

The San Fernando Valley History Digital Project: a Collaborative Digital Project Between Local Historical Societies and a University Library

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Abstract

The University Library at California State University, Northridge and thirty-one local historical societies, members of the San Fernando Valley Heritage Network, collaborated to create a digital history of the Valley, providing access to materials otherwise difficult to access. This case study illustrates how a modest grant and a spirit of cooperation can produce a Web site that supports the educational goals of their community.

Keywords: *Collaborative Digital Library and Archive Project, Historical Societies*

1 Inception

In 1999, a committee consisting of Susan C. Curzon, Dean of the University Library at California State University, Northridge, Cindy Ventuleth, Director of Development, Tony Gardner, Curator of Special Collections and Archives and Robert Marshall, Head Archivist of the Urban Archives Center and the University Archives, laid the foundation for the San Fernando Valley Heritage Network. They realized that local historical societies often work alone and exist outside of the information loop concerning the organization and preservation of historical documents, photographs, and artifacts in their various collections. The Network now serves as the mechanism for representatives from the historical societies and private collections to connect to professional organizations, like the Los Angeles Preservation Network, to organize workshops.

During this same time frame a grant proposal was written to create a digital archive documenting the history of the San Fernando Valley, a suburb of metropolitan Los Angeles. In the fall of 2000, The California State Library granted \$153,298.00 in funding to the University Library to select and digitize their materials and the resources from the members of the Valley Heritage Network. Dean Curzon was able to earmark \$43,292.00 "in-kind" funds (i.e., time release) to help support the project (LSTA Grant

F-7, FY 2000/01, WP99, Grant Award #40-5208).¹

2 Goals

The goal of the San Fernando Valley Historical Digital Library project is to create a digital archive consisting of 2400 images of photographs, maps and textual documents that provide visual information concerning the economic growth and social evolution of the San Fernando Valley from the time of its first settlements to its dramatic growth following the Second World War. The digital collection will serve as a valuable asset to supplement the educational needs of K-12 programs as well as researchers and historical societies. It will provide a single access to primary materials that were once scattered and buried in university archives, historical societies, or private collections. The general population have been unaware of the existence of these materials and access to them is often limited. The Project Archivist and Metadata Catalogers will conduct background research on the resources lacking information to create value-added metadata records. The visual and textual information will assist teachers and students, researchers, and genealogists who are studying California history, its people and their culture.

3 Implementation

The University Library undertook the implementation of this project. Based on the size of our grant and the level of release time for the University staff involved in the project, it was clear that some compromises needed to be made. The decisions fall into 5 categories: hardware & software; staffing, cultivating our relationship with other members of the Network, development of standards, and establishing an efficient workflow.

¹ This project is supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

3.1 Hardware and Software

During the first quarter of the grant, our Systems Librarian, Eric Willis, purchased a Dell Poweredge 4400 as the project server and a second new computer for the Project Technician. A heavy duty oversize Epson 1540xl Special Edition scanner (12" x 17") was purchased to better manage the scanning of large items.

Rather than hiring a programmer and developing our own database, we chose to buy an "off-the-shelf" product. After reviewing the choices, we purchased CONTENT_{dm}, developed by the University of Washington for managing and presenting digital images and metadata records (<http://contentdm.com/>). This allowed us more time to develop our in-house standards and immediately start building the digitized collection.

3.2 Staffing

We were fortunate to be able to hire a technician for scanning the images, Dianne DeSha, and a local archivist, Charla Bench, who had previously worked with the San Fernando Valley historical societies. I was granted release time in order to help create and maintain the "Best Practices" document (<http://library.csun.edu/mwoodley/SFVBestPractices.html>) and to review the records once they were mounted on the server. After two months, it became clear that we needed more staff to produce the metadata records and were able to hire two additional staff members: Lori Saavedra and Adina Lerner.

3.3 Collaborating with Historical Societies

The local historical societies are informal organizations comprised of volunteers who have a keen interest in preserving the history of the San Fernando Valley. The expertise on how to organize and store their material varied widely among the members of the Network. Few have archival training and a number have limited computer knowledge. Some of the members still had reservations concerning the control they could maintain over the use of their images once they were available on the Web. Although most of the members understood the technical limitations of protecting images from being downloaded, a few members felt "proprietary" towards their resources.

3.4 Standards

The standards for scanning, digital storage standards for creating metadata are clearly documented by the California Digital Library (<http://www.cdlib.org/about/publications/CDLObjctStd-2001.pdf>) and the California State Library metadata standards. (http://www.library.ca.gov/assets/acrobat/metado_cfinalrev.PDF). Benchmarking for the scanning was problematic since we did not know at the beginning of the project what types of materials the historical societies would be willing to share with the project. Our scanning procedures were modified as we became more experienced with the variety of material. The refinement of our standards are reflected in our Best Practices document.

CONTENT_{dm} fields are based on Dublin Core 1.1 Qualified. This was fortuitous since the metadata standards of the California State Library are also based on Dublin Core. As a test of what fields the project needed, we created a testbed of fifty records for various types of material from the Library's collection. Only the minimum fields required by the LSTA standards were used. The staff evaluated the level of information the records provided and the appropriateness of the field names or labels. Our Best Practices documents the name of the fields; the order of the fields are displayed; whether or not the fields are part of the template; whether they are under authority control, and if so, which authority standard; and the definitions of how the fields are used. This was imperative so that each cataloger understood the use of the fields and would record content consistently. (<http://library.csun.edu/mwoodley/SFVBestPractices.html>) The definitions and usage of the individual elements and qualifiers follow the standards established by the California Digital Library and the California State Library Metadata Standards.

In the end, we expanded the number of fields from 15 to 24, all of which map to Dublin Core. The decision to expand the number of fields was driven by the need to record or display information required to identify, retrieve, or evaluate the individual images, or were needed in order to record administrative/preservation information.. We took advantage of the fact that none of the Dublin Core fields are required but they are also all repeatable. We were careful to keep the "Dumb-down" principle in mind and record the same type of information in the repeated fields. In the case of our Donor and Project Name fields, both of which map to Contributor, search results by an outside Dublin Core-compatible search engine would make sense because the result always will be a name. The

role or function associated with the names is also recorded in the Description field.

The names or labels for the elements were influenced by the fields defined by the Visual Resources Association standard, although some of the labels are locally devised. Since our audience will include the K-12 population as well as the general public, we preferred to use field names that reflect vernacular usage. For example, the label "Location" is preferred over Coverage.Spatial and Alternative dates, to Coverage.Temporal.

The "date" fields required some discussion. The unqualified "Date" element records the date of the original manifestation, and is recorded using the ISO standard. Occasionally, the item in hand is a reproduction of the original. Often the date of reproduction is not known, or is obviously much later than the original. We decided not to use the date of the reproduction since it might be confusing or misleading to have a "Date" of 1970 for an image whose intellectual content clearly is from the nineteenth century. To avoid simply duplicating a specific date in the Coverage.Temporal field, we decided to use it as an "Alternative Date" field to be filled when appropriate. The encoding scheme for "Alternative Date" is the Library of Congress subject headings that carry is temporal connotation, for example, "World War, 1930-1945." "Date Digital" records the date of the digitization, also using the ISO standard. The latter date will not display to public and is considered an administrative field.

Some of the fields needed for the University materials differed somewhat from those for the Historical Societies. For the University materials, it is important that links be made to our finding aids for the archival collections on the Web and to the bibliographical material for both the Special Collections and the Archival Collections in our library's online catalog. These fields are not applicable to the materials lent by the Historical Societies.

vocabulary)	AACR2)	
Call Number (Subject LCCN)	Rights (URL)	Format (media types)
Location (Coverage Spatial: LCNAF))		Source Type (Format Medium: AAT)
Alternative Date (Coverage Temporal LCSH)		Source Measurement (Format Extent)
Repository Name (LCNAF) (Relation IsPartOf)		Identifier
Collection Name (Relation IsPartOf)		
Finding Aid (Relation IsPartOf)		

The staff agreed that the information in each record should be as full as possible. In a few cases, duplication was viewed as necessary. For example, the description is based on the information that accompanied the item and/or the research conducted by the Project Archivist or the Catalogers. Since the description follows directly under the devised title, the role of the names indexed in the Photographer/Author field and Donor & Others field are recorded in the description field for clarity. Measurements for the object are given in inches (useful for the general public) in the Description field and in centimeters (standard for libraries, archives and museums) in the Source Measurement field.

Names of people, corporations, places, and topical headings for subject content, building names, etc. are in the form established by the Library of Congress Name Authority File and Subject File, or if not established, in the form according to the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules or the for establishing those names and topics. The only exception is that place subdivisions are not included in subject strings but reside in their own field, Location. This supports production levels: in the acquisition mode, subject strings in the "controlled vocabulary" can be clicked on and added automatically into the Subject field; likewise for place names in the Location field. If location names were added to the Subject field, then every possible permutation of subject/place would need to be added to the controlled vocabulary. This

Intellectual Content	Intellectual Property	Manifestation
Title	Photographer / Author (Creator)	Date (ISO 8601)
Description	Publisher	Date Digital (ISO 8601)
Subject (LCSH)	Donor&Others (Contributor: LCNAF, AACR2)	Language
Keywords (Subject – no controlled)	Project Name (Contributor: LCNAF,	Type (DCMI-type)

would have slowed our production immeasurably. If sometime in the future we have the ability to search across multiple Z39.50 databases at simultaneously, a subject phrase search would be weakened by this approach, but a subject word would still be completely supported.

3.5 Workflow

A documented workflow supports the ability to work at production level, and at the same time, to keep control over materials coming from a variety of sources. Although many of the Historical Societies lack any formal inventories for their material, the Project Archivist lists each item borrowed on a loan form with a detailed description. Material that came together in a box or folder is kept in the same order as received. The Project Archivist may collect items from multiple societies on any given day, but the Technician scanning the material, works on a single collection at a time. Each digitized image receives a name based on the collection name and are numbered by its original numbering system, or sequentially if not. The collections are assigned to a single cataloger who uses the original while cataloging. Once the metadata records for the collection are uploaded and reviewed, the original material is returned to the Historical Society. These steps are important in order to preserve friendly relations within the Network.

4 Results

On June 27, 2001 the Project staff and the San Fernando Valley Heritage Network met to review issues concerning the project and gave a brief demonstration of the Web site. Overall, they became more enthusiastic about the project once they saw how the site would work. It also has inspired other groups and individuals to donate their material to the project. The representatives also became more excited about extending the project to include other material in their collections and private collections that would complement what they had already donated. The site opens officially in October to the public (<http://digital-library.csun.edu/>). A full day of celebration is planned with invitations extending to the campus community and the historical societies, local schools, mayors of the Valley cities, and representatives from the local press. The day will be proclaimed officially the "San Fernando History Day," and will include music and dance programs, pageants, demonstrations of the Web site, and work presented by elementary students studying California history.

5 Future

The Project Staff and the members of the Heritage Network have found this collaboration exceedingly rewarding and look forward to continuation of this project and perhaps others in the future. After the current funding runs out, the project will continue with the permanent Library staff, but on a smaller scale. We are seeking new funding to expand the project to include more information about the ethnic neighborhoods and support for the K-12 curriculum. It has been successful in bringing together the community to share in the rich multi-cultural background of the San Fernando Valley.



Figure 1. Women workers in the Adams Olive Cannery sorting room. Sunland, Calif. 1920? Photographer, J.H. Lamson. Sunland, Tujunga, and Little Landers Historical Society at Bolton Hall Museum (Tujunga, Los Angeles, Calif.)