

NHPRC Award No: NAR11-RP-50064-11

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

Michigan Technological University

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Interim Narrative Report for July 1, 2013 - December 31, 2013

January 31, 2014

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, interim 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, 2013 to December 31, 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, July 1, 2013 – December 31, 2013

During this reporting period, the project was headed up by interim university archivist Julia Blair. 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 collaboration with the Digital Library Production Service (DLPS) of the University of Michigan’s Library to display Encoded Archival Description (EAD) finding aids is being reviewed. While the intent is still to share EAD finding aids through DLPS, University of Michigan Library staff have not felt the same level of urgency about developing style sheets and an upload process for use by the Michigan Tech Archives. In order to meet

the objectives of the grant, Archives staff are working with Library and IT staff to deliver EAD finding aids through the Library's newly revamped website.

Finding aids are currently being encoded by Michigan Tech Archives staff using Archivists' Toolkit and converted from Extensible Markup Language (XML) to PDF with the software's built-in stylesheet and posted on the Archives website. If we continue to collaborate with DLPS, these documents will be replaced by the final finding aid portal.

During the period from July 1, 2013 through December 31, 2013 eleven collections were processed by the Senior Project Archivist with two collections, MS-057 Historical Newspapers Collection and MS-058 Clarence Monette Collection, needing additional work to address more complex issues in 2014. Nine collections have updated MARC records with EAD records ready to export. Additional material that had been treated during the fire recovery was added to MS-587 during this period and updates were made to the EAD and MARC records.

Small and medium size collections that were fully processed during this period include MS-009 Fortnightly Club Collection, MS-056 Hancock Home Study Club Records, MS-010 Brockway Diary Collection, MS-016 Daniel Brockway Family Collection, MS-019 Brockway Photograph Collection, and MS-079 WHDF Radio Station Records.

The collection review of MS-057 Historical Newspaper Collection revealed many cataloging inconsistencies. The majority of the Archives' newspaper holdings have MARC records in the Library's Voyager catalog. The Archives holds bound and unbound print versions of several newspapers that have not been recorded in the catalog. It has also been found that many of the newspaper MARC records are incorrect or are in need of an update. It was decided that the newspapers held in the Historic Newspapers Collection should be cataloged as serials, not as part of an artificial collection. The library's Resource Access and Discovery Services department will address the cataloging issues in 2014.

Large Collections processed during this period include MS-220 Ben R. Chynoweth Collection, MS-455 Kenneth L. Dorman Collection, MS-789 The Stenson Collection of Walter S. Pricket Papers, MTU-021 Grover C. Dillman Papers, and MS-058 Clarence Monette Collection.

Special issues were addressed during the processing of some of the large collections. MS-220 Ben R. Chynoweth Collection was completed after being put on hold due to the fact that some of the records were treated during disaster recovery efforts. Although a sizable part of the collection was affected by the fire water damage was minimal. MS-058 Clarence Monette Collection was processed this period with the exception of a new accession consisting of a Commodore 64 personal computer and several boxes of diskettes. Archives staff has started a conversation with members of the Michigan Tech IT department about the preservation of the electronic media. A decision regarding the best way to preserve the electronic media has not yet been made.

MS-789 Walter S. Prickett Collection was placed in archival containers and its inventory was converted from print to XML. The original print finding aid was scanned with OCR and saved as a text file. The text from the text file was then copied and pasted into a CSV file which was edited with Open Refine, converted to an XML file using Steady, and imported into Archivists' Toolkit. The name of the collection was changed to The Stenson Collection of Walter S. Prickett Papers as per the wishes of the donor.

MS-455 Kenneth L. Dorman Papers was completely unprocessed before the project began. The entire collection needed to be placed in archival folders and containers. The collection also required more time spent on the arrangement as the majority of it had no clear original order.

The processing archivist finished processing almost all the remaining (roughly) 350 cubic feet of MS-80, the Copper Range Company Records and wrote most of the lengthy finding aid. MS-869, the Victoria Copper Mining Company Records (approximately 80 cubic feet) was also largely completed and reduced to about 55 cubic feet. In addition, the ongoing mold project reached its final stages. It was expanded to include non-Copper Range Company material and the last batch is undergoing treatment at the Keweenaw National Historical Park.

As an unfortunate result of the October 2012 fire and subsequent sprinkler release, the project was put on hold for a period from October 26, 2012 to February 4, 2013. Subsequently, a request for a no-cost extension was submitted on September 27, 2013 by project director Julia Blair and approved by Kathleen Williams, director of NHPRC on November 20, 2013. The delay in approval was due to the shutdown of the federal government and temporary closure of government offices, including NHPRC. The extension, until July 31, 2014, enables the retention of senior project archivist Rachael Bussert and processing archivist Daniel Michelson.

Promotion

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 has been featured in several posts to the Michigan Tech Archives blog.

Senior project archivist Rachael Bussert and processing archivist Daniel Michelson will be presenting at the Midwest Archives Conference's 2014 Annual Meeting held on April 24-26, with archivists from the South Dakota State Historical Society and the Kansas Historical Society in a session entitled, "The Improvisations of Processing: Confronting the Unforeseen in Large Processing Projects." The session will feature challenges and successes encountered during the course of the Michigan Tech Archives' NHPRC Detailed Processing Project. The abstract follows:

"Oftentimes archivists must confront unexpected challenges when working on large processing projects. Panelists from the Michigan Tech Archives, the South Dakota State Historical Society, and the Kansas Historical Society will discuss unforeseen preservation and access issues that they have encountered during large processing projects, including moldy records; nitrate film; obsolete electronic records and software; privacy issues in corporate, medical, government, and student records; and even a fire in the stacks. The intended purpose of this session is to share with the professional community some of the strategies and policy decisions enacted by the participants to address challenges faced while processing a wide variety of records. In doing so, session presenters will highlight how these specific cases relate to broader issues such as the potential conflict between implementing minimal processing techniques in order to improve access to poorly described or inaccessible collections and the need to consistently meet ethical and legal obligations concerning records containing sensitive or confidential information that could be overlooked during processing. In part by suggesting potential approaches, such as collaborating with other institutions, drafting new policy statements, and exploring possible avenues of research, this session will be valuable to archivists (especially those new to the profession) and project managers who are or will be involved in large processing projects."

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