former director] Brian Smith has just left the company. Where are his records?' 'Well, they're in his office, aren't they,' he said. 'I don't know,' I replied.

"He got up and flew out the door toward Brian's office because he didn't know. When he got there—I'm running behind him—there's nothing in there. We went back to his office and he called somebody and said, 'You talk to this guy Cantelon; we're getting archives.'"

HAI historian Sarah Leavitt, oral history interview with Phil Cantelon, December 6, 2000.



# A Generation of Growth



Over twenty-five years HAI has steadily expanded its operations. Source: HAI archives.

You could say that History Associates Incorporated started out at the top—the founders’ “executive suite” was borrowed space on the fourth floor of the Department of Energy (DOE) headquarters in Germantown, Maryland, to be exact.

But signs were good that HAI would soon be on firmer foundations. Even before the company completed the Three Mile Island project for the DOE, it had landed a big private sector contract—a history of Texas Instruments—and a litigation related project researching the ownership of some offshore Texas islands. Dr. Ruth Harris proved that historical research for litigation could pay—for both the company and its clients—when her work helped save Montgomery County, Maryland, \$210 million in a 1981 constitutional law case. Nancy Merz did the same for archivists, establishing in 1984 what became HAI’s Information Resources Management Division.

By 1984 the company was on its own in a suburban Rockville office townhouse complex. But

only two years later, when *Inc.* magazine designated HAI its “Fastest Growing Company #302,” the company was searching for new digs. In 1987 HAI took up residence in Rockville’s historic Montrose Schoolhouse and established a satellite office in Germantown as well. Two years later historian and archivist Gabriele Carey opened what would one day become HAI’s Western Area Office in the Los Angeles suburbs.

HAI learned a tough lesson in the early 1990s when it lost two of its largest government contracts. After a little soul-

searching and a lot of belt-tightening, however, the company began building a new revenue base on the somewhat firmer ground of a steady stream of private sector contracts rather than a small group of government ones. Diversification, it turned out, would be the key to a stronger and even more challenging company. In 1992 the company established a Litigation Research Division that historian Brian Martin built into one of the company’s top revenue centers. Soon space was again at a premium and in 1994 HAI took up a spacious office suite on Choke Cherry Road in Rockville. An on-site office followed four years later in Kingston, New York, for the IBM archives project.

As the company reached and passed the twenty-year mark, the wisdom of diversification became clear. HAI had always known how to adapt, but the early 2000s indicated that expanding the realm of research and broadening the service base had become pivotal practices for HAI. Researching corporate activities in Nazi Germany led to the creation of an International Division under James Lide in 2000. Five years later historian Keith Allen established a beachhead on the continent, opening an office in Berlin.

In 2002 it was time to move again, into its own single-story building on Stonestreet Avenue in Rockville. Still, three banner years and ten new hires later, additions to the Rockville office seem likely. Could HAI’s second ever fourth-floor executive suite be far off?



HAI’s main office on Stonestreet Avenue in Rockville, Maryland. Source: HAI digital photo collection.



# Faces of the Future

“That’s very nice, but what are you going to do with it?” Most college graduates in the humanities have heard this question more than a few times: historians are perhaps more likely to keep count. A lucky few can say “I’m going to work for History Associates.” Almost alone, HAI has made—and kept—a commitment to hire full-time archivists and historians at competitive salaries and give them the opportunity to excel in their chosen profession outside of the academy. Moreover, at HAI, personal professional commitments are complemented by a shared commitment to the joint enterprise: HAI’s historians and archivists know that they’re in this together and they like it that way.

Over the years this emphasis on professional autonomy within a setting of corporate support has spurred a kind of excellence and innovation that is a rich resource for our clients. Twenty-five years ago there was no road map for firms like ours: together our historians and archivists developed standards and practices that now seem venerable. Time and again our professionals have developed an individual solution to a specific challenge and seen it soon put to work for a variety of clients. In short, our employees’ personal investment in the company creates the kind of innovation and flexibility that our clients can use. Of course, sometimes the challenges may be entirely unexpected. On his first day at work in 1989, senior historian James Lide recalled:

“I was wearing my first big boy suit and everything, and literally walked in the door and said, you know: ‘Hello. Where do I sit down? I’m James.’ And nobody was quite sure who I was or what I was supposed to be doing. There was about ten, maybe fifteen seconds of: ‘Well, okay. I think I

heard about you. Let me give Phil a call.’ They pick up the phone, call Phil. Phil comes up to the front, and says: ‘Oh yeah. I’ve got a job for you.’ Takes me to the back; and first thing I have to do is crawl underneath Barbara Hunt’s desk and empty out the mousetraps that are down there. So that was—you know, five minutes in the company; I was carrying out dead rodents, and disposing of them in the backyard. That sort of set a theme for my next few years there at HAI.”\*

The methodology that Cantelon used with Lide was unconventional, perhaps, but there can be no contesting that, by identifying and training their successors, the founders have fulfilled a chief obligation of leadership. But there are plenty of other reasons that HAI has valued the employees of the past and made room for the faces of the future. “The secret to this company’s success,” insists Cantelon, “is no secret at all. “I’ve always hired people who were smarter than I am and let them work.” If Cantelon has passed on that piece of wisdom as well, HAI is no doubt secure far into the future.

\*HAI historian Sarah Leavitt, oral history interview with James Lide, December 8, 2000.

HAI archivists Gregory Pike (left) and A. Robert Taglianetti. Source: HAI digital photo collection.



HAI historians (from left) Allison Carroll, Traci Parker, and Jessica Smith. Source: HAI digital photo collection.



## History Associates Incorporated

History Associates Incorporated is one of the oldest and largest historical services firms in the United States. Now in its twenty-third year, HAI provides:

### Historical research and writing

- historical studies and illustrated commemoratives
- oral histories
- web-based histories and exhibits

### Archival and records management services

- databases and digital archives exhibits
- inventories and disposition schedules
- appraisal, selection, and processing for archival programs
- archival storage

### Historical research for litigation

- document collection
- site and subject studies
- expert testimony

### International historical and archival services

- preservation and utilization of historical assets worldwide
- multimedia documentary projects
- expertise in multilingual historical research

HAI serves business and industry, government agencies, the professions, and nonprofit associations.

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