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Suellyn Lathrop

Western Kentucky University, suellyn.lathrop@wku.edu

Sue Lynn McDaniel

Western Kentucky University, sue.lynn.mcdaniel@wku.edu

Nancy Richey

Western Kentucky University, nancy.richey@wku.edu

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EXPOSING OURSELVES :

A CASE STUDY IN COLLECTION MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE IMPLEMENTATION

Suellyn Lathrop, Sue Lynn McDaniel, Nancy Richey

Suellyn Lathrop is the Western Kentucky University Archivist and can be reached at suellyn.lathrop@wku.edu. Sue Lynn McDaniel is a Library Coordinator at Western Kentucky University and can be reached at sue.lynn.mcdaniel@wku.edu. Nancy Richey is a Photograph Curator at Western Kentucky University and can be reached at nancy.richey@wku.edu.

Introduction and Background

In the 21st century, libraries are well aware of the problem of hidden collections and so must seek by computer technology to make these “virtually” hidden collections available to our clients in a single, easy-to-use database. The Kentucky Library & Museum (KYLM), which opened in 1939, houses the special collections department of Western Kentucky University Libraries, and holds materials collected from 1919 to the present. Special collection libraries and archives such as the KYLM are known for their diversity of materials including manuscripts, ephemera, institutional records, maps, images, objects, audio and video recordings. These collections are of great research value to scholars across disciplines. Traditionally, access records for KYLM collections were produced in the analog forms of card files and legacy finding aids, thus limiting their use to in-house researchers. As the library’s OPAC developed, bibliographic records were created for books and periodicals housed in the Kentucky Library, as well as some collection level records for manuscript and university archives collections. However, museum objects, photographs and Folklife archives, as well as other non-book collections had never been entered into the library OPAC and were accessed only through paper finding aids. These roadblocks to the collected knowledge of the KYLM primary sources limited the use of our intellectual capital and the production of new intellectual property.

The problem of hidden collections in libraries across the country is one that has been addressed

particularly by the Association of Research Libraries special collections libraries survey conducted in 1998. The ARL Special Collections Task Force summarized the results of the survey in 2001 identifying many unique issues. The “hidden” collections are deemed:

- vulnerable to theft
- inaccessible to researchers because of distance or availability and the financial hardships created by traveling to collections
- inaccessible due to dependence on staff for their institutional memory
- unbrowseable
- exceptional, resulting in omission during retrospective cataloging or in the creation of substandard guides (Jones, 2009, p.3).

Barbara M. Jones and Judith M. Pantich (2004) have also observed that “[t]he problem of hidden collections is one of the oldest and most vexing in modern archives and libraries. Unprocessed and under processed backlogs of special collections are, for all intents and purposes, unavailable and often unknown to scholars. They are demoralizing and frustrating to librarians and archivists. They prevent us from realizing to the fullest possible extent our professional commitments to public service, to teaching, and to outreach.”

KYLM Software Decision and Description

KYLM personnel were very aware of this problem and of the value of their collections, and knew that other institutions have noted “while the hidden collection problem is a national and even international one, solutions to it must be found at the local level” (Steele, 2008, p. 316-317, 331).

KYLM staff realized that diverse user groups now demand multiple ways of accessing research materials, including subject and full-text searching of institutional repositories, finding aids, search engine indexing and examples of original documents. It is no longer acceptable to get, catalog and preserve materials, libraries are expected to promote the use of the collections through as many means possible (Whittaker, 2006). Therefore, in 2005, the department purchased PastPerfect software to accession and catalog incoming acquisitions. Purchase criteria included price, ease of setup and use, Information Technology (IT) support and the department head's positive history elsewhere with the software. Created in 1996, PastPerfect Software for Museums™ says that it provides affordable collection management software for museums. It has six main components: Accessions, Objects Catalog, Archives Catalog, Library Catalog, Photographs Catalog and People Biographies. It can track loans, exhibits, volunteers and fundraising campaigns. The software has a number of built-in report capabilities and is equipped with the *Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging (Chenhall's Nomenclature)*, *ART and Architecture Thesaurus-Getty Union List of Artist Names* and *LC Thesaurus for Graphic Materials I: Subject Terms*. The Archives Catalog is further subdivided to provide for the cataloging of maps, music, oral histories, archives and manuscripts. Also, important to the KYLM decision was that the catalog's subsets provide for detailed descriptions of cartographic elements, individual songs, artists, interview indexing, record box and folder lists. These features allow researchers to drill down several layers into the catalog for information. Finding aids can be generated easily and quickly for patrons in-house or as standalone web pages at any point during processing.

While the program does not create encoded archival description (EAD) finding aids from the data, it does allow for the import and export of data information from and to Excel, ASCII, and dBase and FoxPro files. For a fee, PastPerfect

conversion teams will assist in transferring data from other sources into the database. The software at first seems more geared to the Museum and Historical Society environment but there is much here that is familiar to the librarian. PastPerfect features fields conforming to international standards and hierarchical description; records can be imported from or exported to MARC and Dublin Core; and search strategies include Boolean and Keyword (Canadian Heritage Information Network, 2003). Google search indexing is also a part of the online version.

The software also allows images to be scanned or imported from digital cameras. Multiple images can be assigned to a single record which aids in the description and identification of KYLM three dimensional objects. The software has zooming capabilities which are useful to end users when high resolution images are imported. Metadata is automatically imported regarding file size, format and location of file, eliminating the need of double data entry by staff. Additional metadata can be recorded such as a caption, creator, date created, resolution, mode, software and equipment used to acquire an image giving researchers more searchable information. With this metadata, researchers can determine if an image meets publication needs. Several websites offer helpful feature comparisons for PastPerfect and other software systems. One that our faculty found particularly useful is located at http://www.chin.gc.ca/English/Collections_Management/index.html

Training and Setup

Initially, KYLM staff received a two-day training session from a member of the PastPerfect team along with an instruction notebook. Since that time, new employees have been trained by staff and/or have received training via webinar from the PastPerfect support team. Staff members train student employees. The most tech savvy staff member, by default, became the system administrator, receiving additional training and support. She worked with the PastPerfect team to set up accounts at various levels for data entry. Currently, KYLM uses a single administrative

account, twelve staff accounts, student/volunteer accounts, each permitting varying levels of access and editing rights. The student account can be used by multiple students on multiple computers simultaneously. Staff members have access and edit rights in the six main components as well as access to the research/reports features. Students are allowed input into the four catalogs with proper supervision to insure that no two individuals are editing a single record at the same time. This setup has allowed each area's collection (library, photographs, manuscripts, university archives and museum) to be processed at a faster rate so that now the public can see it results almost immediately.

Five faculty members representing the five main areas formed the PastPerfect Task Force. Early on, the group created a KYLM PastPerfect Guide. Project objectives and outcomes were quickly developed and included:

- Provide a database of the KYLM collections that can be made available to the public, initially through work stations in the KYLM and eventually via the Internet.
- KYLM personnel are to focus on entering enough data to provide a basic level of access but not worry about cataloging every item in detail.
- In large collections, KYLM personnel are to exercise discretion as to the number of items that are scanned and added to the database.
- Items that generate a recurring or high number of requests for publication-quality images should be considered for inclusion in the [department's] Virtual Library & Museum (VLM) (Staebell, 2009).

The Guide also includes basic instructions and protocols for data entry to ensure reliable searching and output such as the assignment of accession numbers, entering contact/donor records, entering accessions, use of museum nomenclature and scanning standards. The image metadata features of PastPerfect will eliminate the need to maintain the existing VLM database as data is transferred into PastPerfect. Over time, as issues of data entry standardization and changes in procedures have come up, the

Task Force has revised the guide.

Implementation

Data entry commenced and was accessible to patrons only through staff-performed searches. By the fall of 2008, with over 6000 records, it was time to investigate upgrading to PastPerfect's online version in order to open the collections to the public. In our ensuing discussions with PastPerfect's Technology Department and Western Kentucky's IT, we discovered that WKU operates a UNIX system which was found to be incompatible with the Past Perfect's online catalog. Therefore, the decision was made to allow PastPerfect to host the site.

The members of the task force prepared for the online upload by running authority file reports against the People Biographies, Subjects and Search Terms in order to correct typing errors, check consistency of data entry and do a general cleanup. The *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials* is supplied as an authority file in the subject field as a picklist. Entries can be modified and new terms added as needed to speed up the data entry process. The search term field is empty and is populated by catalogers who have the option of adding terms to create a picklist or entering data directly into the field which also becomes part of the picklist. The people and subject reports were twenty-eight pages, two-column reports. A fifty-seven page report was generated on search terms indicating the number of times each search term appeared in each of the four catalogs.

Staff then had the documentation to further revise *KYLM PastPerfect Ground Rules* and to continue to standardize data entry. As mentioned earlier, PastPerfect comes with three thesauri/authority files already loaded which can be used as picklists. Several users were not aware of this and were typing entries into data fields. As a result, the search term and subject term fields were not being used consistently. Several meetings were needed to resolve these issues and cleanup of the records took a full week.

The Task Force decided to use the picklist supplied in the Subjects field. Duplicates in the Search Term field then had to be moved to the

Subject field and deleted from search terms. Furthermore, LC headings that did not appear in the combined thesauri would be added to the picklist by copying headings found in the library catalog. Lastly, all users were expected to always check the picklists before doing any original data entry in order to improve consistency and eliminate typographical errors.

Internally, our Task Force agreed to use the Search Term field for geographic terms, corporate entities, families (e.g. Gibbs family) and terms not found in the Subject picklist. Debate continues about the entry of names for natural language name searching. Once the site was live, it became apparent that this is not necessary as the keyword search feature finds words regardless of placement.

As time permits, catalogers are beginning to populate the People Biographies records. Available fields include full name, first name, last name, other names, birthdates, birthplace, death date, death place, mother, father, spouses, children, places and/or geographical areas of residence, titles and honors, relationships, education, role, nationality, publications, occupation/sphere of activity and notes. Additional discussions need to occur concerning the appropriate amount of information to include in the public catalog about living people. Alphabetical picklists are created as names are entered. We decided early on to enter data in the surname, first name, birth year (when known), and death year (when known) fields to create a basic standardized entry and identify individuals with similar names. From there, we found the following types of entries and the confusion can be seen when we do not follow standardized rules:

Chandler, Happy
Chandler, Albert
Chandler, Albert Benjamin, 1898-1991
Chandler, Albert Benjamin (1898-1991)
Chandler, Albert Benjamin "Happy"

Women with multiple marriages posed a similar problem. We learned that some catalogers were familiar with the persons of interest, while others lacking that knowledge simply had to rely on the

item in hand to select the name authority at the time of data entry. The more knowledgeable staff members have edited the people records. While PastPerfect does have a search and replace feature, the staff have been reluctant to use it, so for every term that needed to be revised or moved, each record had to be opened and changed. Changing the picklist does not affect the entries already in the catalog.

Image files were also reviewed and several were over the size limit set forth in the guidelines. These files were pulled, resized and reloaded. Communication was the key to getting the authority files cleaned up. The Task Force updated the internal guide to reflect decisions made, including procedures for data entry.

With the installation of PastPerfect's online version, Task Force members have access to a new field, the "Include in Web Export" check box. As the data entry is cleaned up, each record meeting the minimum data entry requirements must be checked in order to load to the PastPerfect server for web viewing by researchers. During this time, staff discussed which fields should be made available for researchers, labels for those fields, search options and website design. Everyone checked existing PastPerfect sites to see what was being done in other institutions. In doing so, the staff were unaware of a disconnect between what they were seeing and how the data entry had been done at these sites. It is not readily apparent in looking at a site which fields the data is being pulled from for the search results, reflecting the localized nature of cataloging in repositories. The Task Force met and created our website, through a multi-step process: fields to be searched were chosen from each catalog, display order determined, field names modified for ease of use, and all images watermarked. After three hours of intense discussion, the Task Force was ready to upload the website.

Some glitches occurred during the first upload on February 13, 2009. The PastPerfect server wanted to communicate only with the administrator's computer / IP address. It takes between 24 and 72 hours for a site to become

visible. Once up and running, the site was reviewed. Some fields were marked for deletion and the order of fields was revised. HTML links were not functioning and the detailed box and folder listings in the Archives Catalog were not accessible. University Archives staff had been doing most of their data entry in the box and folder lists. The next week saw the revolution of the look of the website in terms of matching the existing KYLM website, changes in field order and removal of some fields. All HTML links were revised and made workable. More records were reviewed, revised and marked for inclusion on the website. Of the approximately 7000 records, a little over 2000 were now available online. As data entry is done by personnel and students with varying expertise, the appropriate Task Force member reviews the records to provide record enhancement and ensure quality control. The need for review creates a lag between initial data entry and uploading for public use.

No one has entered data using the music or oral history detail sections yet. The music detail section allows for listing track numbers, track length, song title, composer, artists and instruments. The oral history detail section provides space to record media id number, side, start time and subject. A similar solution will need to be created in order to make this information available online.

The additional features of “email this site,” “feedback” and “order image” were activated during the second upload. The feedback and order photo email are routed to the KYLM Reference email account. Again, we encountered glitches. Test emails and photo orders were rejected as undeliverable. During the testing, it was found that email was being read as spam when sent to non-WKU email addresses. This problem was quickly corrected. The university archivist also discovered a work-around solution for the container lists. A report can be generated for each record group or series. These reports are marked up using Dreamweaver™ and posted online as web pages. They are also converted to PDF files and loaded in TopScholar, the university’s institutional repository. A hyperlink

is provided from the KYLM site to the finding aid in TopScholar.

Maintenance

After several months testing and revising, the PastPerfect online catalog was named KenCat and links were created from the KYLM and main library’s websites. Data entry continues daily. The system administrator uploads data once a week. As of July 21, 2009, there are 13,227 records with 4650 available online, which means that data entry is progressing at about 900 entries per month. As reported by Mugridge and Edmunds, and others as they have opened access doors, and hidden collections, our library has also seen “significant increases in use of electronic resources and microforms within days (and sometimes within hours)” as materials are uploaded into KenCat because “use of electronic resources is inextricably linked to discoverability” (Mugridge & Edmunds, 2009). Additionally, since loading and using the site, staff have found some interesting features of KenCat. A count of the type of records appears at the top of a search result. This count includes all the records entered, not just those available online. Search terms become hyperlinks while subject terms do not. Subject terms are searchable through the “Click and Search” feature which provides field specific picklists. A search report is generated automatically which indicates how researchers are using the site and lists the top ten search requests. The staff has received information regarding unidentified photographs. The feedback form makes this easy for the researcher and KYLM staff by placing the photo number in the subject line of the email. Use and reproduction requests of photographs have increased as well. One example, the Pershing Rifles digital collection has recently been added to University Archives and is being uploaded into KenCat as additions are received via email. The donor is alerting others to the collection resulting in additional donations. Thus, our library has begun to eliminate the barriers of distance and travel expense by providing online access to a wider variety of materials. Patrons can search for themselves without relying on or having to find the “resident

expert” on a particular topic. Collections are becoming browseable through the “random images” feature. Portions of collections are being cataloged “on demand” as researchers request materials or artifacts go on exhibition. Lastly, and best, patrons have come in looking for sources that they found on KenCat. These items were not easily accessible prior to the implementation of KenCat, certainly not online. Once in the door, these researchers are gaining access to our remaining “hidden collections” through the traditional access methods. KenCat is allowing us to introduce many previously unused materials to existing and new users.

Conclusion

Overall, PastPerfect is a good solution for WKU Libraries’ Department of Special Collections. It has the flexibility needed to handle the range of materials housed in the Kentucky Library &

Museum and allows for description at all levels: collection, series, sub-series, box, folder, item and multiple parts of an object. Promotion of our collections is built-in and word is spreading via the email page and other common web features. Lastly, PastPerfect allows us to no longer fear the donor who comes in with a “closed box.” We may not know what treasures or trash are hiding in there, but we can now, from intake to dissemination, speed up the process, get valuable cultural data out to the researcher, and produce a very useable researcher-friendly digital presence in accordance with the ACRL/SAA Joint Statement on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries (ACRL/SAA Joint Statement, 2009).

KenCat, our customized version of PastPerfect Online, is available at <http://wku.pastperfect-online.com/35749cgi/mweb.exe?request=ks>

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