MOBILE COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

2017 LYRASIS Catalyst Fund Recipient

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.
Introduction, goal and vision for the project

In recent years, archivists have identified the need and desire to capture community archives with the twin goals of providing community members with tools and techniques to engage with their collections, as well as equipping archivists with connections, tools, and techniques to use in their communities. One potential avenue we wish to explore is a mobile maker space and digitization lab that will allow us to reach out to rural communities and digitize their material, making such material widely available while keeping the archive in the community. This is a pilot project that would allow us to work with tribal colleges and communities in Nebraska.

While mobile digitization and maker spaces have been done in the past, notably Baltimore’s Open Works, California’s SparkTruck, Boston’s UpTruck, New York City’s Culture in Transit, and Atlanta’s STE(A)M Truck, we offer an alternative approach to these largely urban-based initiatives. Mobile spaces have generally targeted the cities and urban centers in which they were launched. UNO currently has a robust Native Studies and History program with deep roots within the community. We also house the American Indian Digital History Project, an initiative to share important Tribal community archives. Our initiative seeks to go beyond the urban area of Omaha and Council Bluffs to connect with community archives in rural and tribal communities to capture their rich history and preserve it and make it accessible to all. Combined with the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s core mission of community engagement, developing a mobile maker and digitization lab would help us in fulfilling our mission as a university.

This outreach is happening at a particularly important moment. Commentators in the wake of the 2016 election have pointed to an urban/rural divide, a long perceived issue in American history. As a metropolitan research university, UNO Libraries believes a core facet of its mission is reaching out to tribal communities in our region to connect with their histories and tell their stories. By doing so, we offer a way for rural communities to use their archives and provide those archives more widely within and without.

This project will help us to:
- explore how to provide access to community-made archives
- provide a model for community engagement and involvement in public digital humanities work, specifically around community archival, curatorial, and participatory work
- employ innovative technologies to enable digital participation

---

The UNO Team

The core team includes: Dr. Jason A. Heppler (Digital Engagement Librarian, University of Nebraska at Omaha) Joyce Neujahr (Director, Patron Service, University of Nebraska at Omaha) Drew Roberts (Creative Production Lab Assistant, University of Nebraska at Omaha) Amy Schindler (Director, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska at Omaha) and one or two student workers to be identified in a later phase of the project.
The Project Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Meet with humanities scholars, library and museum professionals, and digital media specialists in Omaha to discuss the project’s goals, identify which communities to reach out to and collaborate with, discuss the potential benefits and drawbacks to collecting user-generated content, and discuss the needs of the project including potential types of content, assessment of technology, and best practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Take our plan to community leaders, meet with tribal communities and talk about our University and plan to capture this type of cultural heritage material. Build trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Begin working in the community with the mobile lab; digitize and scan objects. Work will include creating metadata for objects, digitization of material, capturing community knowledge and/or oral histories, and building relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Take the digitized material and upload it to the project site. Notify community leaders and the public that the material can be accessed. Provide digital copies of material to participants (CDs, thumb drives, or downloads from Box).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accomplishments

The project to date has a lot of community support. After attending many community meetings and events, people recognize the staff at the University Library. People trust that we will properly handle and care for their materials and furthermore accurately describe their cultural heritage past and preserve their stories. The University of Nebraska at Omaha has also provided a matching grant that gave the project additional funding to ensure its financial commitment to completion. The funds from the LYRASIS Catalyst Fund and UNO has allowed us to be more creative with our outreach, marketing, and with the equipment for the project by freeing us to think broadly about out-of-the-box ideas that otherwise could’ve been stunted. The grant allowed us to envision this project despite its long timeframe. Knowing the funding was available for travel and student workers gave us a freedom from uncertainty that might’ve otherwise accompanied our planning and logistics.

We have built two very strong relationships with possible future collaborators: the Circle of Grandmothers and Nebraska City Public Library, who is very interested in modeling or collaborating on a simiair digitization project with us to expand into larger areas of Nebraska. Our first mobile digitization lab date is set for September 29, 2018, with the Circle of Grandmothers. We will be hosting this first visit on campus, however – this has come at the wishes of our community in order to reach Native people living in the city. We see this as an important moment, though, as a place to 1) concretely demonstrate what we’re trying to do, and 2) help spread the word within a broader network of potential collaborators. Building trust continues here, and we see our on-site event as a launching point for future collaborations that can begin to fulfill our broader plans for a mobile digitization lab. To that end, our
Burgeoning collaboration with Nebraska City will be mobile. We plan to have a date set in mid-October with the Nebraska City Public Library, whose archives include Arbor Day (which Nebraska City was the home of) as well as the only site in the state recognized by the National Park Service as a point on the Underground Railroad. We have also had our campus’ Service Learning Academy express interest in the project as a potential partner with community members, P-12 educators, and UNO faculty.

Challenges
There have been a number of challenges with getting the mobile lab out into the communities. We knew building trust was key and this took a lot more time than we estimated. Jason Hepplar and Joyce Neujahr attended many community events to build trust and have the community understand the process of digitization, preservation, and access. Unfortunately, we had some staff turnover that included people that were part of the Mobile Archives team. But we’ve been able to maintain buy-in and expectation-setting with library leadership that ensured the project did not succumb.

The greatest challenge wasn’t technical, but social: communication has been the most time-consuming aspect of our work so far. My first ever meeting with this community happened in August 2017, and after attending at least six community-based meetings and events, many emails and face-to-face conversations, and outreach to related organizations and communities, we’ve set our first event on September 29, 2018. Setting up these relationships and finding dates that worked well for our community’s own schedules was no small task.

Building trust will certainly be our longest and hardest phase. Working with communities that have been historically underrepresented or misrepresented takes time. We have had a very long process of identifying community partners and building up a repertoire with them -- at least ten months of our work so far has been focused on building this trust through attending community meetings, working within other networks to meet communities that might work with us, and keeping conversations going. This all takes a lot of time, and in our experience, it is not unusual for the community to put things on hold -- after all, we are creating new work for them on top of things they are already doing for their local communities. That means communication just ceases sometimes, even for weeks at a time. But continuing to check in and make yourself a recognizable face goes a long way in building this relationship.

As is assuring the community that the work being undertaken here is a partnership, not an extractive relationship. These are, after all, community archives that hold great personal and cultural importance to the individuals we work with -- and resistance, hesitation, or denial of materials use in our digital archive is understandably expected. But this is an important moment for promoting such digital partnerships in Indian Country, especially considering previous colonial attempts to "silence" Native voices from most archives. In 1995, the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot identified the archive as a principle site where the voice of colonized and subjected peoples have been silenced. Over the last forty years, scholars have made enormous advances in documenting and interpreting Native history, but much of that has remained within scholarly conversations and has not filtered out into public consumption and consideration. Our community partners are most excited about representing their archives and their history, and Mobile Archives is giving them an outlet to make that happen.

---

2 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.)
What’s next

We feel we are solidly in Phase 3 where we can kick off our mobile digitization lab and begin digitization. We are sending and posting a Save the Date for our first outing on September 29, 2018 with the Circle of Grandmothers in Omaha. One of the important realizations we had in outreach with our community partners was their desire to see urban Indians better represented, both in archives but also as a matter of local and regional policy. We’ll post fliers within the community to spread the word. We’ll continue to attend and speak at community events and talk about our plans for the project and hope to gain more interest and partner with others to set more digitization dates.

We’ll follow up with the Circle of Grandmothers when the materials are ready to be accessed and provide them with the option to take digital copies for themselves as a thumb drive or download link from Box. The digital files we create through our community engagement find their way into the American Indian Digital History Project (aidhp.com), an initiative to digitize important Tribal documents and lead new ventures into community archiving. By partnering with Tribal communities, Tribal Colleges, Native organizations, libraries, and the general public to digitize primary sources, we are encouraging responsible research into Native history and present-day issues through the recovery, sharing, preservation, and protection of invaluable material. AIDHP currently provides access to Akwesasne Notes published between 1969 and 1984, an important newspaper to the Red Power era, as well as local Omaha tribal newsletters. In addition to the material we collect through Mobile Archives, we are currently processing a variety of material including oral histories, local newspapers and newsletters, photographs, and other Tribal documents deemed acceptable for public use.

The homepage of the American Indian Digital History Project (aidhp.com).

There are several potential audiences for distributing the work once completed, not only among LYRASIS partners but also academic organizations such as the American Studies Association (ASA), the Organization of American Historians (OAH), the American Historical Association (AHA), and the National
Council on Public History (NCPH). Community mailing lists such as H-Net can also be used along with Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, the results of the pilot project can be written up for publication in any number of journals to share with others interested in pursing similar projects.

Helpful Resources


Materials

In the next couple of pages, you will find some examples of our marketing materials for the project.

An early flier to publicize the project from when we hosted an Archives open house on campus.
Mobile Digitization and Maker Space Lab

Dr Jason A. Hopple, Digital Engagement Librarian
paleo archaeology, curator, Digitization Lab

Jeanie Huguet, Director, Heritage Services
University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

Collaborating with local and regional communities to tell new stories and enable new research

We are pursuing partnerships with local communities to explore how we might capture local archives and, when appropriate, make those collections available to students, scholars, and the public. The availability of these local archives will allow groundbreaking avenues of research for students as well as promote a more informed Native and non-Native citizenry about issues relevant to Tribal communities.

OUI PLAN

1. Mobile lab
   - We will develop a mobile lab and outfitting it with digitization equipment, 3D scanners, and 3D printers.

2. Involve students
   - We will hire a student from UMass and an additional community member to work on the project with us.

3. Identify communities
   - We will develop partnerships with the college community and community members interested in working with us and/or participate.

A digital archive

In partnership with the American Indian History Project, we will digitize material deemed accessible for public consumption.

Long-term partnerships

Long-term, we expect to develop the project to establish ongoing partnerships with communities in the Great Plains region.
Save the date flier

We are gathering items of community significance that we would not otherwise see.

On September 29th, we are asking that you bring your photographs, letters, scrapbooks, and other documents that are significant to your family, your life, Nebraska history, or tribal history. We will photograph your items, listen to your stories, and upload the images to an online archive so more people can learn.

We will not be keeping your items -- you take them with you back to your communities where they belong. Participants will also receive digital copies of all of their material.

Contact:
Jason A. Heppler
jheppler@unomaha.edu
402-554-5879

We are gathering items of community significance that we would not otherwise see.

On September 29th, we are asking that you bring your photographs, letters, scrapbooks, and other documents that are significant to your family, your life, Nebraska history, or tribal history. We will photograph your items, listen to your stories, and upload the images to an online archive so more people can learn.

We will not be keeping your items -- you take them with you back to your communities where they belong. Participants will also receive digital copies of all of their material.

Contact:
Jason A. Heppler
jheppler@unomaha.edu
402-554-5879