

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 July 1, 2012 – December 31, 2012

January 31, 2013

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 (senior project archivist Rachael Bussert and processing archivist Daniel Michelson), 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, July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012, the project schedule included the purchase of needed archival supplies, ongoing processing work, and development of processes for posting EAD finding aids to the open web.

Summary of project activities, July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012

This project proceeded on schedule from July 1 through the October 26, 2012.

During that period, the project team convened regular meetings and other special topic discussions associated with the project. These meetings 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 (Chad Arney) met regularly and have been working closely with the University of Michigan’s Digital Library Production Service to develop a collaborative system to serve EAD files created during this project. At the time of this report, an initial beta installation is under review by project staff. It is expected that publicly accessible data will come online in the next six-month cycle.

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.

Between July 1 and October 26, 2012, 12 additional small and medium collections were processed. The collections ranged in size and difficulty. The collections were a total of 115.03 cubic feet before processing and decreased in size to 91.25 cubic feet. Eleven of the twelve processed collections have updated MARC records and their EAD records are ready for export. During this time students were trained and assigned various preservation tasks such as document cleaning and removal of rusty fasteners to support to the processing efforts. Preservation work of this nature on the small and medium collections remains minimal and is still primarily being completed by the senior project archivist. Major work this period has involved the weeding of duplicate documents and photographs from the collections, especially in the Daily Mining Gazette Photograph Collection where a large amount of duplicate and syndicated photographs were removed from the collection.

The processing archivist continued working with the Copper Range Company Records. An arrangement scheme was drafted, arranging the large collection into ten provisional series.

95% of one series, the Copper Range Railroad Company Records (roughly 110 cubic feet of material, plus 74 bound volumes), was arranged and described at the folder/volume level.

As noted in our previous report, an assessment was made of moldy documents within the Copper Range Company Records. Approximately 80 cubic feet of boxed material and 453 bound volumes were surveyed and prioritized for treatment or deaccessioning. Although outside the scope of the NHPRC-funded work, the Michigan Tech Archives has received no-cost, collaborative assistance from the National Park Service in treating some of this material. Records were physically delivered to the Calumet, Michigan, facilities of Keweenaw National Historical Park for treatment. The materials were cycled through the agency's Wei T'o freeze drying machine, a process that kills a variety of pests, including mold. Upon return to the Archives, additional work is undertaken to physically remove the dead mold spores from the material before they reach their final shelving destination.

On Friday, October 26, 2012, the Michigan Tech Archives suffered a small fire and sprinkler release. The disaster affected an area of approximately 200 square feet, with the majority of the damage caused by the water release.

On December 12, 2012, NHPRC approved a request that this project be placed "on hold" during disaster recovery efforts. The two NHPRC-funded staff employed by this grant project were willing to come off grant funding to assist with the recovery efforts. Michigan Tech officially moved all salary and fringes to a completely different internal institutional index account, backdating these transfers to Monday, October 29, 2012, the first business day after the fire. None of their disaster recovery work will be charged to the NHPRC project account.

As of the date of this report, structural repairs have been completed on the affected area and materials retained on site have been treated, re-housed, and returned to the shelf. However, approximately 789 boxes of manuscript material were sent to an off-site national disaster recovery firm for treatment utilizing thermal freeze drying, desiccant drying and gamma irradiation treatments. The first of three shipments is expected at the time of this report.

Work on the NHPRC-funded work will resume on Monday, February 4. Our disaster recovery efforts will continue for at least two more months - mainly as we await the treatment and return of some affected materials. But from February 4 forward, neither of the NHPRC-funded positions will have any direct effort in that work.

The disaster affected 25 of the 92 collections listed in the original project scope of work. Portions of 15 of these collections were included in the materials shipped for off-site treatment, comprising approximately 226.67 cubic feet. 25 collections also had components which were treated in-house by archives' staff, rehoused in new storage containers, and returned to the shelves. The majority of the damage to the collections was to the containers and enclosures. This work was completed with funding outside of NHPRC.

It does not appear that any losses occurred in the collections designated for our grant work, so the work elements outlined in our original plan of work are still appropriate. Having communicated with NHPRC program officer Alex Lorch, we agreed to delay the selection of a definite end date until later this summer. This will allow us to submit one modification for a realistic end date based upon the remaining work at that time. I understand that we have until 90 days before the original project end date to request an extension. Mr. Lorch has also indicated that we do not need to submit an updated plan of work or revised budget at this time.

Promotion

Elements of the project have been promoted during this second 6-month period. Updates and "project discoveries" have been posted to the Michigan Tech Archives blog, including:

"A Copper Range Railroad Poet" sharing the verse of a railroad employee found amongst routine work records in the Copper Range Collection:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/2012/07/18/a-copper-range-railroad-poet/>

"A Unique Home Storage Solution" describing the original housing of film negatives in the Harold Putnam Photograph Collection:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/2012/07/24/a-unique-home-storage-solution/>

"Vandals" describing the 1976 break-in and destruction of mining company records at the Copper Range Company:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/2012/09/06/vandals/>

Attention was also made to the collaborative work undertaken with the National Park Service to treat moldy records. Although this work is not part of the project funded by NHPRC, this promotion included mention of the Commission and its support of our project. See "National Park Helps with Preservation" here:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/2012/10/10/national-park-helps-with-preservation/>

Throughout these postings, we have been attentive to including the NHPRC graphical logo and links to the Commission's web site.

Accomplishments and Impact

Up until October 26, 2012, goals for the project had been met or exceeded. Collections are being processed, rehoused, and described. Updated information about the collections is available to researchers.

The project continues to expand staff awareness for the manuscript holdings of the department. Based upon their close knowledge of collections, grant-funded personnel are able to provide expert assistance to regular staff while responding to research requests.

As reported previously, nitrate film photographic negatives were discovered in the Kukkonen Studio Photograph Collection during processing earlier in the grant-funded work. Since our last report, these materials have been assessed and removed from the Michigan Tech Archives. Under a collaborative agreement with the National Park Service, the nitrate negatives are currently being held in freeze storage at Keweenaw National Historical Park in Calumet, Michigan. The two agencies have begun discussion of possible projects to reformat these images and potential funding sources for such work. Although outside the scope and budget of the work funded by the NHPRC grant, the handling of this nitrate material is another indication of the broad impact of this project on larger collaborations and goals of the Michigan Tech Archives, its heritage partners in the region, and the ongoing work to preserve and make accessible materials of significant historical value.

Other Comments

Michigan Technological University is appreciative of the Commission's support and understanding during our disaster response. The process was positively impacted by the participation of the two individuals who were temporarily removed from grant funding. These professionals were already familiar with our holdings and were able to step in to provide immediate expert assistance.