

NHPRC Award No: NAR11-RP-50064-11

“Extracting Buried Treasure: Enhancing Access to Manuscripts About
Michigan’s Copper Country”

Michigan Technological University

Julia Blair, Project Director

Interim Narrative Report for January 1, 2013 – June 30, 2013

July 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 Julia Blair, acting 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, 2013 to June 30, 2013, 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, January 1, 2013 – June 30, 2013

This project resumed its normal schedule on February 4, 2013, after temporarily being placed on hold due to a small fire and sprinkler release that occurred in the library building on October 26, 2012. This three-month hold period is expected to impact the original end date of December 31, 2013. We intend to seek a no-cost extension during the next six-month reporting period to change the end date of the project.

During this reporting period, project director Erik Nordberg terminated employment with Michigan Tech and was replaced by acting university archivist Julia Blair on April 26, 2013. The project team continued to convene regular meetings and other special topic discussions associated with the project. These meetings concerned aspects of the processing work; other meetings have been devoted to the use of Archivists’ Toolkit, amending internal descriptive rules, issues of reappraisal and, in some cases, disposal of material.

The Michigan Tech Archives is collaborating with the Digital Library Production Service (DLPS) of the University of Michigan’s Library to create and display Encoded Archival Description (EAD) finding aids. While the project is in its early stages, it is envisioned that the finding aids will be

encoded by Michigan Tech Archives staff using Archivists' Toolkit and exported as an Extensible Markup Language (XML) document. Those documents will be sent to the DLPS staff where they will convert the XML documents into HTML documents for delivery to the user.

At this point, Michigan Tech and the DLPS are working to develop a suitable style sheet for display. The finding aids are delivered to the user as HTML documents, converted on-the-fly from the XML, and thus can be read by standard web browsers. The underlying XML encoding and the HTML display allow the finding aids to be searched and delivered in structured parts, permitting the user to "unfold" and view as much of the finding aid as needed. It also permits several views of the finding aid; a "keyword in context" view, a standard view and a full text view, designed to give the user options in viewing and navigating the finding aids.

Since the project resumed in February 2013, fifteen small and medium collections of approximately 64.95 cubic feet were processed by the senior project archivist and processing archivist. The collections were reduced to approximately 59.84 cubic feet. Thirteen of the processed collections have updated MARC records and their EAD files are ready for export.

The bulk of processing during this period was spent on MS-587, the Daily Mining Gazette Records Collection (45 cubic feet). MS-587 consisted of correspondence, business records, and scrapbooks from the newspaper as well as personal papers from its long time owners, the Rice family. The majority of the records was not in their original order and required a more difficult level of processing and description.

In addition to the collections that have been completed the senior project archivist began processing MS-220, the Ben R. Chynoweth Collection, during the months of May and June 2013. Initial Collection review of MS-220, which consists of 17.7 cubic feet of textual documents, photographic material, and scrapbooks, began before the October 2012 fire that occurred in the Archive's stacks. The senior project archivist was able to resume processing of the collection after the last shipment of boxes had been returned from Belfor in late May.

The processing archivist made substantial progress in processing MS-80, the Copper Range Company Records. This included arranging and describing at the folder/volume level seventeen series and subseries (about 66 cubic feet). As a result, most of the collection's records of high value to genealogists are now readily accessible to patrons for the first time. In addition, collaboration with the Keweenaw National Historical Park on the treatment of moldy records resumed.

With the resumption of the project on February 4, 2013, salary and fringes for the two NHPRC-funded staff were returned the grant budget. Cost-share for the project director, archivist, and head of technology resumed as well.

As disaster recovery work winds down, it has been confirmed that no losses occurred in the collections designated for our grant work. The work elements, as outlined in the original plan of work, are still appropriate. Prior to his departure, former project director Erik Nordberg and NHPRC program officer Alex Lorch agreed to delay the selection of a definite end date until later this summer, enabling us to submit one modification for a realistic end date based upon the remaining work at that time. The understanding is that the Michigan Tech Archives has 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 that time.

Promotion

Due to the project having been placed on hold for a portion of this reporting period, the exigencies of disaster recovery efforts, and the resignation of Erik Nordberg, promotion for this 6-month period is minimal.

Details of the grant-funded project and updates on progress toward the achievement of its goals can be found at:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/nhprc-detailed-grant-processing-project-2012-2013/>

The NHPRC project was featured in a post to the Michigan Tech Archives blog on activities taken up by interim university archivist Julia Blair:

<http://blogs.mtu.edu/archives/2013/06/05/coming-home/>

Updates on the disaster recovery effort and its impact on the NHPRC grant project have appeared in the University's daily electronic newsletter, "Tech Today."

<http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/ttoday/index.php>

Accomplishments and Impact

With the resumption of the project on February 4, 2013, progress toward project goals continues. Collections are being processed, rehoused, and described. Updated information about the collections is available to researchers.

The designation of Julia Blair as project director enabled a smooth transition following the departure of Erik Nordberg. Prior to returning to the Archives as interim university archivist, Blair was closely involved with the development of the NHPRC grant proposal to NHPRC, named as a co-project director on the original application. As such, the project has been not been negatively impacted by the change in project director that occurred in April 2013.

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. In one example, detailed processing and cataloguing on MS-220, the Ben R. Chynoweth Collection enabled Chynoweth family members to access and examine unexpected material during their research into the family's history on Isle Royale.

Other Comments

Michigan Technological University is extremely appreciative of the Commission's support and understanding during the disaster recovery efforts and the changes in grant personnel.