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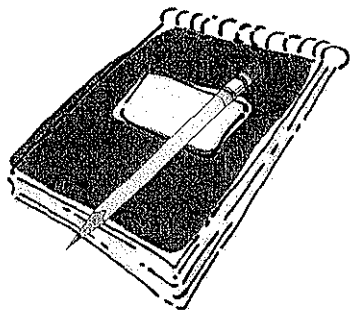
Reports



SOUTHERN ARCHIVISTS' CONFERENCE (SAC)
APRIL 14 – 16, JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

This year's meeting took place in the new building of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the House Chamber of the Old Capitol Museum.
Two pre-conference workshops were held on Friday. In the morning, John Dougan from the Shelby County Archives, in Memphis, Tennessee, offered advice on "Database Design and Management for Genealogical Records". In the afternoon, Alan Heath and Tom Reilly from the Genealogical Society of Utah and Tom Turley, Alabama Department of Archives and History, gave a presentation on "Archival Preservation and Access: How the Genealogical Society of Utah Can Benefit You." Both workshops were well attended and provided valuable insights.
Some conference attendees also took the one-hour architectural walking tour of historic down-town Jackson led by Todd Sanders from the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. A reception and tours of the new facility rounded out Friday evening.

SESSION I

The Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive: Providing Online Access to 20th Century Materials

Peggy M. Price & Diane DeCesare Ross,
The University of Southern Mississippi

The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries began their digital program with civil rights materials in January 2000 because Mississippi was the focal point in the struggle for civil rights in America, and Hattiesburg (home of USM) had the largest and most successful Freedom Summer project in 1964. In September 2001, the Libraries received a $204,687 National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The project archive now provides worldwide access to nearly 10,000 pages of civil rights-related manuscripts, photographs, and oral histories. The project has also resulted in the creation of a model for resolving intellectual property issues associated with digitizing archival collections of 20th century materials not in the public domain. An explanation of procedures and sample forms used to resolve these issues can be found at http://www.lib.usm.edu/~spcol/crda/ipp/index.html.

Early on, project participants recognized the limitations of available subject heading schema in meeting project needs for a controlled vocabulary. They constructed the Civil Rights in Mississippi Thesaurus based on Library of Congress Subject Headings, but with the addition of subjects more intuitive to today's researchers (i.e., "voting" rather than "suffrage") or more specific to Mississippi. These headings are being submitted to the Library of Congress through the African-American Subject Funnel Project for possible inclusion in future editions of the LCSH. The still-growing thesaurus can be accessed online at http://www.lib.usm.edu/~techserv/cat/tools/crm_index.htm.

In September 2003, USM Libraries received a second National Leadership Grant from IMLS, this time for $463,322. Through this grant, six Mississippi institutions (Delta State University, Jackson State University, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Tougaloo College, the University of Mississippi, and USM) are partnering in Mississippi's first attempt to establish a collaborative statewide digital library program. This initial phase will focus on providing access to finding aids and digital surrogates related to civil rights materials held at the participating institutions. However, future expansion

may lead to the inclusion of additional subject areas and participation from public libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions in the state.

SESSION II

Paper Finding Aids for EAD:
Creating Paper Finding Aids that Convert Easily to EAD

Dr. Elizabeth Dow
School of Library and Information Science
Louisiana State University

Dr. Dow began the presentation by giving a brief overview of the history of archival description and the paper finding aid. She then gave a short history of the impact of computers on the way archival institutions develop finding aids. Beginning in the 1960s with union databases, machine readable (MARC) cataloging in the 1970s, MARC for AMC in the 1980s, and then EAD in the mid 1990s, every step encouraged archival institutions to apply standards in order to share information.

Most paper finding aids are highly idiosyncratic, depending on the processor, the collection and the institution. These idiosyncrasies make it difficult for repositories to present information in an electronic format or to share information with other institutions. Ms. Dow strongly suggested creating a standard form for collection data and to present information in a consistent manner.

Finding aids should be developed from general to specific (think outline), the best finding aids are presented in layers of information. High-level information is collection applicable information that applies to all information below it and includes all name authority work and documentation. Mid-level information is component applicable, such as the series and the lower level is the folder or item description. Some helpful hints on low-level information were to avoid abbreviations and ditto marks.

Dow suggested that repositories >begin with the end in mind.= In other words, develop the paper finding aid so it can be easily converted to Encoded Archival Description (EAD). Creating paper finding aids with EAD in mind reduces the work of conversion, increases compatibility in union databases, and most importantly, provides researcher with information presented the same way across repositories. In the case of existing finding aids, Ms. Dow encouraged a careful evaluation of existing information. Many older finding aids are so poor that it is easier to begin again.

One of the more interesting comments of the session was in regard to the implication of intellectual priority; there is increasingly less reliance on the physical nature of the collection as a basis for the description.

Ms. Dow left the group with two pieces of advice: Be sure to indicate in the documentation file the authority work done and to remember--standards are our friends.

SESSION III

Publishing Local History

Richard Saunders, Curator of Special Collections and University Archives,
Director of the University Museum
University of Tennessee - Martin, TN

Dr. Saunders offered detailed advice on all aspects of publishing an archivist might wish to undertake ranging from finding aids to websites to books. In finding aids, archivists need to describe source materials succinctly, so researchers can decide what to use. They need to make notes and jot down observations when they first begin working with a collection and they should probably decide on a format early on also. Dr. Saunders is biased toward print and paper media, partially because of preservation issues. (Lower technology equals higher preservation potential but there are worrisome permanence issues concerning printers, toners and photocopies). He also pointed out that whereas online productions tend to work in

a linear fashion, printed items do not. The web works best as a distribution medium for Universities, government agencies and similar large entities, but not necessarily for small archives because of the cost of long-term maintenance. Many archives are now generating electronic data files. Dr. Saunders recommended that archivists use off-the-shelf software which will be supported by the manufacturer. Standards are essential, as is use of proper data formats. He suggested that too many bells and whistles may be counterproductive and pointed out the need for outside readers for finding acids and the like. Good design and thorough editorial review are essential for quality publications.

SESSION IV

Documenting and Preserving the Deep South

Dr. Shana Walton, Associate Director,
Deep South Regional Humanities Center, Tulane University.

Dr. Walton began by briefly discussing the establishment of the regional humanities centers and their initial missions prior to the withdrawal of NEH funding. She then went on to discuss the abbreviated mission of the Deep South Center and talked about what they have accomplished so far.

Their main mission has been to address access issues to enhance the public awareness of archival holdings throughout the "deep South," in this case Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. She showed the multi-media CD that they developed on the Louisiana Purchase, using archival material from a large number of repositories. She also talked about the CD, "Waking Up to War: The Shock of Pearl Harbor" and distributed copies to the institutions present in the audience.

Other projects she covered were:

Resource Database Collection – working with every state, university, college, and local archives and historical society to provide a portal web site of their on-line holdings and finding aids.

Culinary History Project – working to develop a comprehensive list of cookbook collections in the various regional archives.

The Center staff believe that they should be collecting information, and serve as an Internet portal to make this information accessible to the public.

Dr. Walton then turned the presentation into a discussion on how the various regional archives could help the Deep South Center fulfill their original NEH mission without the massive Federal and private funding they were to have. The discussion covered a wide range of topics, but no concrete proposals were made.

DINNER BANQUET KEYNOTE ADDRESS

A Grassroots Approach to a State-wide Digitization Initiative: NC ECHO

Kim Cumber, NC ECHO
North Carolina State Library

Our NC ECHO Project is really five-fold:

1. Our needs assessment/statistical survey of cultural institutions in North Carolina
2. Our web directory of all cultural institutions in the state - libraries, archives, museums, and other collecting organizations
3. Our re-grant program in which LSTA funds are granted to libraries and their partner institutions for digitization projects

4. Our Continuing Education offerings - some foundation practices, digitization skills, and metadata
5. Our role as an information clearinghouse for cultural institutions across the state

We have broadly defined the term "cultural institution" for our purposes - Any cultural institution (library, archive, museum, historic site, or organization), which maintains a permanent, non-living collection of unique materials held for research and/or exhibit purposes and open for the use of the public will be surveyed. Denominational/associational collections will be surveyed, but individual church collections will not. Art museums will be surveyed but galleries will not. Zoos, arboreta, and parks will not be surveyed, unless as a part of their mission, they hold collections described above.

Project Vision

All of North Carolina's cultural institutions work together to make the state's unique cultural and historical resources accessible for the education and enjoyment of people of all ages in the state, the nation, and the world.

Purpose of the NC ECHO Portal

The purpose of the ASCWG portal is to provide a single point of entry for the citizens of North Carolina to the unique resources of North Carolina's cultural institutions in order to enhance education and learning.

Please go to our website http://www.ncecho.org and play around! There's a lot to see and we are continuing to develop the site and its (presently sub-par) searching function. Please send suggestions if you have them!

SESSION V

Starting an Archives: Decisions, Decisions, Decisions ...

Meredith Johnson, Child Nutrition Archives,
National Food Services Management Institute, University of Mississippi;
Susan Bzdell, Morgan County Archives, AL;
Dennis Smith, National Agricultural Library, Washington, D.C.

Ms Meredith Johnson spoke on the challenges and problems associated with setting up a new institutional archives. She especially stressed the need to publicize archival institutions and provided examples of successful strategies, such as press releases, exhibits of recent accessions, speakers and especially web sites with interesting web exhibits. Ms Johnson also reminded everyone to collect user statistics.

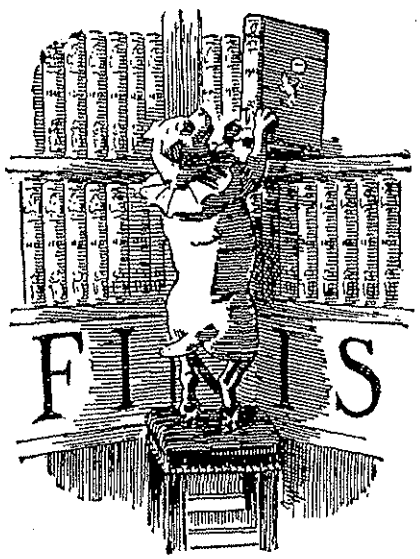
Ms Susan Bzdell's talk entitled "Local Archives: Start-Up Decisions" described the challenges encountered when she had to deal with a totally unorganized and un-inventoried collection to be housed in a less than ideal building. She emphasized that anyone starting up an archives needs to understand clearly the mission of the institution, its funding and the available resources. An archives created by a legislative body will have a secure source of funding, but those funds can only be used for public records. (Ms Bzdell funds come from a $ 3.0 filing fee, she cannot go back and ask for more). Ms Bzdell considers her county to be her service area; she collects local history items, but for those collections she has to rely on private donations of materials and money. With limited resources and limited time, it is crucial to have a precise policy of what to collect from the public – she focuses on photographs which have to be publicly accessible. She recommends forming a "Friends of the Archives " group and to form ties with civic groups. She also encourages people to put bequests in writing and to include them in their wills. Ms Bzdell does charge state agencies for services rendered, this helps with buying supplies for the county's records. This presentation stressed a practical, hands-on approach which the audience appreciated very much.

Dennis Smith described the collections in the archives of the National Agricultural Library, such as the rare book collection containing many rare works in botany, natural history, zoology and entomology as well as herbaria from the 16th and 17th centuries. Other highlights are Thomas Jefferson Correspondence and the USDA Pomological Watercolor Collection. This beautiful collection contains more than 6000 paintings of fruits and nuts from the late 1180s through the early 1900s. Mr. Davis also pointed out the many nutritional resources on the NAL website.

Hear ye! Hear ye!

From Fall 2004 onward, the Newsletter will become an electronic publication. Nadia Nasr, SMA's web mistress, is setting up a special link on the SMA homepage. The newsletter will be in PDF format – this means that you will have to download Adobe Acrobat Reader from the internet.

The address is

http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html

Click on "Free Adobe Reader" on the left sidebar and then follow the instructions.