Rescuing Texas History: Institutional Repository Development at The University of North Texas

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Rescuing Texas History: Institutional Repository Development at The University of North Texas

Session Type
Event

Abstract
The University of North Texas Libraries’ Digital Libraries Department runs a robust institutional repository made of three parts: The Portal to Texas History, The UNT Digital Library, and The Gateway to Oklahoma History. We have for the last seven years run a mini-grant program to digitize materials from institutions all over Texas called Rescuing Texas History (RTH). This grant program asks partner institutions and private collection holding individuals to write and submit grant proposals for their special materials to be digitized and uploaded into The Portal to Texas History. In return, the partners increase access to their materials as well as archival digital copies of the items for their own use. This mutually beneficial arrangement has allowed for many at-risk, historical items to be accessed students, teachers, researchers, and life-long learners state-wide and nationally. Learning outcomes from this session include knowledge of logistics management of several digitization projects and how to work with partner institutions to create an open educational resources that is utilized in schools and by researchers all over Texas and beyond.

Location
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This event is available at Digital USD: https://digital.sandiego.edu/symposium/2015/2015/18
Rescuing Texas History: Institutional Repository Development at The University of North Texas

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Abstract

The University of North Texas Libraries manage a cultural heritage digital repository titled The Portal to Texas History. For seven years, they have administrated a mini-grant program to digitize materials from all over Texas called the Rescuing Texas History Mini-Grant Program. This program allows institutions and private collectors to submit grant proposals to have their collections digitized and uploaded into the digital repository. In return, these partners increase access to their materials and receive archival digital copies of their items for their own use. This mutually beneficial arrangement has allowed for many at-risk, historical items to be archived and preserved. This paper will summarize the program’s logistics of managing several digitization projects and the benefits granted to all involved parties.
Introduction

On October 23rd of 1933, The Department of Justice under J. Edgar Hoover issued an order for the arrest of a twenty-three-year-old man. He was described as being 5 feet 7 inches, barefoot, of medium build, dark brown and wavy hair dyed black, and hazel eyes. The warrant was drafted after charges were filed against the young man and his companion, a Mrs. Roy Harding, “for transporting a Ford Coupe… property of Dr. E.L. Damron of Effingham, Illinois, from Dallas, Texas to Pawhuska, Oklahoma, on or about September 16, 1932” (Dallas Municipal Archives, 1933). This young man went by several aliases: Elvin Williams, Eldin Williams, Jack Hale, and Roy Bailey. But most know him better when his name is twined with that of his partner in crime, a Mrs. Bonnie Parker. He is none other than Clyde Champion Barrow from the twosome, Bonnie and Clyde.

(Dallas Municipal Archives)
The above document came as part of a collection from the Dallas Municipal Archives 2009 Rescuing Texas History grant and is now preserved in The Portal to Texas History (The Portal to Texas History, 2015). Both Parker and Barrow being Dallas, Texas residents, have left a trail of their indiscretions much in the same way we all leave records in schools, government and municipal organizations. These documents are often housed in homes, libraries, museums or organizational archives undisturbed by interested eyes. And in some cases the ignorance of their value leads to their unintended disappearance or destruction.

It was with this foreboding in mind that The University of North Texas Digital Libraries Division began their digital repository: The Portal to Texas History. While UNT itself has much to contribute as far as historical significance, it was desired by the librarians and administrators to reach further than just UNT and the Denton community. Thus a few years after the repository was developed, the Rescuing Texas History Mini-Grant Program (RTH) was also started.

The aim of the program is to archive and increase access to the many endangered historical materials about or related to Texas. To save and shed light on the many forgotten treasures the state of Texas holds with great pride. Running such a program has stretched the UNT Digital Libraries Division since its inception. A lot has been learned both about the Lone Star State’s history as well as how to digitize and manage many projects at once. This paper will describe the results of that learning.

**RTH History and UNT Digital Libraries Division**

The Portal to Texas History was established in 2002 and began with the mission to provide students and lifelong learners a digital gateway to primary source materials held in Texas libraries, museums, archives, historical societies, and private collections. One way in which the Digital Libraries Division has worked towards achieving this mission is through RTH.

RTH was originally called The Rescuing Texas History through the Digitization of At-risk Photographs and Maps. And has, since its establishment, enabled the Portal to be populated with a unique variety of materials all for public access. The mini-grant program is open to institutions and individuals who own historic Texas-related materials. Grant winners, whom we call partners, enjoy the benefits of having their collections digitized, described, and hosted on The Portal to Texas History. They additionally receive back, along with their materials, digital copies of the scanned images for their own use.

The RTH program began in 2006 with nineteen applications and eleven funded projects. The original funding source, The Summerlee Foundation in Dallas, TX supplied the program with a $7,500 grant. The funds were spent on the wages of student imagers and metadata describers, hosting images, and mailing of materials.

The UNT Digital Libraries Division and External Relations Department are the main implementers of RTH. The Digital Libraries Division is made up of two parts: the Digital Projects Unit and the User Interfaces Unit. The Digital Projects Unit includes three sub-units the Digital Newspaper Unit, the Digital Curation Unit, and the Software Development Unit. As a division, Digital Libraries handles all the software engineering, web development, web publicity writing, department administration, user interface design, digitization, and uploading of items into our digital repositories. The actual digitization process takes place in the Digital Projects
Lab and the Digital Newspaper Unit. Partners who apply to RTH have the opportunity to digitize newspapers or other materials such as photographic prints, negatives, documents, and books. The External Relations Department assists in working with current and potential partners, gathering and returning materials, and spreading the word about the Portal and the RTH program.

**The Mini-Grant Process**

*Application, Pre-Arrival, and Inventory*

The Application process begins in late spring with a call for proposals. Grant winners are announced in the fall, and digitization starts in September. The application form asks for the proposing institution’s information, the name of the contact person, a description of the materials the organization wants digitized—and their cultural or historical significance—and an inventory of the materials. Applicants also agree upon applying that they will sign a partnership agreement, obtain copyright clearance for the materials sent, and follow the instructions on the Portal Partner webpages for preparing their materials for digitization.

Partners are asked to provide unique identification numbers for each of their objects, and to note any special instructions for scanning on a provided inventory and packing list. They are additionally asked to label each package sent with the institution’s name and number of boxes. These steps help avoid any confusion among project items and allows Digital Libraries staff the ability to easily locate each project in the labs.

Once the partner’s materials are received at UNT, staff begin with initial inventory of the items. In this phase, a staff member looks to make sure all the items that were supposed to arrive did and that there are no stowaways. If an item is missing or not listed on the inventory, a discrepancy form is filled out with information describing the item and its unique ID. This form is sent through our External Relations Department back to the partner so they can verify the absence or presence of new items or, in some cases, send what was missing to the lab.

Inventories are usually completed within a week of arrival and then the project is added to the lab’s projects workflow queue. The collection gets a project page in the lab’s internal wiki-site. This page also houses contact information for the partner, the important dates such as the arrival inventory date and discrepancies notes, a description of the project, and where to find the physical collection as well as its digital location on our shared network drive.

**Scanning**

The grant-awarded projects come in a variety of forms – there have been books, documents, photos, negatives, pamphlets, newspapers, technical reports and many other such items. The Digital Projects Lab has an assortment of equipment with which to do battle. We have large Epson 10000XL Scanners, Fujitsu fi-66770 duplex document scanners, Epson Perfection V700 negative scanners, and an oversized Zeutschel Omniscan planetary scanner (Digital Projects: Scanning, 2015). Access to a very large oversized i2S SupraScan Quartz A0 HD scanner is also available in the Digital Newspaper Unit should its services be needed. It is the lab standard to scan both sides of everything and generate uncompressed tiffs. Each file is given a
specific file name based on our own identification for the partner to whom the object belongs and the ID number sent on the inventory.

Following scanning, all images undergo two quality control steps: Pre QC and Final QC. In the Pre QC phase a student imager takes each object and compares it to the images generated. This student checks that everything is scanned, named, and sorted according to our standards (Digital Projects: Standards, 2015). If there are any errors the student can fix them or notify the original scanner. After Pre QC, the collection goes through Final QC where a staff member does a final, more detailed check on the images. He or she determines if the item is scanned in the manner that is most appropriate and double checks the contrast, size, resolution, cropping, and file names.

Metadata, Final Steps, and Results

The project is then given over to our metadata students who use a customized editing system and qualified Dublin Core metadata schema called UNTL that was developed by the Digital Libraries Division. The metadata style guide is available online (Digital Projects: Metadata, 2015). When the metadata student has completed describing each item in the project, it goes through the Metadata QC process. This consists of generating lists based on the XML tags used in the metadata. These lists are then scrutinized for errors in formatting, grammar, spacing, and other such issues. After a final look from the Metadata Manager the project is uploaded to our division head who conducts any required OCRing and uploads the project into The Portal to Texas History.

Following upload, the physical items are inventoried one more time to make sure that all items received are being returned. We additionally make copies of the images and provide a CD, flash-drive, or hard-drive depending on the size of the project. Our External Relations liaison then sends the items back to the partner.

Through RTH, the UNT Libraries have thus far partnered with 130 institutions and private collectors, and digitized over 37,000 objects and counting. For the 2014 program year, we accepted 40 projects total in both the Digital Newspaper Unit and Digital Projects Lab.

Benefits and Conclusion

In addition to having their materials digitized and receiving high quality digitals copies of their materials, partners get the opportunity of exposure in a heavily-used digital repository. They get to collectively draw the attention of historians, genealogists, teachers, and image searchers. Usage trafficking is available for each collection, which enables Portal partners to view statistics about their items and collections.

Many partners have gone on to apply for and receive larger funding for bigger projects. One example is Texas Southern University. They applied and were awarded RTH grants for 2013 and 2014. They also applied and won a Tocker Foundation Grant to digitize in 2014 the speeches and scrapbooks of esteemed 1960s Texas and US political figure Barbara Jordan (Texas Southern University, n.d.). Another example is Concordia University, RTH awardee for 2006 and 2013. They received a Texas State Library and Archives TexTreasures grant in 2014 to digitize founding documents from their archive (Concordia University, n.d.). Many partners
have also received the benefit of increased reprint and licensing requests for their images to be used in books and documentaries after providing access to them in the Portal.

The system mentioned in this paper was developed over years of trial and error. If there is one lesson that was learned and is still being learned it is the importance of organization: keeping up with documentation, having clear and visible labels for boxes, having inventories of projects, and keeping track of all the collections as they move through the process. While often challenging, the program has offered many other benefits to its administrators.

Thanks to RTH, The Portal to Texas History holds many valuable and diverse collections and has recently reached its one million items benchmark. UNT has the benefit of creating an open-educational tool that can be used not only in northern Texas but all over the state and the country. Most importantly, RTH has allowed UNT Libraries the opportunity to work towards our goal of providing access to historical materials by building relationships with institutions of similar interests and goals.

References


