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## “Who’s Driving the Bus?” or How Digitization Is Influencing Archival Collections

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## Introduction

Archives and special collections are increasingly utilizing digitization as a means of effectively providing broad access to unique materials. End users have come to expect convenient online availability of archival materials, increasing the demand for archivists to digitize their collections. The pressure to make materials available online can result in archival arrangement and description taking a back seat to the demands of digitization. Thus, processing priorities and timelines can become subject to decisions made outside of special collections and archives departments.<sup>1</sup>

Archivists who work directly with unique collections, as well as librarians and other professionals who coordinate digitization, generally agree that access should be prioritized. However, each group has its own goals, standards, and timelines that may conflict with those of their colleagues. The push to maximize access to collections may, in some cases, go so far as to influence collecting policies. Is the lure of rapid digitization affecting best practices of arrangement and description? If online access to the collections is the ultimate goal, and if each stakeholder has a different perspective on how best to accomplish this, who decides how to proceed? These questions led the archivists and digitization librarian at a midsize state university library to ask, “Who is driving the bus with respect to digitizing archival collections?” This question will be explored through the experiences of three digitization initiatives at the library, each of which involved a different aspect of collaboration between archivists and a digitization librarian.

The case studies presented in this paper examine how the need to facilitate both digitization and online display forced those involved to reconsider archival processing strategies and collection development policies. Each case also includes a discussion of lessons learned from “inherited” processing and digitization missteps, methods of reasserting intellectual control, and the development of standards for future digitization projects. Finally, each offers an answer to the question of who really “drove the bus” on decisions regarding the projects and why.

## Context

Within the university libraries there was no history of collaboration between the Special Collections and University Archives Department (SCUA) and the digitization unit. Housed in separate departments, there was a gulf between the two in terms of logistics and communication. Not surprisingly, early digitization activities resulted in conflicting perspectives and the duplication of efforts. There was also a sense that not everyone’s input was being considered—or even solicited. As a result, these projects often occurred with little interdepartmental collaboration.

In 2003, under the direction of the university archivist, SCUA embarked on a grant-funded project to digitize a selection of documents related to the founding of the university. Beyond

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Mills, “User Impact on Selection, Digitization, and the Development of Digital Special Collections,” *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 21, no. 2 (May-August 2015): 160–69.

Books and Buildings was a curated “boutique” digitization initiative that, unlike later projects, was built without using digital asset management software. Like all early projects within the library, it relied primarily on external platforms such as Flickr or rudimentary websites created in-house. Eventually, the Electronic Resources and Information Technology Department (ERIT) staff began to provide technical support for digitization, but was not initially involved in content selection or metadata for the project. However, in 2005 when the digitization unit was established within ERIT, the unit began to coordinate all aspects of digitization projects within the library.

In the absence of a library-wide vision for digital collections, the digitization unit initiated its own program of content selection. The lack of interdepartmental teamwork became apparent when the digitization unit created the grant-funded Civil Rights Greensboro project in 2008. This initiative involved SCUA materials, as well as contributions from external community partners, but did not include the university archivist as part of the planning process. One archival collection was essentially “reprocessed” to facilitate digitization by merging it with another collection, without consulting the archivists responsible for the collection. Further complicating matters, the library began using OCLC’s CONTENTdm digital asset management platform around this time. This shift was initiated as part of a separate grant-funded project in SCUA, but the oversight of the software was given to the digitization unit. A CONTENTdm test project involving a selection of photographs held by SCUA, the University Archives Photographic Prints Collection (UA Photos) project, was almost entirely driven by the digitization unit, with virtually no contribution from the archivists. This project became very challenging, particularly when a new digitization librarian and a newly hired archivist assumed responsibility for the project. Ultimately, earlier digitization decisions would affect this collection’s arrangement, description, access, staff responsibilities, and processing timeline.

### ***Bus #1: The University Archives Photographic Prints Collection***

#### ***The collection***

The UA Photos collection chronicles the school from its opening in 1892 as a teaching college for young women to its current status as a midsized coeducational state university. This collection includes thousands of images that provide a rich visual narrative of the institution’s history. The photographs are heavily used for research, instruction, and exhibits, which is the primary reason that this collection was chosen for a digitization project. While everyone agreed that digitizing the archival images would increase access and provide important historical information regarding a popular and often-used collection, poor communication and limited cooperation between departments caused the project to stall. It became clear that the digitization unit was “driving the bus” and that the archivists often felt like marginalized passengers.

#### ***Item selection and metadata issues***

In 2009, archivists selected representative images of prominent campus buildings as part of a small pilot project initiated by the digitization unit. Chosen images were scanned, given

university archives identification numbers, labeled using the current name of the building, and corresponding metadata was created based on the institutional memory of long-time staff members or on information written on the back of the photographs. Problems began when archivists were not consulted about proper archival identification or metadata choices, and communication quickly broke down between the departments. The project came to a halt as the archivists attempted to document the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the metadata and correct the arbitrary identification numbers imposed by the digitization unit.

With the project on hold and communication at a low ebb, the library made specific new hires that jump-started digitization efforts. In 2010, an assistant department head of SCUA was hired with an express charge of improving cross-departmental communication and the coordination of digitization efforts. Concurrently, a new archivist joined the department and was given the responsibility to “fix” the many metadata problems with the digitized images and to match the print photographs with their digital equivalents. Around the same time, a new digitization librarian was hired and was tasked to implement CONTENTdm as the primary content management system for displaying the library’s digitized collections. These changes in staff signaled a new relationship between archivists and the digitization unit, ushering in a more collaborative environment.

### ***Reprocessing the collection***

In one of the initial meetings about the UA Photos digitization project, a team was created to develop a collaborative workflow, a communication plan, and a master metadata document with a controlled vocabulary for describing the images. The meeting ended with the decision that the physical collection should be processed immediately. Although it was always understood that the UA Photos would be processed eventually, the instigation of the digital project accelerated the timeline, and the processing of the collection became a departmental priority. This initiative would include the creation of well-researched and consistent metadata, and the development of an organizational structure for the physical and digital collections to establish context across all formats (i.e., prints, negatives, and slides). It would also include proper identification numbers that would correspond to the digital surrogates. Ultimately, the project created a framework for the development of future digital collections. The project would now be prioritized in both departments. SCUA committed additional time and staff to the project, and the new hire became “the photo archivist.”

Processing the UA Photos was an enormous undertaking. This artificial collection consisted of hundreds of alphabetically organized folders containing a variety of photographs. Many included duplicate copies and misidentified images, as well as other non-photographic items. The archivist immersed herself in professional development opportunities and literature relating to the care and processing of historical photographs.<sup>2</sup> As “More Product, Less Process” (MPLP) had been published only five years before the processing decisions were being made, she considered

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<sup>2</sup> Jackie M. Dooley, “Processing and Cataloging of Archival Photograph Collections,” *Visual Resources* 11, no. 1 (1995): 85–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.1995.9658320>.

maximizing productivity through minimal description.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent literature suggested that MPLP was not always the best strategy for processing photographic collections; therefore, the archivist realized that she must first closely examine the collection before determining the level of processing needed.<sup>4</sup> After taking an inventory of the historical photographs and examining the organizational structure of similar academic collections, she decided that the UA Photos would be divided into nine series: Academic Units; Athletics and Sports; Buildings, Grounds, and Views; Campus Life; Concerts, Plays, and Productions; Events; Groups, Associations, and Clubs; Objects; and Portraits and Biographical Images.

As the initial project involved campus buildings, which were the most frequently accessed images within the physical collection, the archivist first began processing the “Buildings, Grounds, and Views” series. The often-erroneous metadata associated with the photographs necessitated the creation of a well-researched resource that traced the history of each building represented in the collection, including date of construction, architect, name changes, and architectural additions. Using this document, the project team would be able to establish a controlled vocabulary based on the current or final building name.

Physically processing the “Buildings, Grounds, and Views” series also proved challenging. Initially, the digitization unit labeled the photographs by the current names of the buildings. After evaluating the series, it seemed logical to use the name that the building was called at the time the photograph was taken and to provide cross references to names that were used at other times in its history. This system provided an accurate naming schema with a narrative that explained not only the evolution of the building’s name, but also a searchable narrative of the building’s history. The identification numbers previously assigned by the digitization unit were removed and each photograph was given a new number based on the collection, series, folder, and item. The new identification number was then added to the metadata for the digital object, matching it to its physical equivalent. This basic strategy would be incorporated into the processing of all of the photographic series going forward.

### ***Lessons learned***

The lessons learned during the UA Photos project were tremendously important for future collaborative projects between the archivists and the digitization librarian.

The most important insight was that collaboration, cooperation, and communication throughout a project are key. The professional literature confirms that digitization “require[s] a partnership among information professionals during most phases of the project, from materials selection to metadata creation to building a user-friendly searchable online interface.”<sup>5</sup> Compromise and

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<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (2005): 208–63, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.68.2.c741823776k65863>.

<sup>4</sup> Anne L. Foster, “Minimum Standards Processing and Photograph Collections,” *Archival Issues* 30, no. 2 (2006): 107–18.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Chaffin Hunter et al., “Two Librarians, an Archivist, and 13,000 Images: Collaborating to Build a Digital Collection,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 80, no. 1 (2010): 85, doi:10.1086/648464.

negotiation overcame limitations caused by different theoretical approaches to the digitization of archival material.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the perspectives of both departments and creating a unified workflow for selection, scanning, and creating metadata were necessary to form a cooperative team and complete a successful initiative.

The second crucial lesson confirmed that it is much better to digitize a collection that is processed than one that is not. Digitizing an unprocessed collection is putting the proverbial cart before the horse. Because the collection of photographs was not processed before digitization, the results were a poor selection of images to digitize for the pilot project, inaccurate metadata, and a lack of organizational correlation between the digital and physical image. All of this resulted in additional labor for everyone involved.

Finally, it became evident that it is really “all about the metadata.” The team found that creating accurate metadata at the appropriate level of detail for the collection was crucial to discovery and to maintaining control of the project. A well-formed metadata plan makes it less likely that the descriptive metadata will become inconsistent or overly subjective, although some flexibility in terminology may be warranted as well. Digitization librarians, who often come from an IT environment, may be slightly more comfortable than archivists with the notion of “perpetual beta” for digital collections—the idea that a digital collection, like a software product or website, may be forever subject to upgrades and improvements and may never actually be “finished” or “perfect.”<sup>7</sup> If new information comes to light about the collection, or if usability issues arise, corrections and revisions can become necessary.

As for “who drove the bus” on this digitization project—it was clearly the digitization unit. The initial lack of both collaboration and clear communication resulted in a disjointed project that went online without proper metadata or any correlation to the physical collection. Fortunately, the team was able to reclaim this “inherited” project, which served as a framework for further library digitization initiatives.

### ***Bus #2: The Women Veterans Historical Project***

The UA Photos were chosen for digitization in large part due to their visual appeal. A similar approach was taken with the items initially selected from the Women Veterans Historical Project (Women Veterans).

#### ***The collection***

Women Veterans documents the contributions and service of women in the US military and related service organizations, such as the American Red Cross, since World War I. The project was established as an offshoot of the university archives and now consists of over 650 individual collections that contain a wide range of source material including photographs, letters, diaries,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>7</sup> Tim O’Reilly, “What Is Web 2.0,” O’Reilly Media, Inc., September 30, 2005, accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=4>.

scrapbooks, oral histories, military patches and insignia, uniforms, and posters, as well as published works. While the project was established in 1998, the initial iteration of the Women Veterans website went live in 2006, using a homegrown content management system. When the current Women Veterans curator arrived in 2008, she inherited a website featuring oral history interviews and digitized visual materials that were highly curated and chosen by the digital projects coordinator. The primary content of the website consisted of oral history transcriptions (which were not full-text searchable), photographs, recruiting posters, and brochures. In fact, there was no mention on the site of the non-digitized materials in the collections until the curator asked that a collection summary field be added. Her involvement with the website was limited to adding the biographical details for each veteran and the descriptive metadata of the non-digitized materials. Descriptive metadata for the digitized materials and controlled vocabulary were created by the digitization unit. As temporary student workers did most of the digitization and metadata entry without a list of standardized terms, there were many descriptive inconsistencies throughout the digital collection.

### *Item selection and metadata issues*

Although oral history interview transcripts provide the “meatiest” content for both the physical and digital collections, photographs are also important, providing visual documentation of the themes and individuals mentioned in the textual documents. Like the UA Photos, Women Veterans was selectively digitized, with specific items chosen for their visual impact, in contrast to later projects where collections were digitized in their entirety. Again, the metadata for the collection—particularly the use of controlled vocabularies—proved increasingly crucial as the digital collection grew, particularly when it was migrated to a new content management platform. This required a reassessment of the approach to metadata for the digital collection and a recognition that it too was subject to the “perpetual beta” effect. As with the UA Photos, better planning at the initial stages of the digitization project would have minimized some of the retrofitting of the metadata that became necessary when it was moved into a new platform. The digitization of this collection drove significant changes both in the arrangement and description of the physical materials, and in the collection development priorities. The hard-won lessons learned during the UA Photos were successfully applied to the reorganization of the digital components of Women Veterans.

As with the UA Photos, in the process of digitization the items had been arranged into artificial numerical “series” (e.g., “photographs,” “textiles,” and “oral histories”) that did not correspond to the actual physical arrangement of the collection. Fortunately, as individual Women Veterans collections are not very large—most average less than one-fifth of a linear foot—this did not result in too much confusion. Interdepartmental communication breakdowns also led to inconsistencies between what was described on the Women Veterans website and what was in the library catalog. For example, all transcripts, brochures, and other published materials had been individually cataloged with Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) assigned. The curator initially made the decision to physically reunite these items with their original manuscript collections. In an effort to address the discrepancies, the cataloging department, the digitization unit, and the curator held meetings to discuss the creation of a crosswalk between the online catalog and the website, but this proved to be technically unfeasible.

### *Platform migration*

This remained the situation until 2013, when the digitization librarian informed the curator that the current Women Veterans website and content management system could no longer be supported by ERIT and proposed migrating the Women Veterans digital collections into the CONTENTdm platform, which was already being used for all other digitized content at the library.

With the understanding that communication, collaboration, and careful planning were the essential first steps toward making this transition, the digitization librarian and the curator created a list of features that were eventually added to improve the researcher experience. This included the addition of “full text search” to transcripts and printed materials; a faceted search interface that allows for more granularity; classification of items into multiple categories (e.g., conflicts/eras and branches of service); downloads of high-quality images and full PDF transcripts; and support for Open Archives Initiative-Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH), which would allow the collection to be added to WorldCat and the Digital Public Library of America. Perhaps the most important improvement was the standardization of metadata and controlled vocabularies for several key fields. This standardization now applies to descriptions of each digital item, permitting more complete and accurate searching across these fields. A metadata master template includes a list of approved LCSH for conflicts, service branches, and veterans’ races, as well as more granular local subject terms for eras, service branches, item formats, and item types. Controlled vocabularies in appropriate fields (e.g., “original format”) replaced the artificial “series” that had been imposed on the earlier digital collection, allowing the “series” field to be used for the actual series names assigned to the processed collections. The series names now reflect the actual physical arrangement of the collections, rather than imposing an inaccurate digital rearrangement. With the carefully considered metadata template in place, the Women Veterans website moved to the CONTENTdm platform in early 2015.

### *Lessons learned*

The lessons learned during this digitization project were varied. The curator learned that the vast majority of researchers find the Women Veterans collections through a basic online search rather than through the library catalog, finding aids, or visits to SCUA. She therefore shifted her arrangement, description, and collection policies to reflect this reality. Because website discovery is emphasized, images and oral history transcripts are the current focus of the workflow, while the processing and description of manuscripts material have become less of a priority. Since many of the Women Veterans collections are small and most of them lack finding aids, additional non-digitized content is noted in a collection summary field present for each digital object. Most of the processing time and energy is spent ensuring the descriptive metadata on the website is correct. The ability to add full-text search functionality to all of the digitized materials has put the processing emphasis on metadata consistency.

The focus on the website also led the curator to reexamine collecting policies, and the Women Veterans collection now accepts loaned material for digitization, especially photographs. Once a digital surrogate is created, the originals are returned to the donor. The loss of artifactual value is not ideal, but Koelsch feels that the informational value, especially with images, is worth the



trade-off. Inspired by the community archiving trend in the profession, this “post-custodial” approach to materials is increasingly becoming accepted practice within the profession.<sup>8</sup>

Women Veterans is a highly curated project that is labor-intensive because of the continual addition of materials and the rich metadata that is created for each item. Therefore, digitizing these materials requires a somewhat different workflow than the “mass digitization/minimal metadata” approach applied to other collections at the university. Effective communication has also been essential, particularly during the platform migration. Unlike the process with UA Photos, including the curator in the initial planning made the transition much easier.<sup>9</sup>

The library is now in the process of migrating all digital collections from CONTENTdm to a new digital asset management platform, and the metadata standardization completed for the earlier migration has streamlined this process considerably. As a result of the lessons learned about the importance of interdepartmental collaboration, the curator served on the task force to choose the replacement product and has been closely involved in the metadata migration process. As to “who drove the bus,” in this case, there were two sets of hands on the wheel. The process resulted in a successful collaborative relationship because the curator was consulted in the initial stages of the move of the Women Veterans materials to CONTENTdm and the digitization librarian worked with her to develop a detailed workflow.

### **Bus #3: *The Anna Maria Gove Collection***

While processing collections before digitization ensures fewer problems, it is not always possible. Archivists understand that processing provides a sound physical arrangement and an opportunity to create robust metadata for digital description. With the previous projects, items were displayed with item-level metadata, which is an extremely labor-intensive process. The authors examined trends in the archival field to create best practices for streamlining digitization. Mass digitization had been discussed in the literature as an effective method of providing both context and content.<sup>10</sup> The digitization librarian looked to incorporate this idea into building new digital collections in CONTENTdm. Thus, the UA Photos and Women Veterans initiatives paved the way for the digitization of the Dr. Anna Maria Gove Papers (Gove).

### ***The collection***

The Gove collection has great research value, and digitization was the best way to provide access to a broad audience, as well as to protect the physical materials from overuse. One of the first female doctors in North Carolina, Dr. Gove was a pioneer in health and hygiene, leading the campus through a typhoid epidemic that decimated the student body. She also started the

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<sup>8</sup> Jimmy Zavala, Alda Allina Migoni, Michelle Caswell, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor. “‘A Process Where We’re All at the Table’: Community Archives Challenging Dominant Modes of Archival Practice,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 45, no. 3 (2017): 202–15, doi:10.1080/01576895.2017.1377088.

<sup>9</sup> The WVHP curator and the digitization librarian consulted with the metadata librarian on what descriptive metadata fields were needed by researchers, as well as devising a list of controlled vocabulary terms.

<sup>10</sup> Larisa K. Miller, “All Text Considered: A Perspective on Mass Digitizing and Archival Processing,” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 521–41, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.76.2.6q005254035w2076>.

physical education department at the school. During World War I, she served with the American Red Cross in France. Single and independently wealthy, Dr. Gove traveled the world studying medicine and documenting her travels through photography. The collection contains extensive correspondence between Dr. Gove and her family and friends; notes from continuing education classes; and postcards and photographs of people, places, and events throughout her life.

### ***Pilot projects***

Prior to the Gove project, the manuscripts archivist supplied the digitization librarian with two small collections as pilots for mass digitization. The literary manuscripts of authors Robert Watson and Randall Jarrell had already been processed to a satisfactory archival standard and had online finding aids that could be used for metadata creation. The digitization librarian crafted a workflow document to track the transfer of materials through the process and establish quality control. Metadata consisted of folder-level description, per the concepts of minimal processing for digitized collections advanced by Greene and by Miller.<sup>11</sup> The assumption was that full-text search combined with folder-level description would facilitate access to the collections more quickly and efficiently than detailed item-level description.

Overall, these pilot projects ran smoothly. As is often the case with collections of author manuscripts, copyright was an issue. For this reason, some folders could not be digitized. The manuscripts archivist and the digitization librarian discussed options for maintaining the physical context of the folders within the digital collection, and they ultimately decided to create an “empty” folder object to display metadata for the items without digital surrogates. Users of the digital collection were then presented with an explanation of the item’s copyright status and a reminder that the physical item could be viewed in person at the archives.

The success of these pilot projects led to the adoption of mass digitization as an institutional standard. In 2014, the digitization unit sought new projects that met the library’s digital collections priorities. At that time, the digitization librarian approached the manuscripts archivist for possible collaborative projects. Together they examined several collections and discussed the pros and cons of digitizing each. The manuscripts archivist mentioned the Gove papers as a possible project, but the collection had many arrangement issues that would need to be resolved before digitization. The manuscripts archivist preferred to wait until the collection was processed—a project that could take a least a year to complete. In 2015, however, grant funding made prioritizing the digitization of the Gove papers more attractive, leading the digitization librarian and the manuscripts archivist to reassess their timetable.

### ***Reprocessing the collection***

Reprocessing Dr. Gove’s collection presented an interesting challenge. Her materials were transferred to the archives shortly after her death in 1949, and the items were divided between the library and other departments on campus. The documents, artifacts, and photographs were

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<sup>11</sup> Mark A. Greene, “MPLP: It’s Not Just for Processing Anymore,” *The American Archivist* 73, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010): 175–203; Miller, “All Text Considered.”

given to the library, while the textiles were sent to the home economics department. When the collection was originally processed in the 1980s or 1990s, the archives staff included historians and librarians who lacked archival training. Thus, the collection was arranged in a manner inconsistent with current archival best practices. For example, many of the photographs were removed to an artificial photograph collection while the paper documents were divided into two manuscript collections, the Gove Family Papers and the Anna Gove Papers. In order to explore the interaction between Dr. Gove and her family, researchers would need to know that the materials were located in two collections and that they must access both. The manuscripts archivist decided that the materials needed to be reprocessed to return the items to some semblance of their original order. The digitization initiative accelerated the reprocessing timeline.

A complete assessment of the materials in both collections provided insight into past processing endeavors. Photographs were organized broadly by people, places, or events. A folder labeled “pre-1900 African Americans” indicated that the collection was organized by historians who wanted to be able to access materials of high research value quickly. Correspondence was organized by recipient, then by date. Some materials, like the correspondence and postcards, were highly organized, while others were put in boxes without folders or description. Unfortunately, original order could not be ascertained from the current state of the collection.

The manuscripts archivist decided on a processing plan that would allow for digitization and organization to happen simultaneously. As soon as the first several folders in the correspondence series were organized and labeled, they were sent to the digitization unit. As the materials were scanned, metadata was added at the folder level describing the subseries and dates of the folder contents. The files were uploaded to CONTENTdm and were ingested into OCLC/WorldCat and the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA).

### ***Digital platform challenges to processing***

The project ran smoothly at first, until the manuscripts archivist discovered problems within the correspondence. Several letters had been misfiled, most likely because previous processors had incorrectly interpreted the handwriting. Interfiling the correspondence in the correct location became a problem for folders that had already been digitized; additions had to be added manually to the compound objects in CONTENTdm, a slow and painstaking process. After the correspondence had been reorganized, the manuscripts archivist moved on to the postcard series. Approximately thirty postcards contained correspondence and she decided to move these to the correspondence series, necessitating further editing of the digital objects. Ultimately, the manuscripts archivist and the digitization librarian decided to halt digitization until all series were arranged and described.

### ***Lessons learned***

The lessons learned from the Gove project, while painful, will be helpful to future mass digitization projects at the institution. Most importantly, both the digitization librarian and the manuscripts librarian learned that processing of a collection must be completed before digitization can begin. In this instance, the push to digitize drove the bus straight off a cliff. Both

the digitization librarian and the manuscripts archivist learned important lessons about processing collections while conducting a mass digitization project. Archival arrangement can be unpredictable, even in semi-processed collections. Rearranging existing digital objects within a content management system can be an onerous and frustrating task that requires duplication of effort. The decision was made that future mass digitization projects will only be undertaken when collections are fully processed, and the timeframe and material selection have been mutually agreed upon.

### **Conclusion: The Bus Terminal**

In reviewing the first decade of the library's digitization program, it became evident that the question was not "who was driving the bus," but "what was driving the bus." The answer was clearly "the rush to digitization." While all stakeholders were enthusiastic about the prospect of greater access to the collections, the library's new focus on digitization created an unanticipated shift in archival processing priorities and staff responsibilities. As a result, while the archivists were essential to the projects' workflows and processing decisions, it was the digitization unit that imposed the timetables, sometimes creating frustration and miscommunication. Once formal digitization efforts began, building a collaborative relationship between the two departments became essential. The dearth of literature about such collaborations resulted in much of the "trial and error" approach to these early projects. The success of the library's digitization projects depended on the ability of the departments to work cooperatively and building upon the lessons learned by each of the early efforts.

In many ways, these early experiences laid the cornerstone for how the archivists and the digitization librarian would work together on subsequent projects. The willingness of both departments to work toward a common goal on UA Photos built trust and established initial best practices for the Women Veterans migration. Consequently, the Women Veterans curator and the digitization librarian were able to move beyond the conflicting requirements of archival processing and digital content management to develop a detailed workflow, reexamine collecting policies, and create a workable standardization of metadata. Yet even when there are positive models to serve as templates for future projects, there are always missteps, such as with the Gove collection. The hurry to digitize the material forced an accelerated reprocessing timeline that resulted in a stalled project. This only confirmed what was already known—that digitizing unprocessed or poorly processed collections should be avoided.

In a perfect world, the digitization of archival material would only happen with collections that have been completely arranged and described according to best practices and would proceed with the full cooperation of all involved parties and departments. Obviously, this ideal is often unattainable. Sometimes projects come with a history that forces the prioritization of one set of concerns over another, as with the UA Photos. Factors such as external funding can also force rapid processing decisions when a longer-term project plan would have been optimal, as was the case with digitizing Gove.

In conclusion, the most important lessons learned from these projects were that, firstly, the best results are achieved when archivists are consulted about digitization goals and are included in decisions about project design. Secondly, archivists must keep in mind that the requirements of databases and content management systems require a level of standardization and flexibility with

which they may not always be comfortable. Thirdly, all stakeholders should understand that a “one size fits all” approach will not work for all projects. Most importantly, it is imperative that before any digitization projects involving archival material begin, archivists and digitization librarians have to arrive at mutually acceptable project priorities, selection of materials, and workflows. When these criteria are met, it will ultimately give everyone an equal seat on the bus.

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