“More Product, Less Process”: Why it Matters to Archivists, Librarians, and Researchers

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The Association for Library Collections and Technical Services
“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results”
--Winston Churchill
Getting better results

- Results trump approaches and processes
- Best results achieved through meaningful scaling and flexible approaches
- Archival approaches provide an extensible model for working at scale
- MPLP offers some value as a model
MPLP article

- 2003-04 NHPRC Fellowship project
- Strong uptake in U.S. archival community since 2005
- A flexible, user-focused, resource-driven approach to collection processing and access
- Adaptable to other special collection holdings formats
- …and especially to digitization at scale
The Problem

- Archival processing does not keep pace with the growth of collections
  - Unprocessed backlogs continue to grow
  - Researchers denied access to collections
  - Our image with donors and resource allocators suffers
Hypotheses

- Increasing breadth and scale of contemporary collections

- Failure to revise processing benchmarks to deal with problem
Methodology

- Literature review
- Repository survey (100 U.S. repositories)
- Grant project survey (40 NHPRC grants)
- User survey (48 researchers)
- Review related surveys
Findings

- Processing benchmarks and practices are inappropriate to deal with problems posed by large contemporary collections
  - Ideal vs. necessary
  - Fixation on item level tasks
  - Preservation anxieties trump user needs
Recommendations

- General Principles for Change

  - Establish acceptable minimum level of work, and make it the benchmark
  
  - Don’t assume all collections, or all collection components, will be processed to same level
Recommendations

- Arrangement
- Description
- Conservation
- Productivity
A better model

- *Make user access paramount:* Get most material available as quickly as possible in some usable form
- Expose hidden collections
- Adjust practices to align with resources
- Use archival approaches to achieve archival scale
- Digitize, digitize, digitize
A better model

- Establish good risk management models
- Risk is unavoidable
- Risk is amenable to being managed:
  - assess
  - mitigate
  - budget
  - respond
Old processing model

- Process driven
Old processing model

Process driven

Resource insensitive
Old processing model

Process driven
Resource insensitive
Artisan quality
Old processing model

Process driven
Resource insensitive
Artisan quality
High unit cost
Old processing model

Process driven
Resource insensitive
Artisan quality
High unit cost
Lengthy turnaround
Old processing model

- Process driven
- Resource insensitive
- Artisan quality
- High unit cost
- Lengthy turnaround
- Stable resources
New processing model
New processing model

Audience driven
New processing model

Audience driven
Resource sensitive
New processing model

Audience driven
Resource sensitive
Production quality
New processing model

Audience driven
Resource sensitive
Production quality
Low unit cost
New processing model

Audience driven
Resource sensitive
Production quality
Low unit cost
Rapid turnaround
New processing model

Audience driven
Resource sensitive
Production quality
Low unit cost
Rapid turnaround
Uncertain resources
What can MPLP mean for Special Collections?

- Broad approach to leveraging our collective ability to provide access to research collections
- Extensible to deal with novel problem spaces
- Sustainable approaches, at meaningful scale, can result from seeing items as collections
- Economic approaches are driving innovations in practice, among them *digitization*
Digitization offers biggest opportunities

- Audience engagement
- Opportunities for revenue and relevance
- Adequate approaches yield exponential outputs
- A problem space that archivists are addressing:
  - User needs and interests
  - Flexible approaches and procedures
  - Relaxed approach to “standards” and “best practice”
  - Novel solutions that are widely extensible
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- Rethinking items as *collections*
  - Photographs (albums and loose images, as well)
  - Sheet music
  - Bound publications
  - Maps
  - Oral histories
  - Audio and moving image materials
  - Born-digital holdings
Photograph collections

NATIONAL DEFENSE VOCATIONAL TRAINING: An Inventory of Photographs at the Minnesota Historical Society

OVERVIEW

Creation: Unknown
Title: National defense vocational training [graphic]
Date: ca. 1941
Language: English

Abstract: View of Minnesota men and women taking aptitude tests and training and working in various vocational training, machine shops, sheet metal, engine repair, airplane mechanics.

Quantity: 159 photographs: 16 x 20 in.
Location: 159 photographs, 16 x 20 in.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Prepared by: Nancy Richardson, March 1992
Catalog ID number: 01964538

CATALOG RESOURCES

The collection is indexed under the following headings in the catalog of the Minnesota Historical Society. Researchers seeking materials about related topics should search the catalog using these headings:

- Vocational education -- Pictorial works
- World War, 1939-1945 -- Education and the war -- Pictorial works
- World War, 1939-1945 -- Education -- Pictorial works
- Machine shops -- Vocational training
- Lewis Berg
- Photographs

Detailed Description

- Location: 1:11. Image: 1
  - Chester A. Swanson timing Dorothy Haendl in an aptitude test for defense training, ca. 1940.
  - Digital Image

- Location: 1:11. Image: 2
  - Chester A. Swanson timing Doris Bayles in at National Defense Vocational Training Center, ca. 1940.
  - Digital Image

- Location: 1:11. Image: 3
  - Doris Reynolds taking aptitude test at National Defense Vocational Training Center, ca. 1940.
  - Digital Image

- Location: 1:11. Image: 4
  - Aptitude test being given for defense training, ca. 1940.
  - Digital Image

- Location: 1:11. Image: 5
  - Lewis Berg giving Dorothy Sasser an aptitude test for defense training, ca. 1940.
  - Digital Image

- Location: 1:11. Image: 6
  - Lewis Berg giving Dorothy Sasser an aptitude test for defense training, ca. 1940.
  - Digital Image

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Sheet music collections

Collection of Songs and Music about Minnesota Places, Institutions, Businesses, and Themes:
An Inventory of Sheet Music at the Minnesota Historical Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title: Collection of songs and music about Minnesota places, institutions, businesses, and themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates: 1883-1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages: Materials in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract: These 37 scores include a mix of waltzes, marches, rags, and songs for piano and voice. While some promote summer destinations such as Lake of the Woods, others celebrate the Aquatennial or promote the Minnesota Boat Club. Cover art and advertising enhance the rich, multi-dimensional aspect of the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity: 37 scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location: F0165B.N55 CSS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrative Information:
Preferred Citation:
[Indicate the cited item and/or series here]. Collection of Songs and Music About Minnesota Places, Institutions, Businesses, and Themes. Minnesota Historical Society. See the Chicago Manual of Style for additional examples.

Processing Information:
Processing and cataloging of this collection was supported by the generosity of the Bean Family Fund for Business History.
Telephone directories

Clearwater County, Minnesota: An Inventory of Telephone Directories at the Minnesota Historical Society

Overview
Title: Collection of telephone directories for cities in Clearwater County, Minnesota.
Dates: 1933-
Language: Material in English.
Abstract: A collection of telephone directories for cities in Clearwater County, Minnesota. Telephone directories are published by telephone companies and include alphabetical listings of residential and business phone numbers and street addresses in the white pages, and a listing of businesses arranged by subject in the yellow pages. Each entry on the inventory lists the city name, year of coverage, and the number of the printed volume or microfiche set which includes that city.
Quantity: Approximately 133 volumes and 13 sets of microfiche.
Location: See Detailed Description for shelf locations.

Administrative Information
Detailed Description
ALBD
Year | Fiche | Print
--- | --- | ---
1933 | 1423 | Print
1934 | 1424 | Print
1935 | 1425 | Print
1936 | 1426 | Print
1937 | 1427 | Print

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Bagley
Year | Fiche | Print
--- | --- | ---
1933 | 1422 | Print
1934 | 1423 | Print
1935 | 1424 | Print
1936 | 1425 | Print
1937 | 1426 | Print
1938 | 1427 | Print
Born-digital holdings
Born-digital holdings
Born-digital holdings

Regarding end of session negotiations.

Regarding session conclusion.

Regarding delayed session.

Regarding bond rating agency meetings.

Regarding New York City trip.

From National Governors Association meeting in Indianapolis.

Regarding 9/11 anniversary.

Short snips of a conference call reporting on Quebec trade mission.

Track 1.
Track 2.
Track 3.
Track 4.
Track 5.
Track 6.
Track 7.
Track 8.
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• Rethinking items as *collections*
  • Photographs (albums and loose images, as well)
  • Sheet music
  • Bound publications
  • Maps
  • Oral histories
  • Audio and moving image materials
  • Born-digital holdings
  • *Use PDFs to inexpensively bundle and present complex objects*
PDFs: low-cost digital carriers
The (im)Perfect PDF

- Perfection—the leading cause of program death
- Scan with flatbed, camera, or photocopier
- As fast as possible (whatever works)
- JPEG quality (300 ppi max)
- Bundle images into a single PDF
- OCR, if it can be done cheaply
The (im)Perfect PDF

- Throw away the JPEGs! (no preservation value)
- Create strong filenames
- No added descriptive metadata (inherit from context)
- Archival finding aids carry metadata, discovery, and access burden
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- Walter Mondale Papers
  - NEH “We the People” Project
  - High productivity + high-value products
    - http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00697.xml
“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Albert Einstein