

Exercise 2: An Analysis of the Major Railroad Archival Collections Project

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Exercise 2: An Analysis of the Major Railroad Archival Collections Project and a Review of
Other Projects

I began this exercise, by reading through the descriptions of each project that had received a Hidden Collections grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources. There were five projects that appeared to be related to work that I intend to do with the Tolland Historical Society. These projects were: *Major Railroad Archival Collections* proposed by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, *Enhancing Access to the History of San Diego and the Border Region* proposed by the San Diego History Center, *Excavating L.A.: USC's Hidden Southern California Historical Collections* proposed by the University of Southern California Libraries, *Martha's Vineyard Archives Project* proposed by The Martha's Vineyard Museum, Inc. and *Uncovering Philadelphia's Past: A Regional Solution to Revealing Hidden Collections* proposed by the University of Pennsylvania. All of the projects except the *Major Railroad Archival Collections* related to the history of a specific geographic region. Their collections are similar to the total holdings of the Tolland Historical Society, which includes three museums and artifacts that reflect different parts of the town's history. The *Major Railroad Archival Collections* is the project that is most like the collection I will be working with. The Collections include ephemera and photos related to railroad companies that operated in Nebraska and nationally (Council on Library and Information Resources, 2012). The collection does not capture the full history of the state, but only one aspect of it. The bank and insurance objects and documents at the Tolland Historical Society similarly only represent one aspect of the town's history. Also, the bank and insurance company are like the railroads in that the companies are no longer operating today as they were in the past.

I was really impressed with the online presentation of some of these projects. *Uncovering Philadelphia's Past: A Regional Solution to Revealing Hidden Collections* proposed by the University of Pennsylvania included a website with blog and Twitter feed so that people could follow along with the progression of the project. The blog contains some tips that could be of use to other archival organizations that are looking to catalog and digitize their collections (PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project, 2013).

Analysis of the Major Railroad Archival Collections Project

Project Topic and Proposed Institute

The name of the project is *Major Railroad Archival Collections*. The Principal Investigator was Katherine Walter who is the Chair for Digital Initiatives and Special Collections at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln proposed the project and carried it out with the Nebraska State Historical Society (Council on Library and Information Resources, 2012).

Description of the Importance of the Collection

According to the summary of the project provided at the Council on Library and Information Resources: Hidden Collections website, the *Major Railroad Archival Collections* “will be of interest to scholars of history, technology, ecology, labor relations, agricultural economics, geography and other disciplines” (Council on Library and Information Resources, 2012).

Project Goals and Objectives

I did not have access to the complete grant proposal for this project so I am unaware of all of the project goals. However, some specific goals are outlined for all of the projects that hope to be selected for Hidden Collections grants.

The program supports:

Cataloging collections of “national significance” which will have an impact on current scholarship;

Using appropriate standards and tools to maximize access, efficiency, interoperability, and sustainability;

Using model approaches to cataloging and outreach that engage scholars and other user communities. These “model approaches” may:

Be models for others, or

Adapt others’ models. (For Applicants, 2012)

Number and Type of Project Sources

“Materials include: the Union Pacific Railroad Collection, the Chicago Burlington and Quincy (CB&Q) Railroad--Lines West Collection, the Charles Kennedy Railroad Collection, and the Val Kuska Collection, which documents the CB&Q Railroad Company's efforts to attract settlers and improve agricultural practices in Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Texas. Document types represented in these collections are corporate and legal documents, field books, maps, drawings, advertising posters, scrapbooks, time tables, and several thousand photographs” (2010 Funded Projects, 2012).

Analysis of Metadata Elements for the *Major Railroad Archival Collections*

The Nebraska State Historical Society displays its collections online using PastPerfect. The metadata elements vary depending on if the record is for a photograph or for an artifact. The phrase *Major Railroad Archival Collections* does not appear to be used in the online collection. I searched for the name “Val Kuska” in the collection field using the advanced search feature in order to find records. This is the name of one of the collections that was to be cataloged as part

of the Hidden Collections grant. Only three results were returned. When I searched for other collections named in the grant no results were found. I am not sure why this is the case. It could be that the collections related to the grant have only been cataloged, but not digitized. The copyright on the database is from 1997-2009 (Systems Planning), which would be one year before the grant was awarded (2010 Funded Projects, 2012). The Hidden Collections grant does not provide funding to digitize collections (For Applicants, 2012).

The elements for an object include: "Catalog Number," "Collection," "Object Name," "Title," "Description," "Culture," "Material," "Date," "Made," "Artist," "Credit line," "Height in," "Length in," "People," "Place of Origin," "Year Range from," "Year Range to," "Makers mark," and "History." The photos appear in the search result list after the objects and their display format is slightly different. The data elements for photos include: "Catalog Number," "Object Name," "Description," "Date," "Title," "Collection," "Classification," "Place," "Subjects," "Scan Number," and "Search Terms" (Systems Planning, 1997-2009).

In addition to assigning metadata to each digital image, there is also a listing of all of the collections that the Nebraska State Historical Society has. Through that listing I found a collection called "Railroads, Nebraska" and another called "Kuska, Val/Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company" the data elements used for these records include "Collection Number," "Collection Name," "Date(s)," "Size," "Abstract," "Access Restrictions," "Use Restrictions," "Corporate Name," "Geographical Name," "Genre Form" and "Subject" (Nebraska State Historical Society 2009).

From the records being displayed, it is difficult to know which standards were selected for use. Several of the terms used appear in the Dublin Core Elements Set. It could be that the

Nebraska State Historical Society has selected terms from that set or they could have created their own list of terms.

Controlled Vocabularies

Controlled vocabularies are clearly in use in this database. The Historical Society could have created all of the vocabulary or they could use a mixture of their own assigned terms for some categories and a thesaurus for others. For example, the names of the collections would have to be standardized by the Historical Society since that would be the only group using those terms. Standard vocabularies could be used for other elements like “Object Name” or “Material” because these words would be used by many different organizations. There are many archives that own negatives. I cannot tell which controlled vocabulary was used, because it is not stated in the database and no thesaurus was provided. The information also was not given in the summary of the project at the 2010 Funded Projects website.

Codes Used to Organize Items

The organization is using at least two types of codes. They are using catalog numbers to identify each record. Also there are “Scan Number[s]” which are included in photo records (Systems Planning, 1997-2009). Perhaps they are used to connect the file name of a scanned image with the original photo in the collection.

References

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