NHPRC Award No: RB-50059-09

"Coming to the Surface: Revealing Hidden Collections in Michigan's Copper Country"
Michigan Technological University
Erik Nordberg, Project Director

<u>Final Narrative Report</u>
December 7, 2011

This project has met or exceeded all of the performance objectives. It has transformed the ways in which information about the manuscript collections of Michigan Technological University may be found by researchers and has encouraged the institution to continue to improve its arrangement and description activities.

In overview, the project completed several large initiatives relating to the manuscript collections of the Michigan Technological Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections ("Michigan Tech Archives"), a department of Michigan Tech's Van Pelt and Opie Library. One involved a survey of the collections to confirm location and extent of individual collections and to record box-level preservation observations. The project also created collection-level descriptions for each of these collections in Proficio, a commercial archival collection management software program produced by Re:discovery. Standardized collection-level catalog records were output to the Van Pelt and Opie Library online public access catalog (OPAC) and to WorldCat, a national bibliographic utility which comingles information from libraries and archives around the world. In addition, brief summary descriptions have been posted to the Michigan Tech Archives' blog (http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/).

These descriptions have been revealed to potential researchers throughout the world via a number of online tools. A full listing of the collections, including collection number, title, and brief description, is now available on the Michigan Tech Archives blog: http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-cataloging-project/collection-registers/.

Catalog records for each collection are also available on the Voyager catalog at Michigan Tech's Van Pelt and Opie Library: http://ils.lib.mtu.edu/vwebv/searchAdvanced. Visitors may limit their searches by the location "Archives Manuscript Collection." These records allow searches of collection names, keywords in their brief descriptions and histories, and also using standardized subject headings. Where applicable, the catalog records also include links to digital resources, such as digitized copies of photographs held in our Keweenaw Digital Archives (publicly available at http://digarch.lib.mtu.edu).

Versions of these catalog records are also searchable through WorldCat, an international bibliographic database maintained by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), a global cooperative of libraries, archives, and museums. The general public can search the main WorldCat catalog: http://www.worldcat.org/. Participating OCLC member institutions may also search these records through the FirstSearch version of

WorldCat which allows researchers to limit type to "Archival Materials" and limit availability to library code "EZT" for Michigan Tech archival collection records.

Researchers, both local and distant, have already made significant use of the online content developed through the funded work. It has become routine for individuals to contact staff via e-mail or phone about specific collections discovered through WorldCat, the library's OPAC, and via web crawlers such as Google and Yahoo which index collection information posted to the Archives blog. In addition, on-site patrons may now be instructed in using these same digital resources to explore their research topics and many arrive at the Archives reading room with print-outs asking for specific holdings. Finally, yet perhaps most importantly, Archives' staff and student assistants now routinely use these tools to assist visitors and are able to use Proficio for various operations including locating/paging collections, reviewing accessions/donor information, and tracking preservation and processing needs.

Work on this project ultimately proved inadequacies in the collection management software implemented for this project. Although Proficio presented some functionality as a general archival collection management tool, deficiencies in MARC and EAD output preclude its long-term viability for the Michigan Tech Archives. As a result, our institution determined to change collection management software from Proficio to Archivists' Toolkit.

The NHPRC-funded collection-level descriptive work in the current project has provided a firm foundation from which staff can add detailed folder-level descriptions of the manuscript collections. Outside of the funded work, initiatives have been undertaken to migrate data to the Archivists' Toolkit platform, utilize this software to add folder-level description to selected collection records, and export EAD-compliant finding aids. These activities reflect our institution's commitment to ongoing improvement in the description of our collections.

The Michigan Tech Archives was very pleased to receive word of a separate grant through the NHPRC "detailed" program which will arrange, describe, and create EAD-compliant finding aids for more than 90 of our premier collections. This new project will begin in January 2012 and continue through December 2013.

NHPRC Basic Project Performance Objectives

As to the specific performance objectives defined in the award letter:

1. *Submit complete reports by the deadlines in the Grant Award Summary. The final report must include three copies of grant products.*

   All reports have been submitted according to the grant award summary. In addition, copies of the narrative reports, including this final report and its appendices, have been posted to the Archives' blog site (http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/).

2. Train 3 staff members to use new collections management software and develop a brief quick reference guide on the basic functionality of that software.

A quick reference guide was developed to assist Archives' staff and student assistants in the use of Proficio (see Appendix 1). This guide provides step-by-step instructions in opening the collection management software, locating the collections description module, searching for different types of information, displaying and printing information, and accessing documents which are linked to collection records such as finding aids and inventories. Training has included 4 different staff members, 6 student assistants, and a summer archives intern. In addition to this guide and basic training, full-time professional archival staff have shared training in the higher end functionality of the system, including use of the accessions and donor address module and a review and approval workflow used for quality control of new entries.

With approval of the NHPRC program officer, funds originally budgeted for additional training by Re:discovery Proficio staff were redirected to support training for EAD-compliant description and the use of XML authoring tools. The "Encoded Archival Description and Stylesheet Workshop" was held in Houghton, Michigan, September 8-10, 2011, and was taught by Michael Fox, recently retired from the Minnesota Historical Society and regular EAD workshop presenter for the Society of American Archivists. Because the cost of his visit was paid from our NHPRC grant funds, no fees were charged to participants. The workshop was advertised to other professionals in the region and staff of the Michigan Tech Archives were joined by librarians and technologists from the Van Pelt and Opie Library, a metadata librarian from Northern Michigan University, and a doctoral student from Michigan Tech for the training workshop.

3. Complete a collections survey and create a brief preservation planning report.

A box-level preservation survey was completed by staff and grant-funded graduate student intern. A total of 1,052 collections were surveyed and assessed at the container level. A sample of one of the completed survey forms is attached (see Appendix 2).

Data on the condition of archival enclosures and an overall assessment of container contents were collected. Each collection was assigned a preservation rating, and priority issues were identified. Preservation maintenance actions were suggested. Data on processing rates were also collected. A brief preservation planning report was completed (see Appendix 3) and information derived from the survey will be incorporated into the Archives' existing preservation program.

4. Using basic processing guidelines describe approximately 7000 cubic feet (931 collections) of unprocessed archival material at the collection level.

The project cataloging archivist input data to the accessions module of the collection management system for 1,980 separate accessions (a sample screen shot of a record from the accessions module is included as Appendix 4). These represent a complete record of all manuscript material owned by the Michigan Tech Archives, which exceeds 7,300 cubic feet in total. This work was informed by survey forms completed during the box-level collections survey, as well as existing print accessions information, donor case files, an extant accessions database, existing indexes and finding aids, and interaction with Archives' staff about specific collections. Descriptive work was not duplicated for manuscript materials on deposit from the State Archives of Michigan as collection records, finding aids, and catalog entries are maintained by that agency.

In support of consistent, comprehensive, and standardized descriptive data, the project cataloging archivist was particularly attentive to developing and implementing a professional system of authority control in the descriptive work. This work included creation of 2,952 authority records for individuals, corporations, and organizations (three sample screen shots of authority records are included as Appendix 5). Many of these involved creation of wholly new entries for local entities not included in international authority control thesauri. The Archives is working with other manuscript repositories in the region to share and continue to develop these local authority thesauri. The authority work completed during this project cannot be undervalued and will prove critical to the Archives' future descriptive activity.

As a result of this work, a total of 753 records were created in Proficio for the collections. Although fewer than the original 931 expected, the project still completed collection-level records for all of the manuscript material originally defined in our project scope. The reduced numeric figure is the result of institutional decisions to deaccession some material – and to combine some materials. During the project, numerous organizations and businesses (particularly mining corporations) were discovered to be represented by multiple discrete accessions, often from unconnected donors. In some cases, provenance dictated maintaining the separation of some materials, but in many cases the grant project team opted to merge related (but previously separate) accessions into single collections under a single collection number and title. In these cases the maintenance of separate collections was confirmed to reflect no useful original order or provenance. This work was closely documented so that future archives staff (and researchers) will be able to recover and understand the source of all donated material.

Staff feels strongly that the combining of separate accessions has improved the quality of description and ease with which researchers will discover relevant material on any particular topic.

From this work with accessions data, authority data, and collections data, the Proficio collection management software has become a tool which comprehensively describes the manuscript holdings of the Michigan Tech Archives. A series of screen shots from Proficio (included as Appendix 6) show samples of the main information, subject access, and many supplemental information sections created for each collection.

5. *Create MARC records for each collection based on nationally accepted descriptive standards and submit them to local and national union catalogs.*

The project cataloging archivist, project team members, and the Michigan Tech catalog librarian developed workflows to output data from Proficio compliant to the MARC format. These records were batch loaded via the OCLC Connexion client to WorldCat. See sample OCLC Connexion record included as Appendix 7 and samples of records as they may be reviewed by researchers in WorldCat in Appendix 8. Records were then copy-cataloged back to the local library OPAC (see sample records from the library OPAC, called Voyager, included as Appendix 9).

A total of 725 collection records were exported using these methods to WorldCat and the library OPAC. Staff determined that a number of collections would not be represented with records in these online sources. These included records for reading room collections of newspaper clipping files, umbrella records for oversize flat file and microfilm holdings, and a limited number of collections which are currently closed to researchers in accordance with donor stipulations.

6. *Promote the use of the project's method by posting the preservation planning, interim narrative and other relevant reports and updates on the MTU's Archives web site.*

A variety of records pertaining to this project, including each of the documents specified above, have been posted to the Archives' blog site (http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/).

Archives' staff have interacted with a number of other institutions requesting information about our project, grant application, and outcomes. The availability of documents on our blog site has encouraged easy access to this information. At least one of these interactions, with Rachel Vagts at Luther College in Iowa, helped to encourage an application and funded project through NHPRC.

7. *Promote the use of the collections through an announcement on the MTU Archives web site, at least two presentations made to a local community organizations, professional groups, or schools, and messages posted to at least three listservs.*

Project activities, documents, and other information have been shared through updates to the Michigan Tech Archives blog site. This included periodic updates to a collection register, which gave researchers the opportunity to monitor the addition of

new collection records and to use the "search this blog" feature to locate key words in collection descriptions.

Presentations were made to staff of the Van Pelt Library on December 22, 2009, and November 10, 2010, to share updates on the project. For the latter, the project team created a PowerPoint presentation which included a general overview of the project, details of the preservation components of the work, description of the description workflows for producing MARC records from the Proficio software to WorldCat and Voyager, a summary of some lessons learned, and the remaining work to be completed.

Members of the project team also highlighted the project at two professional conferences. Assistant archivist Julie Blair delivered a paper at the May 2010 Midwest Archives Conference in Chicago, discussing our repository's grant-writing activity, preservation work, and successful efforts to make information on collections more widely available through the public web. Blair and project cataloging archivist Beth Russell presented a session entitled "Kicking and Screaming Into the 21st Century: Transforming Legacy Data" at the Society of Indiana Archivists annual meeting held in April 2010 in Indianapolis. Although none of the costs associated with these professional conferences were paid from the NHPRC grant, these activities drew attention to the project and to the important support received from the Commission.

Information and slides for these presentations are posted to the Michigan Tech Archives blog at http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-cataloging-project/presentations/.

Two general media releases also drew attention to the project. An initial July 2009 release announced the award and outlined the project plan to local, regional, and professional audiences. Following the conclusion of the grant, a November 7, 2011 open house event held in the reading room of the Michigan Tech Archives highlighted collections 'revealed' during the project. A final media release of December 5, 2011 announced the conclusion of the project and encouraged use of the resources created through shared internet links to collection registers, the local library OPAC, and WorldCat. Copies of these media releases are included as Appendix 10.

Other Comments and Observations

The project team developed an internal wiki to document project activity, to share resources, and to provide a virtual platform for editing of project documents. Project staff utilized the wiki to record policy decisions on authority control, descriptive workflows, and other cataloging issues. The project team also used the wiki for establishing agendas for meetings, managing other documents, and communicating about project-related issues.

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Final Narrative Report

NHPRC funding for this project proved to be a catalyst for several staffing-related opportunities for the Michigan Tech Archives. Based upon the excellent work of the graduate student intern employed for the box-level preservation survey funded by project collars, the Archives was able to secure additional funding from the Van Pelt and Opie Library to extend the student intern's employment for an additional six months. The intern completed several projects outside the scope of the NHPRC grant, including arrangement and description of unprocessed collections discovered during the survey.

More significantly, the Archives was able to continue the employment of project cataloging archivist Beth Russell following the conclusion of the grant-funded activity. Although not a wholly new salary line (Russell was hired to replace Julia Blair, who moved on to a new position elsewhere in the Van Pelt and Opie Library), this allowed the Archives to retain Russell's expert description and cataloging skills and capitalize on the detailed localized knowledge she had developed about our collections. These assets will prove critical to the Archives' ongoing descriptive activities.

This NHPRC-funded project has transformed the manner in which our institution manages, describes, and shares information about our manuscript holdings. Beyond simply a matter of manpower to execute a box-level inventory and implement an archival collection management system, the project added a suite of expertise and skills embodied in a project cataloging archivist that simply did not exist previous to this funding. Retention of this person in a permanent line – and funding for a second 'detailed' grant to develop and implement EAD-compliant descriptive systems – are significant changes for our institution. It is difficult to imagine this transformation having occurred without support from NHPRC.