

NHPRC Award No: NAR11-RP-50064-11

“Extracting Buried Treasure: Enhancing Access to Manuscripts About
Michigan’s Copper Country”
Michigan Technological University
Erik Nordberg, Project Director

Interim Narrative Report for January 1, 2012 – June 30, 2012

July 31, 2012

Objectives

This project is designed to arrange, preserve, and describe to current archival standards 92 manuscript collections comprising 1,329 cubic feet. Project funds support two new professional archivists to complete this work, as well as a small budget for archival storage supplies. Collections will be described to the folder level through descriptive finding aids which comply with the encoded archival description standard (EAD). Finding aids will be published on the Archives’ web site and other web-based destinations for archival finding aids such as OCLC’s ArchiveGrid. In addition, MARC records created through a previously-funded NHPRC project will be updated in Michigan Tech’s Van Pelt and Opie Library catalog and to WorldCat, a national bibliographic utility, to include additional descriptive information and links to the web-accessible finding aids. Cost-share for the project includes the time of Erik Nordberg, university archivist and project director, Elizabeth Russell, archivist, and also Chad Arney, head of technology innovation and strategy for the Michigan Tech Library.

During this reporting period, January 1, 2012, to June 30, 2012, the project schedule included plans to advertise and hire two positions, purchase needed archival supplies, outline and begin the processing work, and identify processes for posting EAD finding aids to the open web.

Summary of project activities, January 1, 2012 – June 30, 2012

This project is proceeding on schedule.

Upon receiving notification of funding, the project director and archivist worked with University staff to finalize the NHPRC grant agreement, finalize position descriptions and advertise for applicants. Rachael Bussert was selected for the position of senior project archivist and Daniel Michelson was selected for the position of processing archivist. Bussert holds an M.A. in History, with a concentration in public history and graduate archival training, from Wright State University and had been employed on an NHPRC-funded project at Northern Michigan University. Michelson holds an M.A. in Archives and Public History from New York University and had worked as a graduate assistant at the Tamiment Library in the Wagner Labor Archives at NYU. Both Bussert and Michelson began work on March 12, 2012.

A project team, consisting of the two project staff and two Archives’ staff have convened regular meetings and other special topic discussions associated with the project. Much of the discussion has concerned aspects of the processing work, but other meetings have been devoted to the use of Archivists’ Toolkit, tweaking internal descriptive rules, and issues of reappraisal and, in some cases, disposal of material.

A second team including the project team described above and the head of library technology has met regularly to discuss potential processes to serve the EAD files to the open web. This

“EAD to Web” group undertook an informal survey of colleagues and institutions in the region and discovered that there were many approaches, but few standards, for the way that XML files could be presented to internet users. Although some simple tools are easily available, complications concerning the ability to search across a collection of EAD files were made apparent to this group. During this investigation, Archives’ staff were introduced to individuals in the University of Michigan’s Digital Library Production Service who have been assisting other archival repositories in the state to serve EAD files to the open web. At the time of this report, discussion is underway about a possible collaborative venture whereby the University of Michigan would assist in providing access to EAD files created during this NHPRC-funded project.

To track processing activities, Bussert adopted a 2010 version of the MD Processing Tool for Microsoft Access created by Collection Services Archivist, Emily R. Novak Gustainis at the Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School. The MD tool allows us to track processing activities at the collection and series level. The tool also allows for tracking at the box level, however, it was the consensus of the project team that box level tracking was not necessary for this project. Additional activities that are performed regularly by the project archivists such as mold remediation have been added to MD’s activities table. Data collection is being done on a monthly basis through MD’s built in queries.

By June 30, 2012, work has been completed work on eighteen small and medium collections, including processing and descriptive work in Archivists’ Toolkit. MARC records for these collections have been updated on OCLC’s WorldCat and on the library catalog according the archives’ revised cataloging conventions and they are ready for EAD export.

The senior project archivist began the project with a general review of the 92 collection in the project excluding the Copper Range Company Records. The purpose of the general review was to prioritize the processing of the collections based on preservation needs and potential access issues. Several collections were identified as having preservation issues that needed to be addressed immediately. Two other collections, the Swande Godell Collection and the Fight for Justice Tribal Takeover Collection were identified as having potential access restrictions. Two collections, the Kukkonen Studio Photographic Collection and the Earl Gagnon Photograph Collection were found to have deteriorating nitrate and safety film. Processing for these two collections by the senior project archivist began in April and continued into May. Although box level inventories had been created before this project it was necessary to conduct an item level nitrate and safety film inventory in each collection before actual processing could begin. The nitrate and safety film in both collections were then reviewed for digital reformatting. It was found that many of the nitrate and safety negatives in the Earl Gagnon Photograph Collection had already been digitized and are accessible on the department’s Keweenaw Digital Archives site. The negatives in the Kukkonen Studio Photograph Collection remain under review for digitization, but have been separated from the rest of the collection.

Outside of the project scope, Archives’ staff completed a project to co-house a large number of smaller, standalone collections in a series of records center boxes, a confederation referred to internally as the “Small Collections.” Due to that work, a number of small collections included in the NHPRC-funded work were made a priority for early processing. The collections processed in this group were less than half a manuscript box in size and needed little arrangement. The majority of the work done in these collections was descriptive. Six collections from the project were added to the “Small Collections” boxes in May and June. Eight more small collections (one cubic foot and under) were also processed during this time in anticipation that they could potentially be added to a “Small Collections” box at some later date.

Another collection identified with major preservation issues was the Oliver A. Farwell Papers. This collection was a main concern due to the large amount of document and photograph cleaning that needed to be performed after initial processing began in June. Photograph cleaning was completed by the senior project archivist, but the document cleaning will be assigned to a student assistant outside of the NHPRC-funded work. The Farwell material, fortunately, still maintained some of its original order. Oliver Farwell kept a large portion of his personal and professional correspondence in alphabetical files. The remainder of the correspondence was arranged chronologically. The processing of the Keweenaw Cooperative Inc., Collection is also nearly complete. Like the Farwell Papers much of the original order of this collection was intact. It was discovered that photographs from one of the accessions had been separated into another location. These photographs have been returned to the collection. Some additional documents created by the Co-op, but filed in other places in the Archives' vertical file collection, were also added to the collection.

In summary, as of June 30, 2012:

- 18 collections completed, EAD ready for export, and updated MARC records.
- 1 collection arranged, but description not complete.

Attention has been paid during the project to reappraisal, removal of duplicates, and removal of some items due to preservation hazards. As a result, for the work completed on these 18 collections, the total volume was reduced from 56.26 c.f. to 39.03 c.f. during processing.

In addition, significant work has been completed on the one noticeably larger collection, the Copper Range Company Records. The processing archivist was charged with focusing his attention on this challenging collection. After initial study of the history of the Copper Range Company and a brief sampling of the records, the primary work on the collection has been a comprehensive survey and inventory. Previous to this project, Archives' staff and students had compiled a simple inventory (with mixed folder and box level information) which provided a basic level of access. The project archivist worked systematically through the boxed material and bound volumes, correcting and expanding the earlier inventory, undertaking some minor processing activities, and noting areas where additional work would be needed (such as reprocessing, refolding, and inventorying). During the period of this report, approximately 417 boxes (mostly record cartons) and 457 bound volumes were reviewed in this manner.

Promotion

The project has been promoted in a number of ways during this first 6-month period. Attention was drawn to the project through the advertising for the two full-time professional archivist positions. Position descriptions were posted November 18, 2011 and promoted heavily during November and December. This included e-mail distribution lists for the Michigan Archival Association and the Society of American Archivists, as well the Michigan Tech jobs site, the Michigan Tech electronic newsletter, and the Michigan Chronicle.

A press release was issued on May 8, 2012 announcing the start of the project and hiring of the project staff. The release was carried in the following places:

Tech Today (electronic newsletter to Michigan Tech community), June 12, 2012

<http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/ttoday/previous.php?issue=20120612&id=15394&nav=1#2>

The Daily Mining Gazette (Houghton, Michigan), June 16, 2012

Michigan Archival Association

e-mail discussion listserv 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 Archives blog
<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/category/about-the-archives/grants-received/>

Additional updates and informal "project discoveries" have been posted to the Michigan Tech Archives blog: <http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-detailed-grant-processing-project-2012-2013/>

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, needed archival supplies were purchased, work was begun on the processing work, and a process has been identified for posting EAD finding aids to the open web.

The project has continued to expand staff awareness for the manuscript holdings of the department. Although the Michigan Tech Archives has always had reliable accession and donor files – and although previous NHPRC funding has created collection-level descriptions for all of the department's holdings – the additional detailed processing and description undertaken through this project has deepened staff knowledge of these materials.

In addition, the two project archivists have quickly adapted to the Michigan Tech Archives setting and have provided an additional echelon of knowledge, both in their archival training and in their ability to inform public research into our collections. Although these positions are not actively involved in the public service activities of the department, they are regularly consulted for assistance with the collections handled through this funded work.

Other Comments

The project has helped to identify and address significant preservation hazards represented by these collections. As indicated above, dangerous examples of nitrate film have now been segregated from the main collection while decisions are made concerning their duplication and proper disposal. Equally significant have been instances of mold contamination inherent with historical industrial records, such as those in the Copper Range Company Records collection. Mold had been observed and documented in previous NHPRC and NEH funded projects, but the close work undertaken in the current project will allow for detailed identification of the extent of the problem, as well as consideration of workflows and processes to address some components. This may involve a larger expenditure on supplies than originally expected, but the Michigan Tech Archives is committed to dealing with these significant preservation problems.

On a similar note, much of the material contained within these 92 collections had seen only minimal appraisal at its original time of acquisition. The project team has spent considerable time discussing the selection and retention of specific materials in each collection. In the case of the Copper Range Company Records, this reappraisal has considered past and potential research uses, preservation and use issues, as well as issues pertaining to voluminous routine business and financial data. These discussions have extended into a larger group of regional archives and museum organizations, with useful debate about the relative research and interpretive "value" of specific items to different types of institutions.