

NHPRC Award No: RB-50059-09

“Coming to the Surface: Revealing Hidden Collections in Michigan’s Copper Country”
Michigan Technological University
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Interim Narrative Report for January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2010

July 27, 2010

Objectives

This project plan includes collection-level MARC cataloging of 900 manuscript collections in the Michigan Tech Archives. Project funds support the salary of Elizabeth Russell, a two-year full-time project cataloging archivist, Crystal Laudeman, a six-month graduate student intern, and the purchase of Proficio, a specialized collection management software program created for archives and museums. Descriptions of each of the Archives’ 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. The project also includes 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, the project schedule included completion of the box-level collection survey and ongoing cataloging activity.

Summary of project activities, January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2010

This project continues on schedule.

The graduate student intern completed the shelf survey; a total of 1,052 collections were assessed at the container level. 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. Analysis of raw data will result in recommendations for further preservation activities. Information derived from the survey will be incorporated into the Archives’ existing preservation program. The survey also helped to identify unaccessioned material and separated portions of several larger collections.

The Archives’ received additional funding from the Michigan Tech Library director to continue the employment of the graduate student intern for three months beyond NHPRC funding. This allowed for timely work beyond the scope of the NHPRC grant including arrangement and description of several smaller collections and physical consolidation of a larger multi-part collection. The selections for this additional work were based directly upon priorities determined during the funded project work.

In support of several project goals, the assistant archivist established a wiki to document activity by the project team. The project cataloging archivist began using the wiki to record policy decisions on authority control, descriptive workflows, and other cataloging issues which will form the manuscript cataloging plan.

The project cataloging archivist continued to input data to the collection management system. This work drew upon data gathered by the graduate student survey, donor case files, an extant accessions database, existing indexes and finding aids, and interaction with Archives' staff about specific collections. As of June 30, 380 collection-level records had been created in Proficio. Work included creation of 2,050 authority records and 925 accession 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. 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 main form of promotion during this portion of the project has involved updates to the Michigan Tech Archives blog:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/category/about-the-archives/grants-received/>

Seven recent entries featured work done through the project, and web-based collection registers of completed records are updated periodically.

A member of the project team highlighted this NHPRC-funded project during a conference presentation. Assistant archivist Julie Blair delivered a paper to a professional audience of 60 to 70 individuals at the May 2010 Midwest Archives Conference in Chicago. The presentation discussed the project within the context of the repository's grant-writing activity, preservation work, and successful efforts to make information on collections more widely available through the public web.

Accomplishments and Impact

All goals for the second six months of this project have been met or exceeded. As reported in the summary above, the box-level shelf survey was completed (including creation of survey forms, workflow, and other documentation), the cataloging processes and workflows have been tweaked and updated, collection-level descriptions were generated in the new software, and MARC continue to be exported to WorldCat and Library's Voyager OPAC.

Quantitative figures as of June 30, 2010, include:

1,052 collections surveyed
380 collection-level records in Proficio
925 accession records
2,050 authority records
39 MARC records uploaded

The project continues to have significant impact on the institution's archival program. The shelf survey and cataloging workflows continue to bring material more clearly to the attention of Archives' staff – and also to the attention of researchers. During the period reported, the project cataloging archivist's workstation was moved to an area adjacent to the department's main public service point. This has resulted in a rewarding two-way path: awareness of research queries has helped to inform cataloging activity, while the growing knowledge base of project staff is having direct impact on the quality of reference service provided to researchers.

For instance, a group of patrons recently visited the Archives in the company of the University Provost. During the course of a tour of the facility, some members of the group expressed an interest in locating information on a local ancestor. Although an initial search retrieved little information about the specific individual, descriptive work completed by the NHPRC-funded project located a personal scrapbook from a classmate of the individual which yielded detailed information about the ancestor. Not only were the patrons able to discover photographs and manuscripts about their relative, but a top-level administrator of the University received first-hand awareness of the success and value of the cataloging project.

This is not an isolated incident. There have been frequent instances of similar discoveries resulting from the project's descriptive work, and there is a noticeable increase in requests for newly described collections from registers posted to the internet and from MARC records entered into the library's Voyager catalog and in OCLC's WorldCat. The project has greatly improved our ability to connect users with relevant material from our collections.

Other Comments

The project team continues to encounter problems with the Proficio collection management software. In particular, coding of MARC indicators, uniform titles and authorities have proven to be ongoing issues. Re:discovery representatives have been responsive to inquiries, but discussions of MARC standards indicate that the software vendor may lack descriptive cataloging experience within their technical team. This has resulted in additional work for project staff and delays in uploading MARC records to WorldCat and WebVoyage. Until MARC records can be created and batch loaded in a reliable manner, extensive time is required to upload and edit each record.

Beyond the funded project (and its specific goal for collection-level MARC records), project staff have begun to assess other aspects of the software for future collection management activity tasks. Initial review indicates that, although Proficio presents many strengths as a collection management tool, there may be deficiencies in MARC and EAD output which could preclude its long-term viability for the Michigan Tech Archives.

Finally, the success of this project to date has encouraged Archives' staff to look toward additional work with the collections. Completion of this NHPRC-funded collection-level descriptive work provides a foundation from which staff can add detailed folder-level descriptions of the manuscript collections. Archives staff recently submitted a funding proposal for a project to create EAD-compliant finding aids for 92 of its premier collections, and staff plan to complete additional proposals for other arrangement and description work. Staff is also considering potential funding sources for conservation work identified through the container-level collection survey. Although it is clearly desirable to fund the professional cataloging archivist beyond the end date of current NHPRC funding, these additional projects will help to conserve the collections and also improve, extend, and share information about the collections to researchers.