

Archival Histories of Marshall University Past-Presidents: Documentation Through

Administrative Papers and News Releases

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Abstract

Over the course of the semester, I set out to accomplish several different goals throughout the award period for this Undergraduate Creative Discovery project. As this was a field experience, it gave me the opportunity to learn archival best practices for processing university archival collections, gain knowledge of digitization softwares and metadata standard practices, and provide learning opportunities to those who use Special Collections. In this report I will outline what those projects consisted of, pivots I had to make along the way, and what I learned from this process.

Introduction

Through this award period, I aimed to explore and inventory items from a University Archives collection located in the Special Collections department in Morrow Library. This collection featured materials from the filing cabinets of three Marshall University Presidents and their administrative assistants, including Roland Nelson (1968-1970), Donald Dedmon (1970-1971), and John Barker (1971-1974). A huge significance of this is working with primary source documents from before, during, and after the plane crash at the University. Most of the contents contained within this collection will never be seen by the public, and the inventory that is published online will be the document to determine if administrators, faculty, staff, or researchers need to access these boxes in the future.

The second goal was to explore Marshall's History from the 1990s that *is* publicly available, including the official news releases that were sent by the administration to local newspapers like the *Herald-Dispatch*. This includes learning about digitization practices. Unfortunately, Lindsey didn't realize that most of these were already digitized when we came up with the initial project proposal, so she allowed me to pivot this project a bit and instead focused on learning the digitization ScannX software with 1950s advertisements that went in conjunction with an assignment for one of my classes.

Results

In creating the University Archives inventory of a President's Collection, I had to ensure that items were preserved using archival best-practices and that items were accessible in a way that did not require digitization of individual items within the collection. To achieve the former, I made sure items were in acid-free folders, and that each folder had a legible title listed on the materials. When items were not in folders, I gave them folders with appropriate titles. When

items were in a folder without a title included (or more than likely, the old label fell off), I examined the materials contained within that folder to properly describe the items and documented them accordingly. As it concerns completing the collection, I was able to finish 9.5 of the collection's total 20 boxes, totaling 17 of the 36-page document, and another student completed the remaining boxes due to the sizable number of materials and some personal circumstances that came out of this semester. My work included getting through two of the three president's administrative paperwork. The final product for this specific assignment can be found at the following link: https://mds.marshall.edu/ua_finding_aids/327/.

What I learned from this process is that it is very different from my initial project I completed from 2021 with the Herald-Dispatch materials and records. I was expecting a lot more press-friendly materials and a lot of this collection required more in-depth processing than some of the previous materials I worked with. I also expected to find some topics within the papers, like the construction of Twin Towers East and West (which I learned would be in a separate Buildings and Grounds collection instead). However, I was able to find some interesting topics throughout processing this collection such as the relationship between faculty and administration. I was particularly interested in finding materials about the history department, as a history major. What surprised me most was discovering the materials the university administration thought was worthy of keeping vs what was not.

Although I was not able to digitize the News Releases, I was able to add the already digitized content to Marshall Digital Scholar. In doing so, I was able to learn about metadata best-practices and metadata actual practices that are used for Marshall Digital Scholar. As MDS is a part of Digital Commons, and a product of bepress, Lindsey explained to me the difference between standard metadata creation and the expanded Dublin Core scheme. What I learned from metadata creation to make individual items accessible is the time it takes for each individual item is more substantial than I thought, and that not every item will be able to be digitized.

Third, I was also able to learn how to use the ScannX Scanner to learn more about digitization of materials. I was able to explore this through digitizing several advertisements from the *Ladies Home Journal* magazine within the Special Collections department from 1953 for my History 280 course with Dr. Robert Deal and Dr. Greta Rensenbrink. Here, I learned about archival best-practices to ensure items were properly digitized. I found a lot of these advertisements to be ones that I had never seen on the Internet before. Since we are in the age of

Pinterest and YouTube, I found this very surprising. This also gave me a lot of context for how race and gender were presented in advertisements of the decade. I also learned the differences for when to use PDF, JPG, and TIFF file formats. A lot of these advertisements that I have seen online are in grey scale because printing these in color was more expensive at the time (if the technology to print in color was even there to begin with).

Another thing I was surprisingly able to accomplish was assisting with a tour of the Special Collections department to a new to Marshall staff member of the University Libraries. This was one of my favorite parts of my experience this semester, as I was able to see things within the department that I had not gotten to see since my freshman year at Marshall and see the progress that has been made in archiving existing collections. This experience has also given me the opportunity to share what it is like working in special collections, not only with people at Marshall, but with people outside of Marshall as well. I am going on a study abroad trip this summer and learned that some of my peers work at a special collections department at their own universities (specifically at Morehead). It was really eye opening to be able to share what I was doing with other people who are interested within the Library Science field, and I had not had that experience before since I am one of the only people at Marshall that I know of considering working in that field. It was nice to be able to talk to a peer my age about doing this work.

Discussion

Working on this collection was very transformative for me. As an out of state student, before I had come to Marshall, I had never even heard about the plane crash. Now, being given this opportunity to look at its impact as well as what else was going on at the university at the time was incredible. Having this experience is going to help me get into the Library and Information Science profession than if I had not had this. I can stand out for graduate school applications, and positions at college libraries, as someone who has had experience, even though I am just starting out. I have had volunteer experience in libraries since I was about 13, and this was one of my favorites that I have gotten to do by far. I can talk to professionals in the field and other people who are trying to get into the field and provide them with advice and share my own experiences and be taken seriously. A lot of the times before when I tried entering the field, I had not been taken seriously in working in the profession because my work experience was unpaid. I can now say that I am very serious about entering this profession with experiences to back me up.

This project I can truly say has changed me. It has changed how I view the university and its perseverance through tragedy that it had to overcome through community (whether that is the faculty, students, administration, and the community at-large). The movie *We Are Marshall* does not do it justice. The years that I completed with this manuscript collection (1968-1974) under this award were so monumental for Huntington and the State of West Virginia and provides more context to other events happening at the university. We often forget that there was more during this time, even though this is still a tragic and influential event at the State level, we are also able to celebrate some accomplishments of the university (whether that is creating new programs, construction of new buildings, or even the founding of student organizations that continue to this day).