The Digitizing of '34

Traci JoLeigh Drummond
Georgia State University

Kathryn Michaelis
Georgia State University

The *Uprising of '34* Collection: A Brief History
Traci JoLeigh Drummond and Kathryn Michaelis

The *Uprising of '34* collection was donated to the Southern Labor Archives (SLA), part of Special Collections and Archives at Georgia State University (GSU) Library, in October 1995. The collection includes video footage of interviews conducted by filmmakers George Stoney and Judith Helfand in order to tell the story of the fallout of the 1934 general textile strikes in the South, and the legacy of pain and silence left in their wake. In addition to the interviews, the collection contains B-roll and archival footage, audiocassettes, transcripts (and partial transcripts), administrative documentation, photocopies of research from other archives and libraries, and photographs, both historical and those taken of subjects and their surroundings during the filming of the documentary. The focus of this article will be on the audiovisual materials, which consist of 1,400 videocassettes in different formats: U-Matic, VHS, Hi8, and Betacam SP. It remains unlike any other collection the SLA has ever received in its 45 years, and processing practices, as they were created for paper collections, were not appropriate for the collection and resulted in problems with arrangement, description, and access to the collection.

In 2015, GSU Library was awarded a grant by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) in the amount of $121,418 to digitize, transcribe, and make available online the audiovisual content in the *Uprising of '34* collection. The process of applying for the grant was complicated by the haphazard history of the collection: documentation was incomplete and unreliable; audiovisual materials had been reorganized and relocated over the years in a way that made them difficult to locate; and some of the 20-year-old videotapes had begun to deteriorate. The grant application process revealed many of the problems with the collection's organization and documentation, but the application process and subsequent grant-funded activity have also helped library staff gain intellectual control over the collection's contents and solve the problems of preservation and access.

Acquisition and Processing

The *Uprising of '34* collection came to the SLA in the same year the documentary was released. The late Cliff Kuhn, former director of the Oral History Association and professor of history at GSU, worked closely with the filmmakers and others associated with the production of the film and ultimately convinced Stoney to donate the collection to GSU despite offers from other institutions. The donor file for the collection also shows that Gary Fink, former professor of labor history (GSU), and Julia Marks Young, former department head for Special Collections and Archives (GSU), also wrote letters to Stoney promoting the SLA as a fitting home for the collection due to its subject strengths, available space at the archives, and the department's ability to care for its contents.

The first part of the collection was received in 1995, with subsequent additions in 1999 and 2000. Processing was completed in 2000. Prior to or during arrangement, Betacam SP submasters were made, perhaps as preservation copies, for the first 112 Hi8 videocassettes, which were thought to contain the only original interviews at the time. However, original interviews were on both Hi8 and Betacam SP. The filmmakers had

also copied original footage from both the Hi8 and Betacam SP to VHS and U-Matic tapes. Some were a direct transfer (1:1), others were split between two videocassettes (1:2). Because of this, some interviews exist in several formats and can have as many as six or seven associated tapes: for example, an interview originally conducted on Betacam SP (one hour) might be split onto two VHS cassettes (30 minutes each) and two U-Matic cassettes (30 minutes each) and an audiocassette recording might have also been made concurrently with the interview (one hour).

While processing the collection, staff organized the tapes first by location—listed by state, then city—and by interviewee's last name. All interviews listed in the finding aid were assigned a series of coded numbers and letters depending on which formats were created for a particular interview: T (transcript available), 8 (Hi8), 4 (Beta, big cassette), 3 (3/4 inch U-Matic tape), 2 (VHS), 1 (Beta, small cassette), and C (audiocassette). These codes are unintuitive, and their meaning is quickly lost to the researcher as they scroll through the finding aid and lose sight of the referential code directory.

What is most problematic, however, is that there is no indication of how many tapes exist for each interview, no indication that some interviewees were interviewed at different times and may have more than one interview, and no indication that some single-instance interviews were so long that multiple videos had to be used to record the content. For example, while there may be a Betacam SP master, it is possible the content was reformatted into two VHS tapes and two U-Matic tapes. If someone was interviewed on two separate dates, there may be as many as ten or twelve tapes associated with two distinct interviews, but this is not reflected in the finding aid. This is an issue for both the researcher and the staff member retrieving content for the patron.

It is unknown who exactly processed the collection. The donor file, where the archives keeps information on all aspects of a collection, has no notes regarding a processing plan or oversight of the project. However frustrating the finding aid may be, it should be noted that whomever processed the collection—and the archivist who supervised them—likely would have had experience processing traditional manuscript collections. That this collection is almost entirely comprised of multiple copies of unique video recordings makes it different from all other collections in Special Collections and Archives; it is also difficult to find collections similar to the *Uprising of '34* in terms of content at other repositories.[1]

A literature review for audiovisual processing guidelines dated through 2000, when this collection was processed, bore no useful results. Manuals for describing audiovisual materials do so through traditional cataloging, suggesting the audiovisual materials they are concerned with are neither unique nor prolific.[2] Articles written

[1] The Talmage Farlow Documentary Film Collection, 1979-2011, at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University Libraries; the John Hanson film collection, 1970-1980, at the State Historical Society of North Dakota State Archives; and the *Eye of the Storm* Documentary Film Collection at the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia are similar in size and makeup. Of these, the *Eye of the Storm* collection has the most thorough arrangement and description available online. It was processed in 2011 and could not have been used as a model for the *Uprising of '34* finding aid.

[2] Titles like Nancy Olson, *A Catalogers Guide to MARC Coding and Tagging for Audiovisual Material* (Dekalb, IL: Minnesota Scholarly Press, 1993) and Karen C. Driessen et al., *A Library Manager's Guide*

before 2000 about audiovisual collections touch more on work in an archival setting but do not address issues with collections like the *Uprising of '34*.

Adding to the frustration of using the collection is the technological obsolescence of machines used to play the formats listed above. Staff did not have access to Beta, U-Matic, or Hi8 players at the time of processing and were unable to review all of the footage for comparison and complete assessment. If the equipment had been available, other resources may not have, namely adequate staff to review over 300 hours of video footage and provide authoritative description for the content therein.

Access Issues

During Traci Drummond's tenure as archivist for the Southern Labor Archives, the *Uprising of '34* collection has been underutilized. It is unclear how often the collection was used before she began in 2007. Since that time, it has only been requested occasionally, and often the transcripts in the collection have been used instead of the videotapes. Unfortunately, a transcript does not exist for every interview.

When patrons have requested the videotapes, attempts to locate and retrieve tapes have been dismal. This is primarily due to the fact that the collection was moved from the main library building to offsite storage in 2010, then back to the main library in 2014, without regard to the existing organization or preservation needs of the collection. On one occasion, a student worker spent almost an entire day looking through boxes for ten interviews, finding only half. For many years, there was also the disadvantage of having video but no equipment to view it. Many of the VHS copies have no sound, so even though they could be viewed it was not worth the effort. U-Matic tapes had sound, but were clearly not originals and playback was frequently of very poor quality. As mentioned under the acquisition and processing section, Special Collections and Archives did not always have the necessary equipment to play all formats, also impeding access.

Fortunately, a grant opportunity presented itself at the end of 2014. Drummond and Kathryn Michaelis, the Library's Digital Projects Coordinator, decided to apply for a Digital Dissemination of Archival Collections grant from NHPRC. With grant funding, the Library could afford professional digitization and transcription services that would increase accessibility to the collection in a way that was never previously imagined.

Preparing the Grant Application

When work began on the grant application to digitize the collection, Michaelis first consulted the finding aid for information on the collection's contents. The collection-level historical note and scope and content note provide a serviceable summary of the interviews and a bit of background on the documentary and the collection. However, much more detail was necessary to craft a convincing narrative that would sufficiently demonstrate the collection's historical significance and justify funding its digitization. To this end, Michaelis began reviewing the videotapes about six months prior to the grant deadline.

---

to the Physical Processing of Nonprint Materials (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1995) suggest that these books were written primarily for libraries and media centers.

She went to work with a spreadsheet that had been created by a student worker based on the collection's finding aid. Though she had been warned that the finding aid was inaccurate, this proved to be an understatement—as a result of having been relocated in such a disorganized manner, almost none of the tapes were in the boxes that the finding aid indicated. The finding aid also listed which video formats were available for each interview. In general, when a VHS or U-Matic was noted, that format was actually present, though frequently the VHS copy was located in one box and the U-Matic in another, and more often than not, neither was the box indicated in the finding aid. However, most of the Hi8 and Beta master copies were stored in a separate location, which project staff were unaware of during the initial assessment because they were not included in the finding aid. That led project staff to believe that they would be digitizing either the VHS or U-Matic access copies—whichever was of the best quality—for most of the interviews.

This worried the project team, because many of the VHS tapes had no sound. A significant number of the U-Matic tapes had picture quality issues, and some made such an alarming squealing noise when inserted into the player that Michaelis declined to play them for fear they might break. Many of the Beta tapes were unable to be played at all; while the library has a Beta player, it plays only Betamax tapes and most of the Beta in the collection are Betacam SP format. Though frustrating, both the deterioration of the physical tapes and the obsolescence of the formats clearly illustrated the need to digitize this collection for preservation and access.

In addition to video, the collection contains several hundred audio cassettes. The cassettes are labeled with the names of the interviewees who appear on them. Some names appear on both video and audio tapes, but it is not clear based on the collection documentation whether the interviews are duplicated or unique. The volume of video and audio recordings compared to available resources—namely the time constraints and responsibilities of staff—made reviewing each item to identify duplicates between video and audio formats impractical, so project staff decided to digitize everything and sort it out during the grant period. It was decided that if an interview appears in both audio and video formats, only the video version will be transcribed or synced and uploaded.

Digitization of the Collection
The grant funding awarded to GSU Library allowed project staff to do the following in order to make the *Uprising of '34* collection accessible to the public:

1. Digitization of video/audio cassettes;
2. Transcription of video interviews;
3. Upload of audio/video interviews to YouTube;
4. For video, description and syncing of the transcript using the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS);[3]
5. For audio, description and indexing of the interview using OHMS;
6. Upload of the synced or indexed interview to GSU Library's *Uprising of '34* Digital Collection.[4]

---

[3] "Oral History Metadata Synchronizer," Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, accessed October 3, 2016, http://www.oralhistoryonline.org/.

Digitization and transcription were outsourced to vendors. The Library hired a student worker to digitize the audio cassettes during the grant period of August 1, 2016, to January 31, 2017, and the unique audio interviews are being indexed by the Library Technical Assistant (LTA) who has been hired for the grant project. The LTA has been comparing the audio tape descriptions and contents to the videos, with which she is now intimately familiar, to determine which are unique and will be indexed using the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS) and uploaded to the Library's Digital Collections.

Insufficient Funding

As mentioned previously, most of the master Hi8 copies of the video interviews were stored in a location separate from the collection boxes listed in the finding aid. After the initial video inventory was completed, it was believed that there were about 232 hours of video that needed to be digitized. That number served as the basis for the price quotes for digitization and transcription—$7,595 and $32,422, respectively—that were included in the grant budget. However, after all of the Hi8 masters were located, it turned out that there were actually slightly more than 300 hours worth of video. Therefore, the digitization ended up costing about $2,000 more than had been anticipated and was not in the grant budget. Project staff decided to go ahead and pay from the grant money to have everything digitized, since preservation of the video was paramount. Unfortunately, the extra $2,000 had to come from the funding for transcription, meaning that this budget, which was already based on an insufficient number of hours, was now short by $2,000. As a result, there were 151 interviews in the inventory that project staff were unable to pay to have transcribed with grant funds. After reviewing all 151, they were grouped into the following categories:

- 24 interviews that project staff decided to index in OHMS instead of transcribing, because the interviews featured groups of speakers and transcription would be difficult and time-intensive.
- 32 interviews that were duplicates of earlier interviews, or duplicate segments of longer interviews so the team decided not to transcribe or index.
- 95 interviews, a majority of the files, that were unique interviews that still needed to be transcribed.

Some of the interviews in the collection had been transcribed years earlier, and their transcripts are part of the collection. However, there were several issues: not all interviews had been transcribed; those that had been transcribed were transcribed according to outdated conventions; some of the transcripts exist only in paper format; and those that exist in electronic format were created with archaic WordPerfect software and are riddled with formatting quirks and idiosyncratic characters. In light of the budget predicament, it was decided that imperfect transcripts were better than no transcripts at all, and Michaelis went through the old transcripts to see if imperfect versions existed of any interviews that were on the "still-to-transcribe" list. It turned out

---

[4] "The Uprising of '34 Collection," Georgia State University Library, accessed October 3, 2016, http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/uprising.

that 43 of the 95 remaining interviews had transcripts already. These old transcripts are being converted to Microsoft Word documents and edited by the project's LTA and graduate assistant.

After locating the 43 old transcripts, project staff were left with 52 interviews to transcribe from scratch. The older transcripts were identified in March 2016, approximately eight months into the 18-month grant period. Each remaining interview was approximately 30 minutes long, which, at a transcription rate of 90-150 minutes per interview—three to five times the length of the interview—would have translated to between 78 and 130 hours of work for project staff. Project staff were concerned about the feasibility of accomplishing that amount of transcription as well as syncing and upload of interviews within the time frame of the grant period. The option of indexing the interviews, rather than transcribing and syncing them, was discussed. However, project staff agreed that having transcripts alongside the recorded interviews would be preferable, since it provides a much greater level of access to the collection content. The idea of crowdsourcing transcription, which had not previously been considered as a possibility for the grant project because of concerns over time and accuracy, was discussed, and project staff agreed to try it.

An advertisement asking for volunteer transcribers was sent out on the listservs for GSU's history department and Master in Heritage Preservation program. Several interested students volunteered. Later the advertisement was posted on GSU Library's public blog and sent out to the Society of Georgia Archivists' listserv. As of the time of this writing, 23 people have offered to help transcribe. Most volunteers only completed one transcript, but several finished one, then asked to do another. Sixteen transcripts have been completed and returned to project staff. Fourteen are in the process of being transcribed by volunteers. Eighteen have yet to be assigned to anyone for transcription. The remaining four have been transcribed in house.

The results of the crowdsourcing experiment have been mixed. The quality of the crowdsourced transcripts, which was a major source of concern for project staff, turned out to be a non-issue—the transcripts have been, overall, just as accurate (and in some cases, more accurate) as the transcripts that were transcribed professionally. Performing quality control checks of transcripts, regardless of who transcribed them, has been a part of the project's workflow since the beginning, so any mistakes that exist in crowdsourced transcripts are likely to be caught and corrected.

Though the quality of the crowdsourced transcripts has been surprisingly good, turnaround time has been a problem. Volunteers who were assigned interviews to transcribe and those who did not send the completed transcripts within three to four weeks were emailed to follow up. All but one of them replied that the transcripts were still in process; however, nearly a month after follow-up, many of the transcripts have still not yet been received.

Outreach

NHPRC requires that grant-funded projects be publicized through outreach activities. Project staff sought to target outreach efforts in order to share the project with multiple user communities, including academic audiences and the general public. Project staff posted about the project on the library blog when the grant was first received, then again when work had progressed to the point of having around 100

interviews accessible online.[5] At least one more blog post will be posted before the end of the grant period.

In February 2016, project staff were able to partner with the Spartanburg County, South Carolina, Public Library (SCPL) to conduct an event for the public. Spartanburg and the surrounding area have historically been home to a number of textile mills, and the local history collection at the library there includes a substantial amount of material related to textile manufacturing history. Working with Steve Smith, the SCPL's Coordinator for Local History and Special Collections, Drummond helped organize a viewing of the *Uprising of '34* documentary followed by a panel discussion. The panel consisted of Drummond and Michaelis as well as Judith Helfand, the surviving *Uprising of '34* filmmaker, and Janet Irons, a historian at Lock Haven University and author of the book *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South*. The event was attended by more than 100 people, including some community members who witnessed the strike, and others who attested to the positive impact of the film on their communities after its release.

In addition to this article, project staff plan to submit a write-up of the project to another archives-related publication to reach the archives community. Drummond and Michaelis are also scheduled to present about the project at the Oral History Association's annual conference in October 2016. Google Analytics for the *Uprising of '34* digital collection show that it has received approximately 5,300 page views since January 2016, which means that far more content in the collection has been accessed in the last nine months than in the nearly 20 years the collection has been part of the SLA.

Conclusion

Preparing the *Uprising of '34* collection for digitization underscored the importance of keeping comprehensive documentation on collections from the time of acquisition and storing it consistently no matter the location. Many of the issues encountered during this process could have been avoided had better records been kept about the number and formats of the tapes that make up the collection, as well as the decisions that were made to move the collection back and forth. Still, care taken with documenting the tapes and providing consistent locations would not have helped during processing, when only some video formats were able to be reviewed because of a lack of equipment.

Preservation problems encountered in the collection are illustrative of the general state of audiovisual collections in archives; digitization provides a method of saving the content on deteriorating tapes, but it is expensive and requires specialized equipment and knowledge. Large-scale preservation reformatting of audiovisual collections will be difficult to fund with many library budgets. Grants can be a solution to part of the problem, but repositories will require creativity and financial commitment from administrations to reformat and save audiovisual content.

---

[5] See Kathryn Michaelis, "Georgia State University receives NHPRC grant to digitize Uprising of '34 footage," Georgia State University Library blog, June 11, 2015, accessed September 26, 2016, https://blog.library.gsu.edu/2015/06/11/georgia-state-university-receives-nhprc-grant-to-digitize-uprising-of-34-footage/ and Kathryn Michaelis, "Uprising of '34 Interviews Now Available Online," Georgia State University Library blog, January 14, 2016, accessed September 26, 2016, https://blog.library.gsu.edu/2016/01/14/uprising-of-34-interviews-now-available-online/.

The number of page views acquired since the collection became accessible online and the response at the community event in Spartanburg are both testaments to the power and importance of this collection. The footage, now widely accessible, will be useful to researchers, students, and the general public in their pursuits to learn more about the communities affected by the strike and the strike's lasting impact on the history of the South and the labor movement.

Traci JoLeigh Drummond, MSIS, CA, is archivist for the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University Library. She manages acquisition and appraisal for the collections, oversees oral history projects, provides instruction for university classes and union workshops, and performs outreach to labor unions, researchers, and donors.

Kathryn Michaelis is the Digital Projects Coordinator at Georgia State University Library. She manages the library's digitization program, including development, creation, description, and maintenance of unique digital collections, seeking grant funding for digitization projects, and managing personnel for digitization projects. She holds a Master of Science in Library Science from UNC Chapel Hill and a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of South Carolina.