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, 2010 – December 31, 2010
January 31, 2011

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, 2010, to December 31, 2010, the project schedule included ongoing cataloging activity.

Summary of project activities, July 1, 2010 – December 31, 2010

This project is proceeding at a productive pace, but it is becoming evident that the three-month delay in the initial hire of the project cataloging archivist will challenge the project team to meet all of the deliverables in the project before the original June 30, 2011 end date. This is not a reflection on the abilities of project staff, but is more a function of the actual time necessary to complete the work. As a result, the applicant will likely seek a no-cost extension to the work sometime in March 2011.

The project team continues to utilize an internal wiki to document activity. The project cataloging archivist and assistant archivist are 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 team also uses the wiki for establishing agendas for meetings, managing other documents, and communicating about project-related issues.

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 December 31, 512 collection-level records had been created in Proficio. Work included creation of 2,326 authority records and 1384 accession records.

The project cataloging archivist and other project team members continue to maintain regular contact with the MTU catalog librarian to clarify process and parameters necessary to output data to MARC format. to WorldCat and also into the library's Voyager OPAC. As of December 31, there were 78 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/
Web-based collection registers of completed records are updated periodically.

On November 18, 2010, the project team provided an update on the project to librarians and staff of the Michigan Tech Van Pelt and Opie Library. 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. An outline of this seminar and .pdf versions of the PowerPoint slides is posted to the Michigan Tech Archives blog at http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-cataloging-project/presentations/

Hoping to further highlight the project and share lessons learned, assistant archivist Julie Blair and project cataloging archivist Beth Russell, developed a session proposal entitled "Kicking and Screaming Into the 21st Century: Transforming Legacy Data" which was submitted to several professional associations for consideration. The proposal was accepted by the Society of Indiana Archivists and will be part of their annual meeting on Saturday, April 2, 2011 in Indianapolis. The abstract for this session is posted to the Michigan Tech Archives blog at http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-cataloging-project/presentations/ Although none of the costs associated with this workshop would be paid through this NHPRC grant, this activity will draw attention to the project and to the important support received from the Commission in our institution's continued improvement.

Accomplishments and Impact

Goals for the third six months of this project have been met. Cataloging processes and workflows have been tweaked and updated, collection-level descriptions were generated in the new software, and MARC records continue to be exported to WorldCat and Library's Voyager OPAC. As reported in the summary above, the program team does feel that the delayed hire of the project cataloging archivist has had the effect of delaying the likely end date for the work. It will be our intention to seek an extension for this project.

Quantitative figures as of December 31, 2010, include:

1,052 collections surveyed
512 collection-level records in Proficio
1,384 accession records
2,326 authority records
78 initial MARC records in WorldCat and Library's Voyager OPAC

Other Comments

Project personnel have continued to encounter problems with the Proficio archival collection management software. Most times that the vendor has issued an update to the software, past problems with various modules reemerge, resulting in at least a week of lost time as the vendor,

the project cataloging archivist, and Michigan Tech IT staff work to resolve (and re-solve) the problems. MARC output still has some problems. The ability to add subordinate units to authority records only partially functions, most times the subordinate units cannot be entered at the initial creation of the authority, the record needs to be edited in the MARC record. Additionally, batch MARC records cannot be created reliably, resulting in the need to upload and edit each record individually. The vendor has been generally responsive to these problems, but it has caused frustration to the project staff and delays in completing tasks.

As a result of these issues, our institution has committed to a change in collection management software from Proficio to Archivist's Toolkit following the completion of this funded project. Although Proficio presents many strengths as an archival collection management tool, the project team has identified enough deficiencies in MARC and EAD output to preclude its long-term viability for the Michigan Tech Archives.

As indicated in our last narrative report, 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 second funding proposal for a project to create EAD-compliant finding aids for more than 90 of its premier collections, and staff plan to complete additional proposals for other arrangement and description work. Staff have also submitted a funding request related to desired facilities improvements – improvements which would help to address conservation challenges identified through the container-level collection survey in this project. Although it continues to be a priority 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.

This project has greatly informed our desire and need to move into the production of EAD-compliant finding aids. Although beyond the scope of the work funded by NHPRC, Archives staff have made tentative plans to host an Encoded Archival Description workshop sponsored by the Society of American Archivists. Although plans have not been finalized, the tentative dates are in late June 2011. Again, none of the costs associated with this workshop would be paid through this NHPRC grant.