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This exploratory study describes a questionnaire survey of members of Friends of Old Salem and Friends of MESDA and the Collection. The survey was conducted to determine user awareness and user satisfaction of those Friends who have access to the database to study early Southern craftsmen. The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) has placed online an index to the early southern Craftsmen records found in the Research Center at MESDA. This index to the full text Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans (IESAA) provides researchers with basic information about southern craftsmen who produced works in the South before 1821.

The study finds that while most MESDA patrons are aware of many of the formats of the Craftsmen Database, they are not as aware of the online version. The ultimate goal of the survey is to justify the expenditure needed to migrate and add information to the online database. Based on the user awareness findings, it is recommended that more user education about the online database is needed before further expenditures to improve the database can be justified.

Headings:

Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

MESDA Craftsmen Database

Southern Craftsmen

Southern Artists

User survey -- Statistics

Database -- Online – Survey

THE MUSEUM OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS (MESDA)
CRAFTSMEN DATABASE: A USER STUDY AND ANALYSIS

by
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Introduction

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) is the only museum dedicated to exhibiting and researching the regional decorative arts of the early South.¹ MESDA's ongoing research programs continue to explore the early South's craftsmen and their surviving artistry. Public dissemination of information and data collected, recorded, and correlated by the museum's research staff has been a primary role of MESDA from its beginning.

In order to explore and document the heritage of decorative arts surviving in the early South, Frank L. Horton, Bradford L. Rauschenberg, and Carolyn J. Weekley designed a long-term research program at MESDA. The program has two key foci: objects and makers. A catalog of objects, the Catalogue of Early Southern Decorative Arts (CESDA), was created through field research that locates and documents surviving examples of early southern material culture. Field researchers travel the South looking anywhere and everywhere to find decorative items made in the South before 1821.

¹ Much of the following material comes from the Old Salem Inc. publications and the Old Salem website, www.oldsalem.org.

Researchers have collected information about the makers, which is listed in the Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisan (IESAA), from primary research in public and private records of every county in the region designated by MESDA as the early South: Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and eastern Tennessee and Kentucky. These records included newspapers, city directories, court records, wills and inventories, and private papers. The researchers in the Research Center at MESDA have looked through hundreds of rolls of microfilm and microfiche examining these documents. The overriding purpose of this part of the research program is to collect and make accessible data on the lives and working habits of southern artists active prior to 1821. The records vary from simple entries to more complex listings including: descriptions of the work of the artisan, land transactions, vital statistics, objects produced, ads for products sold, and design sources. This program continues today, employing half a dozen researchers, and has collected information on over 76,000 artisans working in 126 trades.

There have been several indices to IESAA created through the years. The most recent, the online Craftsmen Database, provides web users a glimpse of the enormous wealth of information held in the MESDA Research Center. The Craftsmen Database is a searchable index with five fields of demographic information and a summary paragraph. This online database contains a portion of the biographical material available for each artist and artisan listed in the IESAA. The entry contains the artisan's full name, the geographic region(s) in which the artisan was active, the known date(s) the artisan was active, and the

trade(s) in which he/she was engaged. Each entry also contains the artisan's MESDA identification number, which can be used to solicit further information about the artisan from the full text IESAA files in the MESDA Research Center. In addition, if there are photographs of the artisan's work available in the Research Center, the entry will have an asterisk beside the ID number. A listing of the primary and secondary resources used to date by the MESDA researchers is also available online. Exact citations for each entry are available in the IESAA files. This can be very useful in helping other researchers back track sources and/or avoid duplication of effort.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to survey current and potential users of the Craftsmen Database to determine knowledge of the database and its usability and usefulness. It is the hope of the MESDA staff to find grant money to be able to migrate the database to more accommodating software and to increase the amount of information available online. Based on anecdotal information, it is felt that more researchers would use this database if these improvements were made. The survey will help determine if there is really a need for these improvements before expenditures are made.

Literature Review

An important component of offering any digital resource is its evaluation, both in terms of performance measurement and assessment.² Evaluation activities can include many types of instruments, including surveys, which can help to determine the validity of the resource. Validation is defined as “determining the correctness of the final program or software produced from a development project with respect to user's needs and requirements.”³

The Craftsmen Database at Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) is an example of a domain-specific, single function, in-house database. It was designed and constructed by MESDA personnel to fulfill one function: allow online access to an index of the full-text Index of Early Southern Arts and Artisans (IESAA) that is located in the Research Center card files. One of the major goals of this study is to determine the validity and usefulness of this database, that is, whether it is producing the results that researchers need and request.

Database Surveys

An extensive search of the available literature shows that little user-oriented research has been conducted to evaluate such tools as the Craftsmen Database. Most of the literature focuses on multiple databases within a digital

² Christine L. Borgman, Final Report to National Science Foundation, computer and Information Science Directorate, Information and Intelligent Systems Division, Fourth DELOS Workshop. Evaluation of Digital Libraries: Testbeds, Measurements, and Metrics. (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary, 6-7 June 2002): 4.

library system, the user interface for each of these databases, and how the user chooses between them. Nick Bryan-Kinns and Ann Blandford, in July of 2000, published an RIDL working paper titled "A Survey of User Studies for Digital Libraries."⁴ They state, "it is important to consider what attempts to understand digital libraries and their use have been undertaken."⁵ In their study they look at published surveys of users and potential users, at the kinds of activities these users were doing, at studies about digital library user interfaces and possible new designs, and at varying techniques that were used to conduct these surveys. They conclude that though there have been several studies on the use of digital libraries there have not been enough of them when compared to the number of studies done on hypertext, WWW, and information retrieval fields. They also conclude that "the studies have tended to focus on comparing user interfaces and search techniques rather than considering what people require of information services such as digital libraries, and how they might wish to use them."⁶

Carol Tenopir in "Database and Online System Usage"⁷ discusses the difficulty of tracking database and system use in all types of libraries. She looks at intermediary searching tools, such as Dialog and Lexis-Nexis, and at direct measures such as daily log-ins and hourly usage reports. She discusses the difficulties of comparing usage statistics between systems when there is no standardized tracking system. Her conclusion states:

³ Borgman, NSF Report on DELOS workshop: 5.

⁴ Nick Bryan-Kinns and Ann Blandford, "A Survey of Users Studies for Digital Libraries," RIDL working paper found at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/annb/DLUsability/DLuser.pdf>

⁵ Bryan-Kinns, "Survey of User Studies," 1.

⁶ Bryan-Kinns, "Survey of User Studies," 11.

⁷ Carol Tenopir, "Database and Online System Usage," *Library Journal*, 126 no.16 (2001): 41.

good data can help librarians make decisions on renewing or canceling subscriptions...libraries can use these numbers to help determine which academic disciplines use online systems the most and help measure the impact of user instruction. Effort is required to make data comparable across systems and the most meaningful to each library.⁸

One instance of a domain-specific database is the Alcohol Studies Database⁹ (ASD) supported by the Center of Alcohol Studies and Rutgers University Libraries. Containing more than 60,000 citations of documents indexed by the Center of Alcohol Studies since 1987, the primary focus of the database “is on research and professional materials dealing with beverage alcohol and its use and related consequences.”¹⁰ Jantz conducted an in-depth analysis of the user interface of the ASD employing data from transaction logs in order to improve user access to the collection. Many of the conclusions Jantz reaches could be of help in framing and analyzing the data from the MESDA exploratory study. He suggests “users will frequently make assumptions about user interface syntax given their experience with Web search engines or other database products.”¹¹ Jantz also mentions the possibility of having a “basic” search and an “advanced” search user interface as a possible solution to the difference in user abilities and approaches.

Database Construction

Lacking a sufficient number of pertinent studies concerning domain-specific, single function databases, it seems appropriate to examine the literature on building databases. This literature was explored to determine the traits of a

⁸ Tenopir, “Database and Online System Usage,” 45.

⁹ Ronald Jantz, “Information Retrieval in Domain-specific Databases: An Analysis to Improve the User Interface of the Alcohol Studies Database,” *College and Research Libraries*, 64 no.3 (2003): 229-239.

well-built database, in order to compare that to the Craftsmen Database. The article that contains the best explanation for the purpose of this study is Ernest Perez's "A Reality Check for Do-it-yourself Databases."¹² According to Perez, there are five *Ws* and an *H* that should guide in the design of a database and provision of access to it. They are: Who's going to use it?, Who's going to do it?, What is it you're doing anyway?, When is it going to happen?, Where will it be located?, Why do this?, and How are you going to do it? Though the Craftsmen Database is already built, many of these questions are relevant to any examination of the usefulness of the Craftsmen Database and will be used in the analysis found in the Conclusions section below.

User Studies

In 1986, Paul Conway developed a framework for structuring a comprehensive program of user studies for archival repositories. This framework "combines the basic elements of information that should be recorded, analyzed, and shared among archivists with a scheme to gather this information."¹³ According to Conway, frameworks are a method used to sort facts. They are useful in sorting old facts and should lead to new conclusions. Conway defines three important components of such studies: the users, the information need, and the use.¹⁴ The first component is the user, the person who is attempting to locate the information. In this case, it is the person who is accessing the online

¹⁰ Jantz, "Information Retrieval," 230.

¹¹ Jantz, "Information Retrieval," 238.

¹² Ernest R. Perez, "A Reality Check for Do-it-yourself Databases," *Database*, 21 no.2 (1998): 76-78.

¹³ Paul Conway, "Facts and Framework: An Approach to Studying Users of Archives," *American Archivist*, 49(Fall 1986): 393.

database or who might in the future. The second component, an information need, is the query submitted to the database and determination of the underlying information need that prompted the query and is related to ultimate use. In the case of the Craftsmen Database these questions deal with southern artisans: identification of the artist, his trade, his product, and/or his time period of work.

Use, the third component, is divided into two distinct activities.¹⁵ Use can occur physically, when a researcher comes to the archives and looks at documents, or virtually, when the information is accessed online. User statistics can be tracked for any number of activities that take place in an archival institution. This can be translated into the virtual world by using transaction logs that count the number of times a particular user and password access the system. The problem with a simple count, which is all that is available with transaction logs, is that there is no way to know if the user found the needed information, peripheral information, or no information at all.

Beyond studying simply accesses to information one can also explore use how information is used. Some of this can be determined in a user survey by asking why the information was sought in the first place and specifically, how the individual employed it. Outside the boundaries of the present study, citation analysis can also be useful in determining how people use information.

Information need and use are only part of the picture of an overall service evaluation. User satisfaction is also important. The only ways to determine whether an online user is satisfied with the information found using a particular

¹⁴ Conway, "Facts and Framework," 395.

¹⁵ Conway, "Facts and Framework," 396.

database is through a user survey such as the one described here or some form of interview conducted in person, over the telephone, or through email. In general, surveys can reveal broad patterns of use and satisfaction, while interviews can provide rich data that leads to understanding of complex issues and motivations.

In order to determine user satisfaction, user expectations and perceptions must also be explored. Rowena Cullen in "Perspectives on User Satisfaction Surveys"¹⁶ states that satisfaction "may involve long-term, as well as short term, perceptions and a personal reaction to service built up over a number of transactions of varying quality."¹⁷ Cullen explains that the user survey as described in *Measuring Quality: International Guide for Performance Measurement in Academic Libraries*¹⁸ provides "detailed information about the user's opinion of the service; helps clarify the librarian's concept of the service as well as his/her assumptions about the user's needs; indicates problems; and suggests solutions."¹⁹

Just as important to understand, and an important component of user satisfaction, is user dissatisfaction. If it can be determined why end-users are dissatisfied, the problem may be fixed to create a more usable and useful database. In "Sources of Dissatisfaction in End-User Support: An Empirical Study," Nancy Shaw explores "the end-user support factors that correlate with

¹⁶ Rowena Cullen, "Perspectives on User Satisfaction Surveys," *Library Trends*, 49 no.4 (2001): 662.

¹⁷ Cullen, "Perspectives on User Satisfaction Surveys," 665.

¹⁸ R. Poll and P. te Boekhoerst, *Measuring Quality: International Guide for Performance Measurement in Academic Libraries* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1996): 30.

¹⁹ Cullen, "Perspectives on User Satisfaction Surveys," 668.

user satisfaction.”²⁰ She found that “staff technical competence, software upgrades, ease of access to computing facilities, documentation to support training...[and] user understanding of the system...were all significantly related to lower levels of end-user satisfaction.”²¹

Nancy Shaw reported an additional examination of user dissatisfaction in “Understanding the Hidden Dissatisfaction of Users toward End-User Computing.”²² She asserts “end user satisfaction is a perceptual or subjective measure of system success, serving as a substitute for objective determinants of information systems effectiveness.”²³ She found that “satisfied and dissatisfied users held different views or technological frames of reference towards the technology they used.”²⁴ Given the exploratory nature of the Craftsmen Database User Survey, Shaw’s conclusions are also valid to this study:

It is necessary to look beyond the end-user satisfaction surveys to tease out hidden areas of dissatisfaction. Service quality gap analysis can be used to identify specific support areas that need attention, as well as identify which particular support areas influence overall end-user satisfaction. In addition, practitioners should be aware that end-user population is not a homogenous population that can be served by a one-size-fits-all support strategy.²⁵

²⁰ Shaw, Nancy C. Shaw, William H. Delone, and Fred Niederman. “Sources of Dissatisfaction in End-User Support: An Empirical Study,” *The DATA BASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 33 no.2 (2002): 41.

²¹ Shaw, “Sources of Dissatisfaction,” 53.

²² Nancy C. Shaw, “Understanding the Hidden Dissatisfaction of Users toward End-User Computing,” *Journal of End User Computing*, 15 no. 2 (2003): 1-22.

²³ Shaw, “Understanding the Hidden Dissatisfaction,” 2.

²⁴ Shaw, “Understanding the Hidden Dissatisfaction,” 1.

²⁵ Shaw, “Understanding the Hidden Dissatisfaction,” 14.

Methodology

MESDA funding, as in most non-profits, is not sufficient for all of the “wish” lists of the organization. Among the items on those lists is an update for the Craftsmen Database, which is an important research tool and the result of the extraction work taking place in the Research Center. The craftsmen information can be accessed in several different formats. The most complete format is the Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans (IESAA) card files available in the Research Center at MESDA. Indices to this material exist in three formats: a microfiche version (now out of print), a print version that was published in the *Journal of Southern Decorative Arts*, and the online Craftsmen Database. This online database indexes the full text of the IESAA and consists of the five fields that were included in the two earlier indices and adds a summary paragraph that describes the types of information available in the full text IESAA.

Photo files containing photographs of many of the pieces produced by the artisans are also referenced in the Craftsmen Database. These photographs include both objects that are in the MESDA collection and objects that were found during research field work.

From numerous comments made by patrons who had used the IESAA in the Research Center, it became quite clear that they were struggling with the online version of the Craftsmen Database. Some of the comments indicated the researcher only used the files in the Research Center because the online database was not functional for their purposes. It is possible that the problems

come from an inconsistent search interface. Within the search interface there is an odd combination of very precise and very imprecise search terms accepted. This depends on the field being searched. The research staff thought that it would be a good idea to migrate the database onto more useful and usable software and add additional information to the database from the in-house card files. In order to do this it would be necessary to apply for grant money to assist in the upgrade. At this point, the MESDA staff realized that they had never formerly determined the need for this online database. In order to secure funding for an upgrade, one of the grant proposal requirements would be to indicate the importance of the online database to research in the Decorative Arts field. That data did not exist and lead to the present study.

When this study started, the database had been online for over three years, but there had not been many users in-house nor had many eligible subscribers requested a password. Many of those who have used it reported dissatisfaction with the database. It was decided that a user survey was needed to evaluate the resources, time, money, and amount of information that should be put into the online database. A literature search revealed nothing usable on which to model a study. The decision was made to do an exploratory study to survey current and potential users to uncover why the database wasn't being heavily used and whether those who did use it were happy with it. According to Powell:

An exploratory survey, often conducted as qualitative research, can increase the researcher's familiarity with the phenomenon in question, it can help clarify concepts, it can be used to establish priorities for future research, it can identify new problems, and last, but not least, exploratory survey research can be used to gather information with practical applications, although such results can not

always be anticipated. Specific kinds of exploratory research surveys include: ...Experience surveys--gather and synthesize the experiences of specialists and/or practitioners in a particular field...The researcher's primary interest is in gaining provocative ideas and useful insights (i.e. suggestions for further research, rather than specific statistics)...can provide information on feasibility of doing further research....may help establish priorities to for research in that area and to summarize the knowledge of practitioners regarding effectiveness of various methods and procedures, or best practices in a particular field.²⁶

The goals of the Craftsmen Database user survey include:

- a. Determining the awareness level of users and potential users of the database, i.e., are the intended patrons aware that the database exists? Is anyone using it and if so in what format? Are they using it online?
- b. How useful is the database?, i.e., does the database contain relevant information for the target audience?
- c. How easy is the database to use?, i.e., how easy is the database to search? And are the patrons finding the information they are looking for when it exists in the database?
- d. What are the general demographics of the users?

The survey committee, Gary Albert, Publications Director for Old Salem, and Katie Schlee, Librarian for Old Salem designed the survey questions to provide answers for these goals. The questions were created in an ongoing process of writing, reviewing, and rewriting, so to avoid as much bias as possible and to allow the patrons to input comments. The survey, sponsored by MESDA, also questions institutional users and readers of the *Journal for the Early Southern Decorative Arts (JESDA)*. Only the questions pertaining to the online database will be analyzed for this study.

²⁶ Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, (Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 1997): 58-59.

Questions were carefully constructed in order to elicit the information that will be most useful in determining the future of the online Craftsmen Database. The first questions, 1 and 2 (see appendix 2), deal with determining the awareness level of the researcher and potential researcher about the database. These questions seek the following information: has the researcher heard of the Craftsmen Database, has he/she used it in any form; does he/she know an online version exists? These questions are expected to reveal the effectiveness of previous marketing attempts to acquaint the researcher with the database.

Because the database is restricted to *JESDA* subscribers, and a password was required for access, the next questions, 3–6, will solicit information about whether the researcher has applied for a password. More importantly, it is hoped, these questions will reveal why the researcher has not applied for, or if he/she has applied for a password, why he/she has not used the password. Once it is established that the researcher is aware of the database, is aware of the online version of the database, and has applied for and used a password, the next questions, 7–10, deal with the use and usability of the online database. The researcher is questioned about the use to which the database has been put, the information found, and the ease of use. It is also of interest to know how the researcher feels about the helpfulness of the *MESDA* Research Center staff.

Questions, 11-13, about contacting the staff and their helpfulness are next. To help determine if the researcher understands the nomenclature of the database, question, 14, asks again about the use of the files in the research room. The last section of the survey is about the database and is directed to

institutional users to discover: if they have used the database, if a client has requested the database, and if IP filtered access is desirable.

The last section of the survey deals with the general demographics of the user population. Standard questions about age, gender, education level, and computer use are included. Because the Friends population tends to be older, it is important to know how computer literate they are, if they even use computers. Since the intended user of the database is the Friend of MESDA and the Collections, questions concerning membership are included: if the respondent is a member now and how long he/she has been a member. Membership benefits have changed recently and it is thought that this might have confused some of the patrons. The next set of general information questions tries to discover the background and interests of the researchers, and asks whether they consider themselves professionals or amateurs in the field?, and what their areas of interest are? These questions are included to get an idea of the purpose the researcher had for using the database. The last questions deal with *JESDA* and will not be analyzed as part of this study.

The Craftsmen Database User Survey asks about the experiences that the user has had with the database and solicits comments on use and usefulness. As Cullen indicates, this should help to determine user satisfaction with the database and indicate the problem areas where the user is dissatisfied. Following Shaw's recommendations, several questions in the Craftsmen Database user survey will attempt to uncover MESDA staff helpfulness, ease of

access and use of the database, and comments about the usefulness of the database.

Once the survey was complete, it was sent to a small sample of eight to review and make comments. This sample included local university archivists, employees of Old Salem and MESDA, and friends of the committee. The attempt was made to get a mix of individuals who would potentially view reading and interpret the questions differently. The mix of professionals and friends allowed the survey to be reviewed by individuals with varying interest and knowledge levels. It is hoped that this will help create a survey that a wide range of respondents can readily understand and easily fill out.

The survey population included all the members of Friends of MESDA and the Collections, an organization of interested patrons who contribute money and time to MESDA. This membership is the basis of the population who is granted access to the online database through passwords. The survey was also sent to Friends of Old Salem (FOS) a sister organization whose focus is the Old Salem village. FOS members do not have password access to the database, but it is felt that some of them may have used the craftsmen material in the Research Center and would be interested in the online version. If enough interest is generated, then the online database could be opened up for their use as well. The mailing list also included patrons who, over the years, have been added for various reasons. The make-up of this list means that some of the people receiving the survey will not be appropriate, but it was not possible to weed these people out before the list was mailed.

After the survey was mailed, the wait began. The surveys came in slowly at first and then by the boxful. Surveys that were obviously not part of the targeted population were removed. This was determined by the answers to the awareness questions (1-3) and the general questions about MESDA membership and *JESDA* subscription. If the patron had heard of the database then the survey was used, if he/she had not heard of the database and was not a Friend of MESDA or a *JESDA* subscriber then the survey was removed. It is felt that these people would not contribute anything to the knowledge needed for the decisions that are to be made. The data was then input to an Excel spreadsheet for analysis of the qualitative questions; this was followed by further examination of the comments.

Analysis of the data begins with looking at the big picture. As stated above, many of the respondents were be relevant for the purposes of this study. By removing any survey that indicated no familiarity with the Craftsmen information in any form and those sent in by people who were not members of Friends of MESDA and the Collections, those remaining were the only ones to be analyzed.

The first analysis of the survey data was done to determine the overall familiarity with IESAA and the indices. How many patrons have heard of the IESAA or the indices in any form? How many have used it in any form? How many have heard of or used the online version? By looking at the responses to questions 1, 2, 3, and 14, these issues can be answered. By dividing the respondents into Friends of Old Salem and Friends of MESDA, it is possible to

see if the targeted audience, MESDA Friends, knows about the craftsmen information in any form. In addition, it is possible to see how many Old Salem Friends are aware. Calculating these totals, from question 2, will also allow a count to be made of the use of the IESAA or the indices, in any format, thus allowing MESDA to determine the use level of the database.

The next iteration shows the level of knowledge of the online version of the database. These numbers I come from analysis of questions 2 and 3. Counting the number of patrons who accessed the database, in any form, and who were not aware of the online version highlights the awareness level of the online database.

Questions 2 and 14 also show the pattern of format use for the database. This allows a ranking of the formats in terms of their use, which in turn can help determine the type of information that should be added to the online version of the database.

The usefulness and ease of use of the online database can be determined by examining the responses to questions 7-10. These are mainly comment based and will require careful reading and grouping. By grouping the comments based on content, it will be possible to study how useful the online version of the database has been from the researcher's perspective. Question 10 also investigates the ease of use of the online database. Studying the choice of rankings and the comments given by the researcher will help determine the deficiencies, in terms of ease of use, of the online database.

The analysis of the last section, demographics, should give clues about the make-up of the Friends groups. This section will be analyzed by making tables of the pertinent data from each question. Grouping the ages together in 10-year intervals will show a picture of the age range and concentration. Education ranges will give a picture of the abilities of the researchers.

By looking at the number of respondents who own computers, use email, and access the Internet, this study will be able to determine the computer access available to the users. If the numbers are high in these categories, then the probability of the online database being used and useful for these researchers would be high.

The last two general questions deal with patrons' descriptions of their areas of interest. These questions give a picture of the respondent's research interests. This helps in determining the appropriate material to add to the online database.

Once all of these questions have been analyzed and examined for groupings and distribution of answers, many decisions should fall into place. These analyses can be used to draw conclusions concerning the perceived use and usability of the online database and recommendations can be made concerning its future.

Findings

The original goal was to send the survey to the Friends of MESDA and the Collections (FOM). This organization was the only group to have access to the database. Because only a joint mailing list would be used to distribute the publication with which the survey was to be sent, the survey was also sent to Friends of Old Salem (FOS). Since many of these people were familiar with the database in the other formats, the information that many of them would return could also be useful.

Surveys were mailed to 2100 people. It is estimated that 900 were sent to FOM and that 1100 were sent to FOS. The remainder, of the surveys, was mailed to people who were on the mailing list for reasons other than membership in one of the Friends group. Four hundred sixty-seven surveys, or 22%, were returned. Of these 69 were discarded, from the respondents who indicated that they had never heard of the database, never used it in any form in the Research Center, and were not a member of Friends of MESDA and the Collections. It was concluded these surveys were not relevant to our project and so were put aside. Therefore, 398 or 19% of the surveys were used in the analysis. Two hundred and thirty surveys were returned from FOM, which is 25% of the total FOM population. One hundred and sixty six were returned from the FOS population, which is 15% of the total FOS population.

It was estimated that about 50%, or about 450, of the total Friends of MESDA population are serious researchers. Therefore, based on demographic

information discussed later, the return rate for serious researchers was estimated to be about 42%. This is an adequate sample population on which to base tentative conclusions.

Awareness level

The first goal of the user survey is to determine the awareness level of users and potential users of the database, i.e., are the intended patrons aware that the database exists? Is anyone using it and if so in what format? Are they using it online?

The first analysis of the survey data involved calculating how many in the sample had heard of the Craftsmen database. Friends of MESDA returned 232 surveys. Of these individuals, 189 had heard of the database, and 167 had used the database in some form. The Friends of Old Salem returned 166 surveys, 86 had heard of the database and 61 had used it in some form.

Table 1. Total Returns

	Total Returns	Heard of Database in Any Form	% Heard of Database in Any Form	Used in Some Form	% Used in Some Form
Friends of MESDA	232	189	81%	167	72%
Friends of Old Salem	166	86	52%	61	37%
Total	398	275	69%	228	57%

Another important statistic is how many people knew about the database, but didn't know that the online index existed. This is an important statistic, if this

percentage is too high, then MESDA has a lot of education that needs to be done about the online database.

Table 2. Formats Used

Format	Number Used This Format	% Used This Format*
Index Cards	171	63%
Photos	167	61%
Microfiche	54	20%
Print	103	38%
Online	73	27%

*Percentages don't add up to 100% More than one format could be chosen.
275 patrons used Craftsmen Database in some format.

Table 3. Knowledge of Online Version

	Knew Database Existed	Didn't Know Online Version Existed	% Didn't Know Online Existed
Friends of MESDA	189	63	33%
Friends of Old Salem	86	30	35%

MESDA staff has wondered that many of those who had used the online version of the database might have only used it after using the Craftsmen information in another format. Data from the survey shows that only 19 out of 73, or 26%, who had used the database online had not used in another form (see table 2). So 54 people or 74% of all those respondents who had used the

database online were already familiar with the database in another format before using the digital version.

This led to some concern about possible confusion over the recognition of the name of the database. Combining both Friends groups, 123 people claimed to have not heard of the database in any form, but 23 of these people had used it in some format. And 25, of the 123, who had checked no in question 2 (had they heard of the database) indicated in question 14 (had they used any files in the MESDA Research Center) that they had used the files. Therefore 48 out the 124 who had used the material and were familiar with the information contained in it. They were familiar with the material but not with the name, Craftsmen Database.

Table 4. Knowledge of Password Requirement

	Number Knew Online Existed	% Knew Online Existed
Knew Online Existed	182	
Knew Needed Password	153	84%
Applied for Password	85	55%

In order to use the online database, the patron needed to apply for a password. This database is not open to the public and is password restricted to subscribers of *JESDA*. The application process is simple; the applicant sends an email to the Research Center with the appropriate information and a password is emailed in return. A significant percentage of those who were aware of the online database were also aware of the need to apply for a password. Therefore the promotional materials were adequately explaining the need for the password. But

only 55% of those who were aware of the need for a password had actually applied for one. The explanation most often used was that they had no need for the online database at this time and therefore had no need for a password.

The total for the format of the database used was calculated, shown in Table 2, in order to determine the most used format. No longer tracking if the response was a Friend of MESDA or a Friend of Old Salem the analysis will be on the use of the database in any form by anyone.

The most used format was the index cards in the Research Center. This was not a surprise. This is the oldest format, the one most familiar to most researchers. Photos came in second, also no surprise; many researchers request pictures of objects known to have been made by the craftsmen in which they have an interest. Online use was only 27%; this is disappointing considering the resources put into the marketing of the online database. Looking at Table 5, it can be seen that when researchers are in the Research Center, the photo files are heavily used.

Table 5: Use of Files in MESDA Research Center

Used files in Research Center	Number Used Craftsmen Files	% Used Craftsmen Files*	Number Used Photograph Files	% Used Photograph Files*
200	157	79%	177	89%

* Percentages don't add up to 100% More than one format could be chosen.

Use and Usefulness

The next question to be answered by the user survey is how useful is the database?, i.e., does the database contain relevant information for the target audience?

Questions 7-10 addressed the usefulness of the database. These questions were comment based with responses and ranging from “very helpful” to “complete waste of time.” These questions were also a source of a little bit of confusion on the part of the user. The intent was to analyze the online database, but several patrons gave us their view of other formats as well. So this section not only gives a snapshot of researcher opinions of the online database, it also gives a little insight into some perspectives of the other formats. This study will only consider the comments for the online version of the database. MESDA staff will examine the other comments.

Patron’s purposes for using the online version, question 7, were fairly standard, comments included research for specific trades, specific individuals, and/or specific geographic locations. This was expected. It was also expected that researchers would be looking for more general information and that was found to be true as well. General comments included:

- women artisans in Virginia
- silversmiths
- searching for mid 18’c craftsmen in the Shenandoah Valley area
- research on needlework
- research areas that interest me personally & professionally

- usually just browsing for Ky. Craftsmen.

Comments that indicated the online database was useful included:

- it is great
- most always useful, often found precise information to answer my question or solve my problem. Seldom found nothing of help
- extremely
- very useful - amazing the number of craftsmen in various categories.

Comments that indicated the online database wasn't useful:

- little pertinent (information found), because of early time period for that area
- I found it too cumbersome for my needs, so I resorted to using the printed Journal boxed set. The online database didn't allow me to search efficiently for the information that I needed. In addition, I wanted an overview of craftsmen that turned out to be exceedingly large. I didn't want to print out all the records that my research required
- most cases did not find the names I was searching
- useless - I have better and more data.

Comments from people who had problems using the online database:

- misunderstood what it contained
- password did not work - did not have time to call and receive a new one
- not user friendly
- my password does not work.

The other large category of comments was from those disinterested in using the online database. Most of those comments were some variation of the following:

- Have not needed to do research work
- so little time that I never have gotten to it
- no current project.

Finding the information that they were looking for is another question. Because of the limitations of the online database, few people found the exact information for which they were looking. Though the database was useful in a general sense, many times it was not helpful for a specific request. Typical of the comments is “Found very little “specific “ information but the browsing was useful and informative.” “I found it useful as an index, but not for direct information,” is the type of comment that indicates unfamiliarity with the purpose of the online database. It was never intended to provide “direct information” as it is only an index. The researcher is directed to contact MESDA to request further details about the information found in their search.

Table 6. Ease of Use

Ease of Use	1 (easy)	2	3	4	5 (difficult)
# checked	27	17	21	15	4
% of total	32%	20%	25%	18%	5%

Table 6 shows the raw count of the ease of use scale. It was thought that many people would indicate difficulties using the online database. As seen, though, about half of the users did not experience any great difficulty using it.

There is a significant minority who experienced difficulty, but not many as had been anticipated. There were few comments associated with this question. Most of them were given by those who scored the database in the 4s and 5s, these numbers indicating difficulty in using the online system. They include:

- it is easy to use, but it's not clear at the outset what the database contains
- a little confusing
- the research cards are easy, the online database is difficult to use
- search engine should give complete results, categories should be better defined
- have had problems with the password.

It was found that many of these comments about the researcher's search efforts were based on frustration with the search keyword terms accepted by the database software. As Jantz, in his study, mentioned the possibility of having a "basic" search and an "advanced" search, it is possible that these two search choices could be a solution for the Craftsmen Database as well.

Demographics

The survey was also analyzed to answer the following question: what were the general demographics of the users?

Table 7. Age Range

Age Bracket	Number	% of Total
21-30	11	3%

31-40	35	9%
41-50	82	21%
51-60	114	28%
61-70	84	21%
71-80	31	8%
81-90	13	3%
Other	28	7%

The age range of the respondents was 23 to 90, with several indicating only that they were “mature” or that they were “seniors.” 70% of the respondents are between 41 and 70 years of age.

Table 8. Gender

	Number	% of Total
Male	189	47%
Female	209	53%
Total	398	100%

The Friends groups are about evenly divided between men and women.

Table 9. Education Level

	Number*	%
High School	19	5%
Some College	25	6%
College Degree	124	31%
Graduate Work	74	19%
Graduate Degree	144	36%
Post Graduate	68	17%

*Does not add to 398, some respondents checked more than one box.

On the whole the Friends groups are well educated. Eighty -six percent of them have one or more college degrees.

Table 10. Own a Computer, Use Email, Access Internet

	Number*	%
Own a Computer	358	90%
Use Email	346	87%
Access Internet	355	89%

*Does not add to 398, some respondents checked more than one box.

A very high percentage of the survey owns a computer, uses email, and access the Internet. There was no correlation between age and computer familiarity.

Table 11. Self Description

	Number*	%
Scholar	135	22%
Dealer	49	8%
Collector	177	29%
Student	58	10%
Other	185	31%

*Does not add to 398, some respondents checked more than one box.

A high percentage of the researchers could be considered professionals in the decorative arts field or highly knowledgeable amateurs. The "Other" category contained 79 researcher, museum professional, curator, appraiser, or other indication that the respondent was a professional in the decorative arts field. Therefore, more than 82% or 193, of the respondents would have a high

probability of needing the online database in their professional lives. The high response rate of professionals in the field possibly indicates that this group was more likely to respond to the survey than those whose professions had little or no need for the online database and therefore may have been less aware of its existence. Based on the estimate of 450 serious researchers, this indicates that about 42% (193 out of 450) of the serious researchers returned the survey.

Table 12. Areas of Interest

	Number
Furniture	321
Ceramics	198
Silver/Metal	196
Textiles	159
Paintings	202
Prints	138
Genealogy	136
Local History	186
Other	56

Does not add to 398, some respondents checked more than one box.

The range of interests is very broad, all categories are well represented, with furniture having two or more times the interest factor as the other categories.

Seventy percent of the Craftsmen Database users are between 41 and 70 years of age. They are fairly equally divided between men and women and are well educated. Most of them have some form of higher education. Computers, email, and accessing the Internet are part of their lives and most seem comfortable with their computing abilities. They describe themselves as scholars

and collectors with a wide range of interests: furniture being the most frequent choice, paintings, ceramics and local history not far behind.

As expected the survey population was an older and well-educated person, with serious or professional research needs. What was unexpected were the few number of complaints about the online interface, also the low number of respondents that knew of online version of the database. Equally unexpected was the interesting correlation between use of the files in the Research Center and satisfactory online use. Many of the respondents that had used the files in the Research Center had little or no trouble with the online version.

Conclusions

User surveys are an important tool in the library world to help determine the allocation of scarce resources, time, and money. The Craftsmen Database User Survey has enabled MESDA to answer several questions and begin the asset allocation process. As it was an exploratory study, it also raised several questions that will need to be addressed. Analyzing the data and answering the questions posed by the goals of this survey is the first step toward fulfilling the requirements of the next step, the creating of the grant proposal.

Eighty one percent of the Friends of MESDA respondents were aware of the database in some format. Of that 81%, 33% were unaware that the database existed in an online format. The awareness level for Friends of Old Salem was even lower—only 52% were aware of the database in any form and only 35% of those patrons were aware of the online version. The expectation that the Friends of Old Salem would not be as aware of the online version of the database, it was not a benefit of their membership, was met.

From the demographics of the respondents, 82% would have had a good reason to use the online database. And 72% of the respondents have used it. This indicates that those Friends who would benefit from using the online database are fairly well informed of its existence. If it is assumed that many of those who did not return the survey, did not do so because they had either not heard of the Craftsmen Database or had never used it, then it is disappointing to realize how many Friends of MESDA were not aware of the Craftsmen Database

in the MESDA Research Center or the online version. It is a benefit of their membership and had been mentioned many times in their literature. One result of this outcome is the increased awareness of the need for better user education. It has been suggested that more mentions of this database need to be made in all publications being sent to Friends. More study will need to be done to determine the most appropriate means of disseminating information about the online version of the Craftsmen Database.

Password awareness seems to be adequate. As MESDA increases awareness of the online database as a whole, the need for a password will continue to be publicized as well. One of the possibilities for future study would be the option of eliminating the password and opening the database to anyone on the Internet. This could increase the use of the online database, thereby making it more feasible to migrate and add information to the database. The larger potential audience would help justify the time, money and effort needed to migrate and update the online database. Because of the high rate of serious researcher awareness and use the potential increase in online database use in its present form is limited. Opening the online database to anyone on the Internet will not only increase use of the database, but will also increase awareness of MESDA. This might also attract a younger audience, which given the age range of the current membership, would be good for MESDA. If the decision is continue to require a password to open the online database then consideration should be given to patron's potential password problems, both in using and in remembering the password

The many formats in which the database is available allow patrons to use the format that is most appropriate for their needs. Continuing to provide all of these formats is advisable.

It is clear that many Friends, of both MESDA and Old Salem, were aware of the Research Center and the resources available there. But equally obvious is that there is confusion about the terminology used in describing the Craftsmen Database. Serious consideration needs to be given to the nomenclature used and on how to standardize it.

The addition of the Photo files to the online database is another area that must be explored in greater detail. It is apparent that these files are used extensively and making them available online would greatly enhance the database.

Use and Usefulness

The comments found in the survey seemed to indicate that those who had little or no trouble using the online database, and who understood the limitations of the database, were happiest with it. The expectations of the user played a role in the level of their satisfaction. Those who were aware up front that this version of the database was strictly an index were able to search and either find or not find their specific information and be satisfied with their results. Those who were unable to access the online version, those who expected more online information, and those who had difficulty with the search terms were the least happy with the results of their efforts.

As Table 5 indicates, 23% of the users who answered this question had difficulties using the online database. Twenty-five percent were fairly neutral about the ease of use and 52% felt it was relatively easy to use. This ease of use seems to apply to those who understood the limitations of the database, both in terms of search capabilities and information provided. Again, this seems to be an indication of the level of comfort the users have working both on computers and in databases. As only half of the users were comfortable, MESDA needs to make the database more easily accessible and the software more user friendly. This, also, leads to the conclusion that the online database needs to have better directions and explanations of the search process and, possibly, to be divided into a basic and advanced search capability in order to handle the different experience levels of the users. This will be especially important if the database is opened to the general public. The user base may change to include those who are not as familiar with the difference between keyword searching and working with controlled vocabulary search terms.

Need for migration and expansion

Based on the results of this survey, migrating and expanding the online Craftsmen Database may be the best use of MESDA's limited resources at this time. The data indicates that many researchers are aware and able to use this valuable resource.

Emphasis needs to be placed on educating potential users about the existence and use of this resource before time and money are used to improve it.

MESDA needs to make a diligent effort in education and outreach, and then conduct another survey to see if this effort has been effective. At that time it may be appropriate to migrate and expand the online database.

Before the next survey is taken, MESDA needs to be able to target mailings and e-mailings to potential users. This would require the mailing list database to be reorganized and updated. As FOM are solicited to re-subscribe to the *Journal of Southern Decorative Arts (JESDA)*, more identifying information should be requested. This information could include email address, research level, and occupation and would greatly enhance the next effort to survey the FOM population. It would also be helpful to conduct interviews of a portion of the respondents in order to obtain more in-depth knowledge of the respondent's views about the Craftsmen Database in general and the online version specifically.

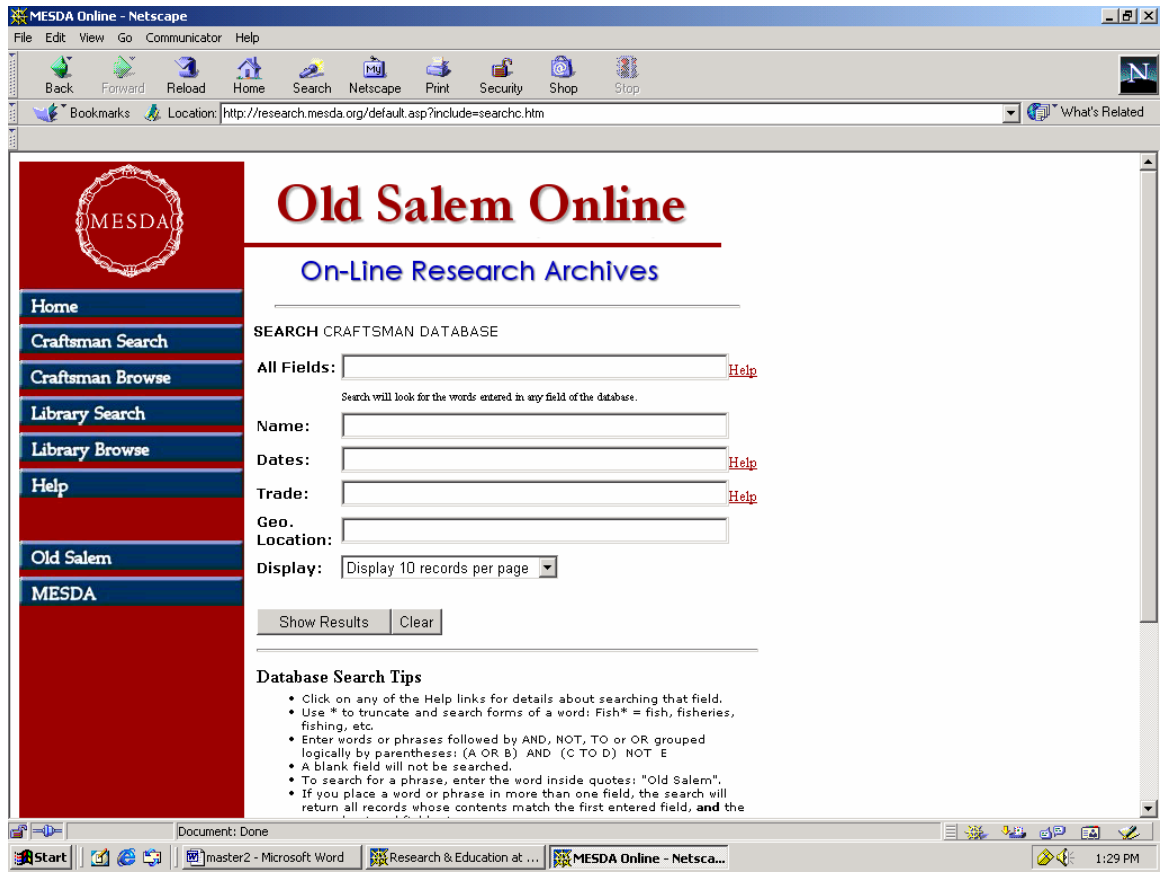
Many of Perez's questions are relevant to the decision to undertake migration and additions to the Craftsmen Database. Who's going to use it - will it continue to be only MESDA Friends or should it be opened to the public? What is it you are doing anyway -- should the database continue to be a brief index or should additional material be added? How are you going to do it -- grant money, Friends money, grad students, etc? Many of these questions will be the basis of future study when it is determined that there is enough interest in the current database to consider improvements.

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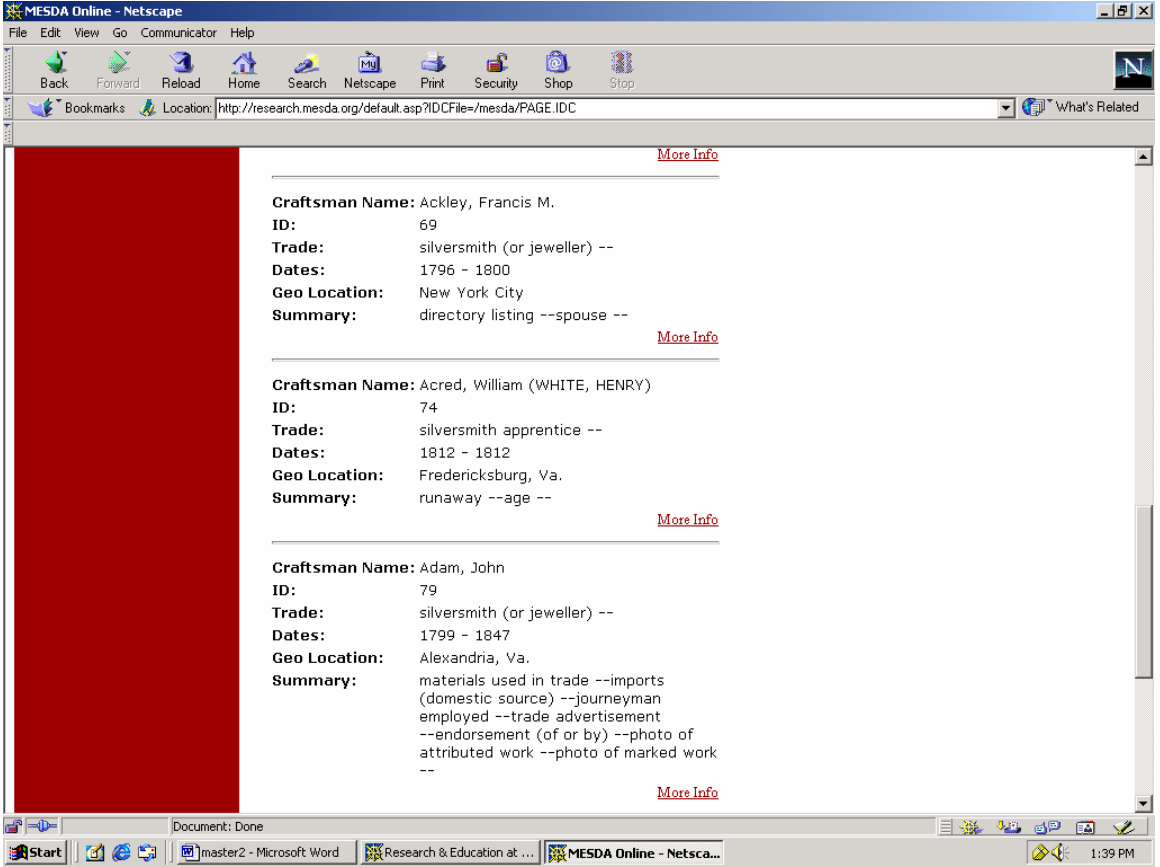
Appendix 1 – Sample of Online Craftsmen Database Search Results

Initial search screen:

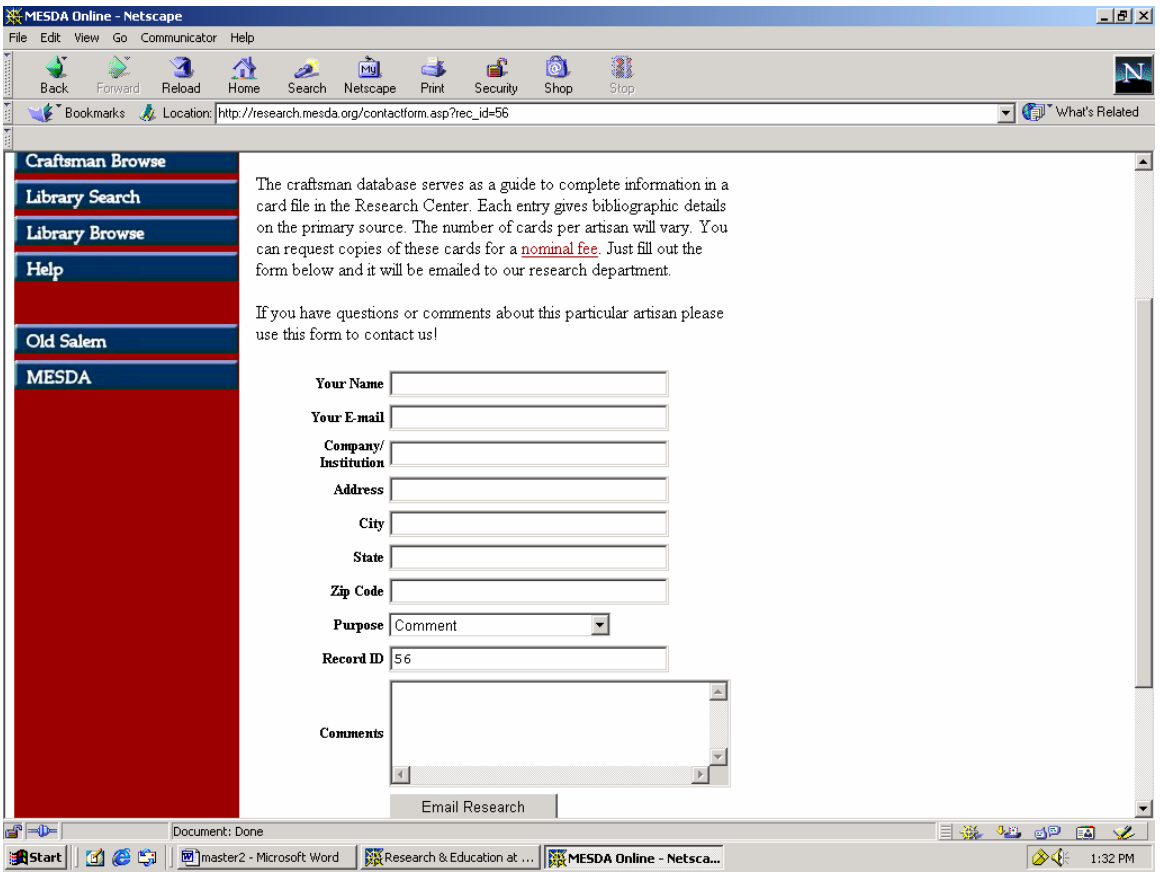


Search result for “silversmith” in the Trade field:

3673 “silversmith” records found.



“More Info” screen:



Appendix 2

Craftsmen Database User Survey

1. Were you aware that this database exists?

Yes ___ No _____

2. Have you ever accessed the research files in any format? Check all that apply.

_____ Card Files in Research Center

_____ Photo Files in Research Center

_____ Microfiche index to Craftsmen Database

_____ Print version of the index to Craftsmen Database in the *Journal* boxed set

_____ Online Craftsmen Database

3. Prior to receiving this survey did you know that an online version of the Craftsmen Database is available?

Yes ___ No _____

4. Did you know that you need a password to access the Craftsmen Database online?

Yes ___ No _____

5. Have you applied for a password? If not, why not? If you have not applied for a password, skip to question 14.

Yes ___ No ___

Why not?

6. If you got a password, did you use the database? If not, why not? If you have not used the database, skip to question 14.

Yes ___ No ___

Why not?

7. If you have used the database, for what purpose did you use it?

8. Was it useful? Did you find the specific information you were looking for?

9. Did you find useful information that you were not looking for?

10. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being easy and 5 being difficult, please rate the ease of use of the database.

1___ 2___ 3___ 4___ 5___

Comments:

11. Did you contact MESDA research staff to get more information or assistance?

Yes ___ No ___

12. Were they helpful?

Yes ___ No ___

13. Did you realize that contacting MESDA research staff for more information was an option?

Yes ___ No ___

14. Have you ever used any files in the MESDA Research Center?

Yes ___ No ___

15. Which files? Check all that apply.

___ Craftsmen

___ Photos

Institutional Users

1. Have you personally used the database?

Yes ___ No ___

2. Has a client ever requested it?

Yes ___ No ___

3. Would you be interested in IP filtered access for your user community?

Yes ___ No ___

General Questions

Age: ___

Gender: M or F

Education Level: ___ High School ___ Some College ___ College Degree
 ___ Graduate Work ___ Graduate Degree ___ Post Graduate Work

Are you currently a Friend of MESDA and the Collections?

Yes ___ No ___ How Long? _____

Do you own a computer?

Yes ___ No ___

Do you use email?

Yes ___ No ___

Do you use the Internet?

Yes ___ No ___

How would you describe yourself? Check all that apply.

___ Scholar

___ Dealer

___ Collector

___ Student

___ Other: _____

What are your areas of interest? Check all that apply.

___ Furniture

___ Ceramics

___ Silver/Metals

___ Textiles

___ Paintings

___ Prints

___ Genealogy

___ Local History

___ Other:

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please return in enclosed envelope by (date).

All of the results will be used to improve the database....Your identification will be kept confidential.