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

Interim Narrative Report for July 1, 2009 – December 31, 2009
January 29, 2010

Objectives

This project is designed to complete collection-level MARC cataloging of 900 manuscript collections in the Michigan Tech Archives. Project funds will support two new staff and the purchase of Proficio, a specialized collection management software program created for archives and museums. Descriptions of each of the Archives' 900 manuscript collections will be created in the new system, with information shared to Michigan Tech's Van Pelt and Opie Library catalog and to WorldCat, a national bibliographic utility. In addition to the descriptive cataloging, the project will include a box-level survey of the collections, a brief preservation planning report, and a cataloging planning report. Cost-share for the project includes the time of Erik Nordberg, university archivist and project director, Julie Blair, assistant archivist, and also Jennifer Miller, catalog librarian in the Michigan Tech Library.

During this reporting period, July 1, 2009, to December 31, 2009, the project schedule included plans to advertise and hire two positions, purchase and implement the Proficio software, outline and begin the box-level collection survey, and undertake initial cataloging activity.

Summary of project activities, July 1, 2009 – December 31, 2009

This project is proceeding on schedule.

Upon receiving notification of funding, the project director and assistant archivist worked with University staff to finalize the NHPRC grant agreement, finalize position descriptions and advertise for applicants. Elizabeth Russell was selected for the position of project cataloging archivist from a pool of 15 applicants and began work on September 28, 2009. Russell holds the masters degree in library and information science from the University of Rhode Island and brings a breadth of experience with cataloging archival material to this project. She has worked with a wide range of archival materials (manuscripts, books, oversize drawings), has worked with a number of different library cataloging systems, including the Voyager OPAC system currently used by the Michigan Tech library. Russell is familiar with MARC, OCLC, and LCHS, and has had specific training in standards including specialized workshop training from the Society of American Archivists in Encoded Archival Description (EAD) and Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS). Her education and experience will bring a high level of expertise for precisely the kind of project we have designed.

Crystal Laudeman was selected for the position of graduate student intern from a pool of 10 applicants and began employment on October 5, 2009. Laudeman is currently pursuing a graduate degree in library and archival management at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She completed her undergraduate study in history at Northern Michigan University in 2005, which helped to familiarize her with Michigan's Upper Peninsula and its extractive minerals industry.

The assistant archivist and graduate student intern established working philosophy, documentation, survey forms, and a workflow to undertake the box-level shelf survey. The survey was begun and incorporated assessment of preservation and conservation issues for inclusion in the collection record and for consideration in future conservation projects. As of December 31, the graduate student intern had completed surveys for 963 individual collections.

The project team worked with the software vendor and Michigan Tech information technology staff to purchase and install the Proficio collection management software. Some initial debugging was necessary, but the software was ready for use by September 28, 2009, when the project cataloging archivist began employment. Following a period of orientation and training, the project cataloging archivist began to develop a written manuscript cataloging plan to gather/review data and to input data to the collection management system. This includes use of data gathered from the graduate student's physical shelf-reading of the collections, as well as a review of existing donor case files and accessions database information, location/review of any existing indexes or finding aids, and interaction with Archives' staff about specific collections. As of December 31, there were 148 collection-level records created in Proficio. This included creation of relevant authority records.

The project cataloging archivist and other project team members also met several times with the MTU catalog librarian to define a process and parameters necessary to output data to MARC format. Additional software installations were necessary, including arranging direct access for the project archivist to OCLC Connexion, and an initial test batch of MARC records were exported from Proficio to WorldCat and also into the library's Voyager OPAC. As of December 31, there were 16 records added to these bibliographic utilities.

Promotion

The project team promoted the initial project award through a press release on July 8, 2009. The release was carried in the following places:

Tech Today (electronic newsletter to Michigan Tech community), July 10, 2009
   online version: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/ttoday/previous.php?issue=20090710
The Daily Mining Gazette (Houghton, Michigan), July 31, 2009
   online version: http://www.mininggazette.com/page/content.detail/id/506041.html
Michigan Archival Association
   e-mail discussion listerserv and their newsletter, *Open Entry*
Society of American Archivists
   e-mail discussion listserv "Archives & Archivists," and newsletter, *Archival Outlook*
Midwest Archives Conference
   MAC newsletter
Michigan Tech Van Pelt and Opie Library newsblog
   http://blogs.mtu.edu/library/category/archives-blog/archives-cataloging-project/
Michigan Tech Archives blog
   http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/category/about-the-archives/grants-received/

On December 22, 2009, the project team provided a one-hour seminar on the project to librarians and staff of the Michigan Tech Van Pelt and Opie Library. The seminar included presentations from the graduate student intern and project cataloging archivist, provided an overview and description of the work to date, and outlined the remaining components of the project. An outline of this seminar is posted to the Michigan Tech Archives blog at http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-cataloging-project/presentations/

Accomplishments and Impact

All goals for the initial six months of this project have been met or exceeded. As reported in the summary above, the two grant-funded positions were advertised and filled, the Proficio collection management software was purchased and installed, the box-level shelf survey was initiated (including creation of survey forms, workflow, and other documentation), cataloging process and workflow were created, collection-level descriptions were generated in the new software, and an initial batch of MARC records were successfully exported to WorldCat and Library's Voyager OPAC.

Quantitative figures as of December 31, 2009, include:

963 collections surveyed
148 collection-level records in Proficio
16 initial MARC records in WorldCat and Library's Voyager OPAC

The project has already had significant impact on the institution's archival program. The box-level collection survey has uncovered a variety of preservation concerns including brittle paper, deteriorating photographic negatives, and some indications of mold and paper deterioration. The shelf survey has also uncovered a surprising amount of unaccessioned material and smaller collections with limited documentation. Deciding that this material could be better served by additional detailed accessioning and initial processing, the project team has received additional funding from the Michigan Tech Library director to continue the employment of the graduate student intern for an additional three months beyond NHPRC funding.

Probably most significant, however, has been expanded staff awareness for the smaller manuscript holdings of the department. Although the Michigan Tech Archives has always had reliable accession and donor files – and materials have been "discoverable" through rudimentary location guides and finding tools – the shelf survey and cataloging workflows involve existing Archives' staff in the review and description of many collections which have received little notice of researchers in recent years. The descriptive cataloging workflow involves review and approval of all collection records by both the university archivist and assistant archivist, informing these two key public service personnel of the breadth and variety of the department's holdings.

Other Comments

Project personnel have encountered some limitations in the ability of the Proficio software to output data correctly in MARC format. Although this software provides powerful tools for managing collections, donor information, and descriptive metadata about the collections, it has not been heavily utilized by archives in academic library settings to produce collection-level MARC records. The vendor is working closely with the project team to address these concerns and the improvements likely to come from this collaboration will prove valuable to future users of this software.

A number of issues have been encountered during the box-level survey. These include a surprising amount of unaccessioned material and smaller collections with limited documentation. The project has also identified a number of groups of topically-connected accessions – most often multiple donations from a single company or organization over time –

which might benefit from integrated processing into single collections. Project staff has also considering revising the existing system used for numbering accessions and collections.

These are not significant obstacles to completion of the project goals, but some of these issues have identified additional work that will be undertaken outside the grant-funded project (and will not use grant-funded personnel). In fact, Archives' staff has worked with Michigan Tech Library administration to secure additional funding to continue the employment of the graduate student intern for an additional three months beyond NHPRC funding. This additional time will allow the department to complete several components outside the parameters of the grant-funded work, including initiatives to address some of the issues described above.

Regardless of these challenges, we are generally satisfied with the results of the project through this first six months. Re-evaluation of existing workflows in connection with the implementation of the new collection management software has allowed staff to streamline routine activities and modify or eliminate procedures that were tied to an older paper-based collection management strategy. Most importantly, the project has greatly improved control and description of our manuscript holdings, has greatly improved Archives' staff awareness of the contents of these collections, and has already produced MARC records in WorldCat and Michigan Tech's library Voyager OPAC which are being discovered by researchers.