Freed Faces, Our Past Americans: Collaborations to Create, Digitize and Describe the "Former Slaves in Freedom" Collection

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From the Field

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Abstract

The Chicago State University (CSU) Archives collaborated with the International Society of Sons and Daughters of Slave Ancestry (ISDSA), a Chicago-based lineage society, to digitize, describe, and make accessible online a collection of 359 private historic photographs of formerly enslaved African Americans, and 90+ brief family histories, submitted by descendants. This case study describes the benefits, processes, and challenges of this unique, unfinished collaborative project. The study also describes: 1. Creative, flexible approaches to collaborative digital projects by an academic institution and a community organization; 2. Balancing cataloging/metadata standards while respecting a curator's goals for the collection.

Keywords: African American history; African American genealogical data; African American lineage societies; collaboration; community archives; digital collections; digital projects; historical photographs; metadata; partnerships

Introduction

Academic libraries have been involved in digital project work (digitizing physical collections or creating digital collections, and making them accessible online) for the past two decades or more. Digital project work is typically a collaborative process that can involve multiple people inside or outside an institution, all of whom ideally bring their skills, abilities, and specialties to the project. Digital projects can involve employees from one or more units, along with volunteers outside the institution including community members, private individuals, or groups interested in the collection(s) to be digitized, and

those who desire a voice in decisions to initiate digital projects.

This paper describes two phases of a collaborative digital project at a small, urban, public university from both a cataloger's perspective and a collection curator's perspective. In phase one, the CSU archivist and the curator created and described digital surrogates of the photographs. The curator derived and compiled 90+ brief family histories based on data submitted by descendants. In phase two part one, I collaborated with several student workers on describing the family histories, and reviewing and remediating collection descriptions (metadata) in preparation

for upload to online platforms. In phase two part two, I initiated consultations with various professionals in the library and archives community, to ensure standard metadata. Most importantly, I sought counsel from the collection curator to understand the metadata and align it with her goals for the collection. This paper highlights the importance of the various consultations on the resulting metadata.

Background on ISDSA and Its Physical Collection

Seven individuals co-founded the International Society of Sons and Daughters of Slave Ancestry (ISDSA) in Chicago in 1996 in order to honor and memorialize formerly enslaved persons. It was the first lineage society in the United States committed to documenting and preserving slave genealogy. The co-founders were: Pat Bearden, Curtis Brasfield, Alvin Collins, Adlean Harris, JoAnn Page, Yolanda Simmons, and Robert H. Williams[1] (See Figure 1). They were members of the Patricia Liddell Researchers, Chicago chapter, an African American genealogy society. With approximately 100 years' combined experience in family history research, these co-founders traced their genealogy to their ancestors who had been enslaved.[2] In addition to historians, the group included authors, retired educators, a librarian and newspaper columnist, and a certified genealogist.[3] Currently, Pat Bearden is the ISDSA president and curator of the ISDSA Collections (physical and digital).

In 1999, ISDSA launched a state of Illinois grant-funded, nation-wide, grassroots campaign to collect photographs and biographical information about formerly enslaved African Americans from their descendants. For the campaign, ISDSA members created a submission form where submitters included photographic and biographical data about their enslaved ancestors.[4] The ISDSA Collections include images of formerly enslaved African Americans born in 19

southern States in the United States. These images include photographs of paintings, sketches, and drawings. Also included are descendants' personal anecdotes about how their ancestors experienced slavery and subsequent freedom. Many collection photographs, taken in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, feature not only adult individuals but also family members (spouse, children, parents). (See Figures 2 and 3). Nearly all individuals depicted wore formal, period clothing, and some held personal items, such as a book or a cane. Some men were pictured standing next to their automobiles. At least two images depict white slaveholders who reportedly fathered children with enslaved females they owned.

Once the data were collected, ISDSA members and volunteers input submission form data into a spreadsheet, then uploaded the data and photos they digitized (with grant funding) onto: https://sites.rootsweb.com/~ilissdsa/.[5] This data was later used as the ISDSA Collections metadata. The campaign is ongoing; Bearden continues to network with others to inform them about ISDSA and invite them to submit ancestral photographs and stories.[6] (See Figures 4 and 5).

Understanding CSU, Its Library and Archival Facilities

CSU is a minority serving institution that supports "…community development, including social justice," per CSU's Mission Statement.[7] Almost 20% of all African American students receiving a Bachelor's degree from Illinois public universities come from CSU.[8] CSU offers Bachelor's degrees and minors in African American Studies (AAS).[9] The CSU Gwendolyn Brooks Library core values include. "Community development and partnerships."[10] Both the CSU Mission Statement and the Library core values communicate that inclusivity of and service to diverse populations is important to the institution on campus and in the community. The Brooks

Library membership in the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), allows CSU to add digital collections to CARLI Digital Collections.[11] This membership includes one CONTENTdm license along with training and support. CARLI uses CONTENTdm to store and display digital images and metadata files.[12] Digital collections can then be added to the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) via the Illinois Digital Heritage Hub (IDHH), a state collaboration that gathers metadata from cultural heritage institutions. IDHH provides guidelines for collection metadata added to DPLA.[13]

The CSU Archives and Special Collections unit collects materials, "that reflect the historical, literary, and academic traditions of CSU and the south side community of Chicago."[14] Special Collection areas pertinent to this study include: African American history, neighborhood history, and social justice.[15] The archivist at the time of this data collection was Aaisha Haykal. Haykal holds an MSLIS and Community Informatics certificate issued from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2011.[16] The certificate suggests interest and commitment to help local communities and groups archive their collections. I understand this was Haykal's first professional archivist position.

Digital Library Plan and Implementation

CSU had previously prepared for ISDSA collaboration. Development and implementation of the 2006 CSU Digital Library Plan provided needed infrastructure and experience in order for library and archives staff to partner with ISDSA. The plan included specifications and cost estimates for equipment (digitization scanner), software (CONTENTdm), and staff role descriptions. The Digitization and Web Services (DWS) Coordinator and Technical Services (TS) Director (plan author) were set to manage CONTENTdm and the local digitization server; The

DWS Coordinator would manage and coordinate materials digitization, and create web pages; the Bibliographic Control Coordinator along with myself, the Special Formats Cataloging Librarian, would design metadata templates; manage the cataloging process; and input Dublin Core metadata into CONTENTdm.[17] During the implementation of the plan (2007-2009), I created metadata for 71 digitized books, as well as reviewed and edited student-input digital photograph metadata. The DWS Coordinator uploaded image and metadata files to CARLI's server. Creating, reviewing, and editing Dublin Core metadata within CONTENTdm gave me the experience I needed to review and edit ISDSA Collection metadata. Acquiring and using this equipment and software provided CSU Library (and later, archives personnel) the tools and experience needed to develop the capacity to later collaborate with ISDSA.

Project Participants

In addition to Haykal and myself, Pat Bearden was a primary participant in this project. She is a family historian, who holds a Bachelor's degree in Education (Chicago Teachers College, CSU predecessor), and a Master's degree in Education (Roosevelt University). Bearden taught elementary school (27 years, Chicago Public Schools), where she developed and taught family history courses.[18] Bearden was acquainted with Haykal, as both were members of the Black Chicago History Forum. In addition, ISDSA exhibited their photograph collection at CSU in 2002. Since then, two cofounders have died; one is in a nursing home, and one moved to the north side of Chicago. One former member dropped out due to family issues.[19] Bearden was the sole ISDSA member active in the CSU collaboration and as a result, her perspective as an ISDSA representative is included in this paper.

Background on CSU-ISDSA Collaboration

Bearden attended a meeting at Chicago's Newberry Library in 2014 wherein attendees were invited to submit digital collections to the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). Bearden told a librarian attendee about the ISDSA Collection, and then acted on the librarian's suggestion to contact the CSU archivist. Bearden said, "I went to school there" (Chicago Normal School) and, "Tread works there" (referring to Treadwell Merrill, former CSU librarian and member of an African American genealogical group along with Bearden).[20] Bearden hoped to collaborate with CSU to digitize the ISDSA Collection and add it to DPLA.[21] "We move forward by merging and teaming with like-minded organizations," she said.[22] Echoing ISDSA's goal, Bearden publicized years earlier, "In keeping with ISDSA's goal to form strategic partnerships, we continue to forge productive relationships with organizations that share our vision."[23]

ISDSA Project Phase One Part One

Formalized Partnership and Digital Project Work

Phase one (2015- September 2016), took approximately 18 months. Both phases included Bearden and one CSU employee. Phase one began when Haykal created a memo of understanding (MOU) between ISDSA and Chicago State University, to facilitate adding ISDSA photographs into the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). The MOU, based on ISDSA's and CSU's needs, goals, and resources, specified what each party would provide and how each would benefit.[24] (See Figure 6).

During phase one CSU Archivist Aaisha Haykal facilitated a CSU-ISDSA collaboration with Bearden, ISDSA Collection curator, and oversaw the digital project work. Bearden shared with Haykal information about ISDSA and its physical collection.[25] Due to lack of resources to hire workers for the project, Bearden decided to scan

the photographs herself to move the project along. "A lot of worthwhile work doesn't get done due to shortage of workers," said Bearden.[26] Haykal advised, trained, and assisted Bearden on digitizing the print collection (photographs and text) on CSU scanner equipment purchased to build the CSU Digital Library. Haykal also answered questions.[27] Photographs were scanned at 600 dpi.[28] Bearden voluntarily came to CSU "every Tuesday for a year and a half" to digitize and describe the collection.[29] Bearden also derived personal narratives based on biographical data from completed ISDSA submission forms.[30] Haykal also trained Bearden to input image file and biographical metadata (from personal narratives) into Excel.[31] The narratives were saved as PDF text documents and were included in the collection.

Organizing Digital Collection Files

Haykal saved image and text files using this structure: State abbreviation_Surname_First name; a successive number starting with "001" and ".tif" i.e. "AL_King_Glasco_001.tif" for an image of Glasco King from Alabama. Additional files associated with the same person include a distinguishing number for format i.e. "Photo2": "GA_Steverson_Wilson_Photo2_029.tif". Text files end with "..Oral, a number, then ".pdf" i.e. "GA_Steverson_Wilson_Oral_029.pdf". This filename structure enabled multiple files associated with one individual to be grouped together in the file directory and thus more easily accessible for inventory and content description.

Describing the Collection

Bearden used the ISDSA metadata template and submission form for data input into Excel. Bearden and Haykal reviewed metadata on completed submission forms, then decided which metadata to include and where to categorize it. When they saw patterns or themes, they added another column to input needed metadata. They also identified original image format types. Bearden read a book on historical

(post-slavery) clothing.[32] This helped her better understand how to describe clothing in the collection images.

Phase Two Part One

Roles and Backgrounds

Phase two part one began upon Haykal's departure (fall 2016), and after passing metadata, text, and image files to me for metadata review, edit, and upload to CONTENTdm.[33] Phase two part one lasted nearly 2.5 years (intermittent, including time spent on my other faculty cataloging librarian duties). (See Figure 7). Phase two team members included myself and several student workers I trained and supervised (see Acknowledgment; see Figures 8-12).

I am an assistant professor in the Brooks Library at Chicago State University; with an MSLIS from Brigham Young University and a Master's degree in History from Chicago State University; 20+ years' academic library cataloging experience (including non-print format materials); Metadata experience in Dublin Core and CONTENTdm per CARLI metadata standards.

Student workers Buie and Christian both entered and edited metadata. The other students reviewed and edited metadata. The students (graduate and undergraduate) originated from Brazil, Chicago, India, London, and Russia. Their majors included Business Management, Computer Science, Geography, and Psychology. Their participation brought multicultural, multiethnic, and multi-generational aspects to the project.

Assess and Standardize Metadata

In fall 2016, I became familiar with the collection images and assessed the metadata in Excel. This digital collection and metadata were unique from any other metadata/cataloging project I had worked on. The metadata included a lot of genealogical and biographical data, which I had

not seen included in digital collections before. That data informed me that the curator wanted researchers to see the image and read about the person's family history simultaneously.

Also, that fall I started reviewing Dublin Core and CARLI metadata guidelines to verify required, recommended, and optional fields.[34] This was necessary, as I had not worked with metadata for several years. I assessed, edited, and documented collection metadata issues, and made decisions on metadata to add, retain, edit, rearrange or cut, per metadata standards. This was important because the metadata was created and input by others (volunteers, community members), and some of it was non-standard. I then categorized the metadata as: 1. Needed to be cut or edited and therefore not ready for upload; 2. Local and important to the curator, and allowable by metadata specialists. (See Figure 13).

Workflow

I then developed a workflow for reviewing and editing of metadata. I chose to focus on one column of metadata at a time, starting with the Description column, as it had the most metadata. I trained the first student worker to note issues (spelling, punctuation) in said column, then to rename and resave the file before sending it to me via email. I repeated this work process with other students, varying the instructions as needed. I reviewed the students' work and sent feedback and further instructions by email prior to the students' next shifts. I also showed students what data to edit and how, then watched them do a few edits to ensure they knew what to do. In winter 2017, I documented my questions and metadata issues in preparation to consult with metadata specialists. During the project, I trained several students to review and edit collection metadata in Excel. I continued to edit metadata as time permitted in conjunction with other duties. The amount of metadata was overwhelming, however, I persisted in reviewing

and editing it, assisted by student workers, in consultation with other professionals, and most importantly, the curator.

Consultations with Other Professionals

In summer 2016, I met briefly with Haykal in person and took notes while she told me about the collection and asked me to review, edit, and upload the metadata to CONTENTdm. Before she left in late September 2016, she left me a copy of the images, text and metadata on an external drive.[35] After Haykal left, I consulted with her by email as needed. I followed Haykal's use of Library of Congress subject headings.[36] After I consulted with the new archivist, I replaced the terms "slave" or "slaves" with "enslaved." [37] For six months (October 2016-March 2017) I reviewed, assessed, and edited the metadata before I met the curator, Pat Bearden. My consultations with her about the metadata will be covered later in this article.

I also consulted with other librarians and metadata specialists. This helped me understand the viability of local metadata fields for researchers. In 2017, metadata specialists assured me I could use local fields (column labels) if I felt they were meaningful.[38] That advice freed me to consider adding additional local fields as needed. CARLI staff offered to review the metadata file, which was important, as they identified incomplete filenames and lack of title fields (Dublin Core and CARLI required).[39] I addressed these issues and revised metadata editing instructions for students after I made informed decisions on standardization based on CARLI's feedback. In spring 2017, I learned from the Systems Librarian how to join/concatenate data from two Excel columns into one, to create a Title field.[40] This is one example of standardization that can enable discovery.

I also consulted the metadata literature. Short advises discussing metadata needs with the content provider or project lead before digital projects are started.[41] I followed Short's advice, which made a significant, positive difference on the project metadata work. His advice, along with the archivist leaving CSU, encouraged interaction between myself and the curator. As Bearden and I discussed the project over the two+ years, and how to make the project successful, I better understood both the metadata and her goals, for both the collection and metadata. The discussions motivated me to continue editing the metadata, despite its complexity, and the many challenges it presented. I was able to enhance the metadata to better reflect Bearden's goals. Short's advice enabled me to more effectively review, edit and improve the metadata; it became more complete, more meaningful, and of higher quality.

Review and Edit Subject Headings

In 2019, the last major area of metadata review/edit was the Library of Congress subject headings. I assessed the subject headings (terms) for spelling, appropriateness, and consistency with authorized headings in the Library of Congress Authorities database.[42] Therein, I identified additional appropriate subject headings to add, and inappropriate headings to delete. I trained and closely supervised a student worker to enhance existing headings, add new headings for family roles/relationships, military service, and occupations. I instructed the student to learn to use the OpenRefine software to delete inappropriate or unneeded subject headings.[43]

Metadata Fields

The image metadata is stored in Excel, with 359 rows and 30+ labeled columns. Each row contains metadata about the individual(s) in the featured image; some include information about family members. I added nearly 30 additional rows to the initial 320 to ensure that each row contained only one description per image. I added twelve more columns to the initial

twenty, to enhance discovery. The Description column originally contained name(s) of person(s) in the image, any distinguishing personal characteristics, clothing details, types of items they held; biographical, occupational, military service, and slaveholder data. Later, I moved data from the said four categories to new separate columns, and retained in the Description column only information about the image. Submitters were typically descendants of the person(s) featured in the images. In 330 rows, metadata specified the relationship between the featured person(s) and the submitter; nearly one-third specified either Paternal or Maternal.[44]

Workflow and Staffing Challenges

Staffing

The Brooks Library downsized and lost personnel over the last several years and those remaining have multiple roles and duties. Fewer library personnel mean less (or no) time for digital projects. I had no staff to assist me in this project. I continued library cataloging, processing work, and metadata remediation work (as time permitted). Since May 2016, I had no staff to assist in cataloging and processing library materials. One staffer, recalled in January 2019, resumed processing work (her civil service rank excludes cataloging duties). In addition, two winter pipe floods (2018, 2019) affected my department and office, disrupting library operations and project workflow.

Student Labor

Finding capable, dependable, student labor was essential to project success due to the large volume of very detailed work required to standardize and enhance the metadata. It also required good judgment and ability to focus for 2-3 hours per shift. Due to lower enrollment, fewer students are available for part-time work. Vetting student workers was critical. During interviews, I tested students' attention to detail by asking

them to identify misspellings in the Excel metadata file.

I hired a few student workers (two in succession; two concurrent) to help review and edit the metadata. After the first two student workers, I hired a third student who seemed better suited to process books than review/edit metadata. I asked the Honor's College for help finding student volunteers to assist with metadata remediation but was unsuccessful. I wish I had requested student help from other campus units or departments i.e. Student Government Association. Two department colleagues' willingness to lend their three student workers during one semester when I lacked a student worker (one the next semester) was very helpful. Two of the students were undergraduates, majoring in business management and psychology; the third was a computer science graduate student. I found that computer science and business management students were well-suited to the work, as they seemed comfortable and capable at reviewing and editing detailed data; two of each worked on the project.

I specifically sought to find a computer science student who would be able to upload the collection images and metadata into CONTENTdm. This was important because Haykal had asked me to upload the collection into CONTENTdm along with reviewing and editing metadata. Fortunately, a Computer Science faculty member recommended Christian, a Computer Science graduate student, and a quick learner and capable worker.[45] I assigned him to complete the CONTENTdm training made available on the CARLI website.

Phase Two Part Two

Meeting the Curator

Phase two part two began in April, 2017, when I met Bearden, and continued till spring 2019. (See Figure 14). By coincidence/design, Bearden lives in my neighborhood. Visiting Bearden in

her home, she showed me her family and extended family photographs, which were prominently displayed on a table. Later, I reflected that the photographs were closer physically to us than if they had been on the wall, and therefore such placement seemed more effective.

Outreach

In April 2017, Bearden and I traveled to Iowa where we co-presented on the ISDSA Collection at an archives conference. The trip allowed us time to become well-acquainted and for me to ask her questions about ISDSA, the photograph and digital collections, the metadata, and the process of digitizing and describing the collection. We became good professional colleagues and good friends.

Bearden and I traveled and co-presented on the collection and the ISDSA-CSU collaboration several more times during the past two years, including two additional conferences: DPLAfest (2017) and Midwest Archives Conference (2019). Our presentations were well received. During the archival Iowa conference, an attendee expressed interest in the collection; he wanted to do a similar project to capture his Eastern European heritage in Wisconsin.[46] The collection is now more widely known in the library and archival world. An article was written about our presentation at DPLAfest and published in American Libraries magazine.[47] The article provided even wider national exposure to the collection.

Consultations with the Curator

From April 2017 onward, I consulted often with Bearden, mostly by long phone conversations but also in person and via email. It was convenient: She was still local, willing and available to answer my questions about ISDSA, the 1999 campaign and the resulting Physical Collection, as well as the people and histories represented in the collection. This helped me gain a holistic view of ISDSA, the collection, and how she

wanted the metadata to be. I also asked how the CSU collaboration was formed and how it developed over time, the digitization process and the work it entailed for both. Anything I needed to know, Bearden was able to clarify and add to my understanding. "Collaborative means anyone you talk to," she said.[48] From the outset, I felt very comfortable with Bearden, which facilitated learning what I needed to know as a cataloger, for the project. She said: "You had no guideposts to tell you how to do it. The background wasn't there, plus, you had other duties."[49] At first, my intellectual curiosity drove my approach to the collection metadata work, but later I felt more connected to it. Bearden also shared with me her goals for the collection, which are described in the next paragraphs.

Curator's Goals for the ISDSA Collection

Bearden wanted the collection to connect researchers to their family histories, and for the descendants of the formerly enslaved to be able to find genealogical information about their ancestors, to see what they looked like, and what they wore. Bearden's "main thing" is, "People hung onto these pictures for over 100 years!" "And that's what their ancestors meant to them." "I want to count them all," i.e. none will be rejected.[50] She added, "I want it i.e. the collection to touch the soul."[51]

The collection reflects ISDSA's goals to honor and celebrate former slaves. ISDSA's goals and objectives can be found at: https://www.isdsa6365.com/about-isdsa.[52] Bearden wanted to ensure ISDSA's goals and mission remained intact during the CSU collaboration. She stressed, "This is a community-based project, it has different standards than archivists have." She added, "This project is "from the people." It is unusual. It needs to remain authentic. We don't want to lose the African [American] voices and how they viewed it. You don't want to sterilize it to the point that it's not recognizable."[53] Bearden added, "Recognize the

need to honor the African American culture and contributions." She continued, "Do you hold it [collection metadata] true to their (community members') intent?"[54] I tried to keep Bearden's goals in mind as I reviewed and edited the metadata.

Bearden also wanted descendants to know how the former slaves prospered post-slavery. She wanted the Collection to convey the fact that the former slaves led productive and accomplished lives, that some of were prosperous even millionaires.[55] About 10 percent were landowners. Some were farmers; others, entrepreneurs who had stores; many were maids, washerwomen, or nannies. But they were strong and proud, and in the photos, they posed with dignity no matter their class or station in life.[56]

It was important to Bearden to include positive images in the collection because many of the images of former slaves she had seen in the past depicted people who worked as sharecroppers, wearing very simple, homemade clothing i.e. made from flour sacks.[57] "In slavery people might have worn flour sack or gunny sack clothing, but none of them dressed like that post slavery" said Bearden.[58]

Metadata Consultations with the Curator

Bearden was the main stakeholder I consulted about the metadata. As time passed, I relied on Bearden's advice more heavily to help me understand how to develop and retain authentic metadata. It seemed the more I learned about the metadata, the more questions I had about it. Bearden's perspective was important for two main reasons: 1. As an ISDSA co-founder and the collection curator, she knows more about the collection than anyone else; 2. She has an African American perspective about the collection and its metadata. One of the key areas Bearden helped me with was the terminology in the metadata. Bearden wanted the collection metadata to include terms that would improve

access to it. When I asked Bearden if she wanted to retain the slaveholder and plantation names and locations, she explained that these names were important [metadata] to include, as they can assist people in finding their enslaved ancestors.[59] The metadata includes separate columns for the submitter's name, and their relationship to the ancestor. Bearden said that, "having the submitter's name in the metadata makes it come full circle."[60]

Other terms that Bearden helped me with regarding usage were the subject headings "Former slaves" or "Enslaved people." I was not sure if these terms were applicable for images of children or adults taken in 1862 or 1863 because the Emancipation Proclamation was written in 1862. Student worker Christian assumed from reading about the Proclamation that all southern slaves were freed in 1862.[61] Bearden explained that slaves were freed at various times, depending on the state, and that some slaveholders did not free their slaves even after the Emancipation Proclamation. She added that a female slave's offspring were born slaves.[62]

I asked Bearden for help choosing between subject headings, for example whether to use "slave master" or "slaveholder" or "slave owner." During one phone conversation. Bearden asked her husband what he thought (both are African American), and they agreed on the term "slaveholder" and so I used it.[63] Bearden added that when she asked others for their opinion on these terms, "everybody had a different opinion."[64]

I also wanted to hear from professional librarians on the terminology (covered later). When I was unsure whether using the subject heading "Slave narratives" was appropriate, Bearden said the personal histories/narratives were vignettes, not slave narratives.[65] I also verified via an online source that slave narratives were a specific genre, written by the slave themselves.[66] I then directed my student worker to remove that subject heading from the metadata.

Curator's Suggestions for Additional Metadata

Bearden approached metadata flexibly. She said there should be a column label for "Also Known As" i.e. AKA, (for variant personal names) as both men and women changed their names, because they ran away. For example, George Washington (married to Virginia Belton) changed his name a lot.[67] Many people remarried; one person was married three times. Sometimes they were known by their first name, or their nickname, or their married name.[68] Bearden's ancestor Fredonia had a different nickname each decade: Jona in 1870; Doney, 1880; Donie, 1900, and Donia, 1910. (See Figure 15). Bearden said the informant (probably a family member) gave names to the census taker each decade, starting in 1870. Bearden added that only a certain percentage of census takers were literate, implying the names could have been misspelled on the census.[69] The names were spelled phonetically based on the informant.[70] Due to time constraints, I did not add such a column, as I was focused on completing the metadata review/edit. I wish however, that it would be done.

Bearden wanted to have a separate column of metadata for female maiden names, as she felt this information would help researchers find their female ancestors. Bearden said that her metadata for a separate project, titled "Remember Their Names" included such a column.[71]

Consultations with Other Professionals About Metadata

After I presented a lightning talk on the collection at the 2017 Code4Lib meeting in Chicago, a seasoned metadata librarian from Illinois State Library offered his feedback on the metadata.[72] He reviewed it and advised me to divide it into three separate Excel sheets with suggested column labels for each sheet. I took much of his advice. He suggested that I derive the title from the featured person's name, using a last name, first

name order. When I asked his opinion on the term "slave owner" he suggested I use it, because "Slavery was a brutal form of oppression, and that term needs to be baldly out there." [73]

I also consulted with Dr. Gemmicka Piper, Humanities Librarian, and Chair, African American Funnel Project, about subject terms to use i.e. slave owner vs. slaveholder vs. slave master. Haykal had recommended Piper as a co-presenter for our MAC2019 (Midwest Archives Conference) session on minority collections (which I chaired).[74] The Funnel Project is a product of the African American Studies Librarians Interest Group (AASLIG) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The Project concentrates on creating, changing, and updating subject headings related to the African American experience, to improve access to African American materials.[75] By Piper's invitation, I participated in a Funnel Project committee conference call in late January 2019, wherein a member advised me to choose a thesaurus and use its terms.[76] This sound, professional advice aligned with my commitment to follow regional and national metadata standards that include consistent use of authorized terms from acceptable thesauri to facilitate discovery and information retrieval within the collection, based on the metadata used. I was relieved, as the advice gave me professional justification for using standard thesauri, which was especially important for me as a catalog librarian. It was also important to Bearden and myself to use descriptive terms that were not offensive to the African American community.

A colleague advised me to ask an African American person to review the metadata, in order to see if the metadata reflected bias. They reasoned that because I am not African American, that while I might not *intend* to include metadata that was biased, I might not recognize it as such. They implied that an African American person would be able to recognize bias in the metadata.[77] Bearden advised that an African

American colleague who is also an archivist would be ideal.[78]

After I shared the colleague's advice with Bearden, she strongly urged me to ask Piper for feedback on the metadata, as she viewed Piper as an expert, "who knows more about African American subject headings than all of us." [79] I emailed Piper a few screenshots of metadata, and asked her for feedback. Unfortunately, Piper softly declined.[80]

Curator's Reflections

Digital Project Work

Bearden was new to the many aspects of digitization. She said, "I didn't know the process. I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was what was in the MOU.[81] She added: "All the stuff I didn't know…archivist's rules, how to scan pictures, digitizing a collection—what does it mean?" Regarding the metadata, Bearden said she was "not up to" …the regulations she had to go through i.e. "those rigid rules" like naming columns, inputting data into only one cell, or saving files in a certain format. "Why all the red tape?" [82] "It took time for me to understand it" i.e. the standards. "Collaboration is about getting understanding." [83] Yet she stressed, "I want it i.e. the metadata done right."[84]

ISDSA-CSU Collaboration

Bearden seems pleased with and relieved about the digitizing and metadata work completed thus far. She reflected positively on the collaboration that enabled her to digitize the ISDSA collection:

"I'm 10 minutes from CSU…when I found out that I could digitize the collection, down the street from my house, I was happy that the work was finally going to get done. That was huge that someone would allow me to come into their space each Tuesday for a year and a half, and she would take me through how to digitize, and

give me input--I was truly grateful for that. And take time and interest in the project and seeing how valuable it was. I could see that the archivist graciously accepted this additional responsibility, and was committed to completing this phase of the project."[85]

Bearden understood that I would take the next step in the process, to look at the metadata and clean it up.[86] In retrospect, Bearden viewed it as a rare opportunity for me to work on the project. Bearden stressed: "Aaisha turned the project over to <u>you</u>. What a gift!"[87] Bearden asked me, "How often does this kind of project happen to a White cataloger? How many Black catalogers are there in the U.S.?" She implied that there were few Black catalogers, and therefore, the chances of a Black cataloger being available (at CSU) to work on this project, were slim.[88]

Discussion and Analysis

Digitization

Bearden wanted to retain the '<u>authentic-ness</u>' of the pictures. She preferred the worn, stapled version of her ancestral photo over the cleaned, photoshopped version. She felt the former didn't reflect the photograph's journey. She wanted the images to reflect the flavor and richness of the time period, and to keep the photograph's context intact. Conversely, a photoshopped version might show more clarity e.g. lost details, and both versions could be included. In retrospect, Bearden regretted cropping some of the image frames, especially with those with the photographer's name. Some photographs included the studio's name. Historians can study photographers from specific studios.[89]

Metadata Work

Networking and collaboration were essential to successful metadata creation, remediation, and enhancement for this project. I was on my own until I used my professional networks to consult with others about metadata standards, including

appropriate terminology, and various aspects of the work. I received guidance from department colleagues, metadata specialists from CARLI, the University of Illinois, the Illinois State Library, professional associations, other librarians, and professional literature. The most unique and extremely valuable source of advice about the metadata was Bearden. Bearden helped me to broaden my view of metadata, to make it richer, more discoverable, more appropriate and ideally appealing to a culturally diverse global audience.

With CSU library participation and collaboration, the ISDSA collection can be added to CARLI's and DPLA's collections. Although both organizations allow flexibility for metadata fields/elements, they require conformance specific standards for metadata and digital files. My professional knowledge as a cataloging librarian and experience following metadata standards was critical to this project and enabled me to prepare collection metadata for upload to CONTENTdm. I did a small test load of images and brief metadata into CONTENTdm. (See Figure 16).

Project Status

In March 2019, after I completed the metadata review/edit process and standardized the metadata per both CARLI and national metadata standards, my supervisor allowed me to send the metadata file to the new archivist. [90] The next steps for the collection images, text and metadata are: 1. Upload to CARLI Digital Collections via CONTENTdm; 2. Review and edit the metadata per the Illinois Digital Heritage Hub guidelines; 3. Upload to DPLA. I am pleased that I was able to help move the project to that point. Hopefully the entire collection and metadata will be uploaded soon. For further information on the status of this project, readers may contact the Archives & Special Collections unit at Chicago State University (via their web-

site at http://csu.libguides.com/collections/archives) and/or ISDSA via email at isdsa@aol.com. In the meantime, readers can visit the newest ISDSA website at: https://www.isdsa6365.com/.

Project Management

There should have been a skilled project manager who initiated pre-project planning with all project stakeholders and participants. Such planning would have included explanation of, discussion about, and commitment to following digitization and metadata guidelines and requirements, in consideration of stakeholders' collection and metadata goals. A project manager was needed to encourage and facilitate proper use of authority throughout the duration to ensure the most appropriate personnel and individuals worked on the project. A project manager was needed to provide direction, oversight, coordination, and to facilitate communication about the project, both between project team members and to others inside and outside the organization.

Expert cataloging guidance in consultation with the curator early on can result in efficient and effective project work.

The metadata work would have been more efficient and more effective were a cataloging/metadata librarian involved with the curator from the project's beginning. Ideally, said librarian would have advised and directed metadata input per professional metadata guidelines and the curator's collection and metadata goals, thus reducing required remediation and enhancement work later on. In short, for best results, call the cataloger sooner rather than later. Invite him/her to the planning table to connect and consult with the curator and other stakeholders from the start. This will enable the cataloger to more effectively assist in planning, advising on, and learning about the

desired metadata early on, and thus save time and labor throughout the project.

Benefits of the Project

Partnering with ISDSA gave CSU employees experience in collaborating with the curator and tapping into a rich tradition of community-based, volunteer project work. It allowed all involved to gain technical skills, and allowed most to learn about how unknown individuals and families from the now-distant past experienced new-found freedom.

The partnership also continued ISDSA's legacy of working together with others toward positive, common goals that would seek to shatter negative cultural norms and educate researchers on potentially unexpected economic, educational, professional, and other types of accomplishments of African Americans who were formerly enslaved.

The collection metadata has valuable genealogical data that users will be able to access and ideally connect with their ancestors. Some CSU students and staff *might* have ancestors represented in the collection and could discover family connections. While reviewing the collection metadata, Allen Buie saw information about George Washington Thomas from Buie Plantation in Mississippi.[91] Buie knew he had relatives from Natchez and wondered if he was related to Thomas.[92]

Future Directions

The ISDSA Collection could become well known in Chicago and globally, which is fitting, considering ISDSA's international scope. Also, the collection has the potential to supplement African American Studies (AAS) courses at CSU *or any other institution.* An AAS professor expressed strong interest in the collection and our presentations (DPLAfest 2017) on the collection.[93] Due to the current pandemic, it is even more important to have digital collections accessible

online, now that much of the teaching and learning from schools, colleges, and universities is done virtually and remotely.

Ideally, other libraries, institutions, and community archives will join us to grow the Collection (thus aligning with Bearden's goals). Bearden wants CSU to help the collection grow. I suggested collaboration with the said African American Studies faculty.[94] Bearden also wants to share the collection with the world.[95] Bearden said that ISDSA has a Facebook page, and to search for "Pat Bearden."[96] "Any group that connects with what the ISDSA project is about i.e. soliciting the collection and sharing of personal and family history, should be aware of it," said Bearden.[97] "We are eager for people to be aware of the collection and to make sure these stories and historic photos are collected and saved for future generations" said Bearden.[98] (See Figure 17).

Conclusion

This study described the ISDSA-CSU collaboration to digitize and describe a community-based collection of historic photographs and personal/family histories for a local African American genealogical society. The study highlighted the numerous collaborative efforts and challenges involving CSU personnel, multiple professional librarians and archivists, and the collection curator from ISDSA, in attempts to meet the curator's collection goals for the metadata and to create a rich online resource for researchers to discover our shared past.

Ideally, this study will serve as a practical example to others in how to (or not to) best carry out similar digital projects, and inspire those with institutional resources to reach out to the communities around them to assist in making their collections accessible online. In 2019, we recognized the 400th anniversary of the first arrival of enslaved people from Africa in the United States.[99] Ideally, this collection can serve as a

more positive contrast to that anniversary, as the global audience will ideally, in the near future, be able to view the collection featuring freed individuals who were able to survive their difficult past, experience wider choices, and forge new lives based on personal choices, for themselves and their families. I am grateful to have played a rather laborious, but rewarding part in

the multi-faceted collaboration that resulted in such a rich digital collection and metadata. I hope that this article pays adequate tribute and provides wider exposure to ISDSA's extensive work to create the physical collection made possible by the submitters' strong ties to their ancestors, and commitment to bring ancestral images and memories--to a present and future audience.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Founders of the International Society of Sons and Daughters of Slave Ancestry, pictured from left to right: Alvin Collins, Yolanda Simmons, JoAnn Page, Michael Flug, Patricia Bearden, Phil Walker (attendee), Curtis Brasfield, and Robert H. Williams. Insert photo: Dr. Adlean Harris. Michael Flug was then Senior Archivist at the Vivian Harsh Research Collection at the Carter G. Woodson Library, Chicago, Illinois.
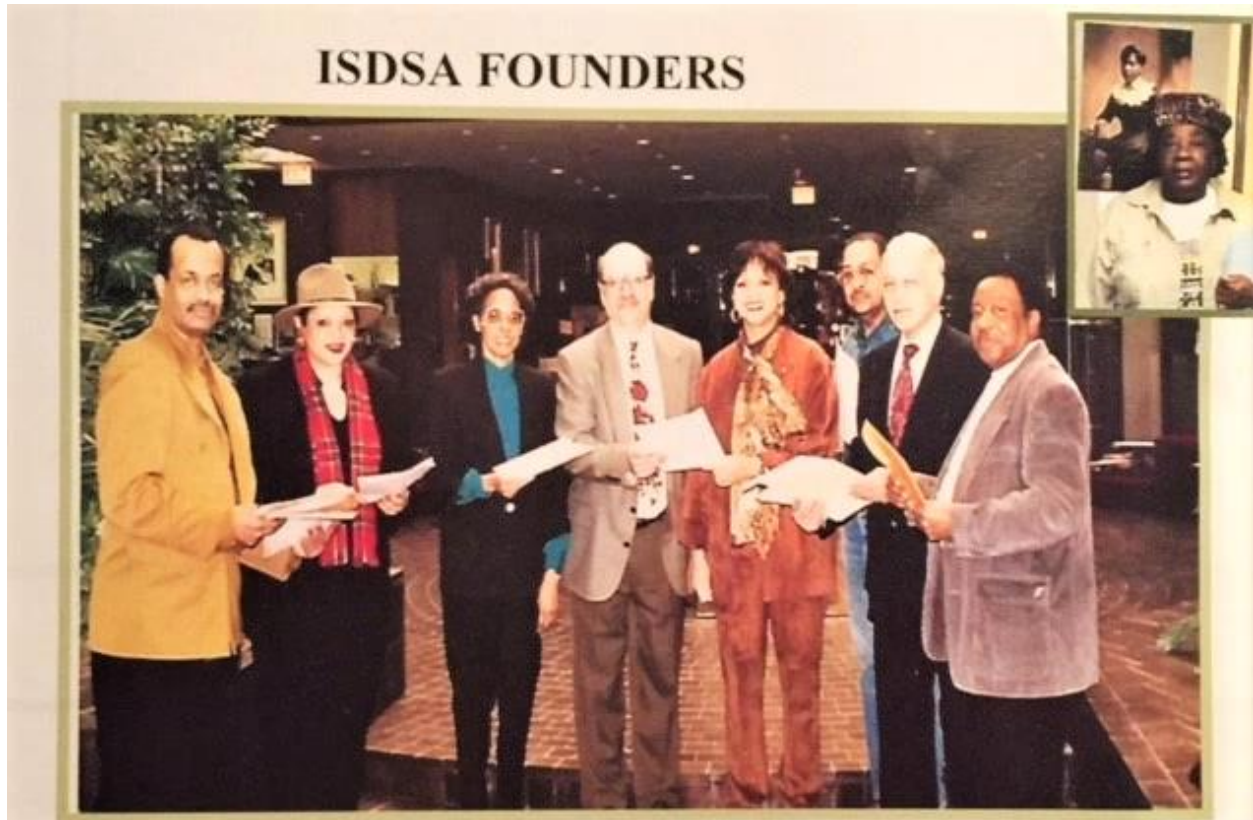
Figure 2. Willetta Gary (photograph submitter) and granddaughter with ancestor Elizabeth White's picture.

Figure 3. Robert H. Williams (ISDSA cofounder and photograph submitter) with picture of ancestor, Reverend Robert Oliver Williams (circa 1854-?)

Figure 4. Pat Bearden, ISDSA collection curator; Ron Davis (photograph submitter) holding a picture of his paternal great-grandfather Davy Crocket Brown and wife Mary Elizabeth English; JoAnn Page, ISDSA cofounder; Yvonne Huey, ISDSA member. Photograph is taken at the State of Illinois building in Chicago where ISDSA held an exhibit. Davis, who lived nearby, went home and brought back that picture.

Figure 5. Long-time friend Fredricka Hicks (photograph submitter) and Pat Bearden, ISDSA Collection curator, at the ISDSA office in the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. By chance, Bearden saw Hicks in the area and invited her to submit photographs of her ancestor to ISDSA. Hicks, a Beverly resident, brought back photographs the same day.

Figure 6. Aaisha Haykal, then archivist at Chicago State University, and Pat Bearden, ISDSA Collection curator, at the Hall Branch, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, Illinois.

Figure 7. ISDSA-CSU Collaboration Timeline -1
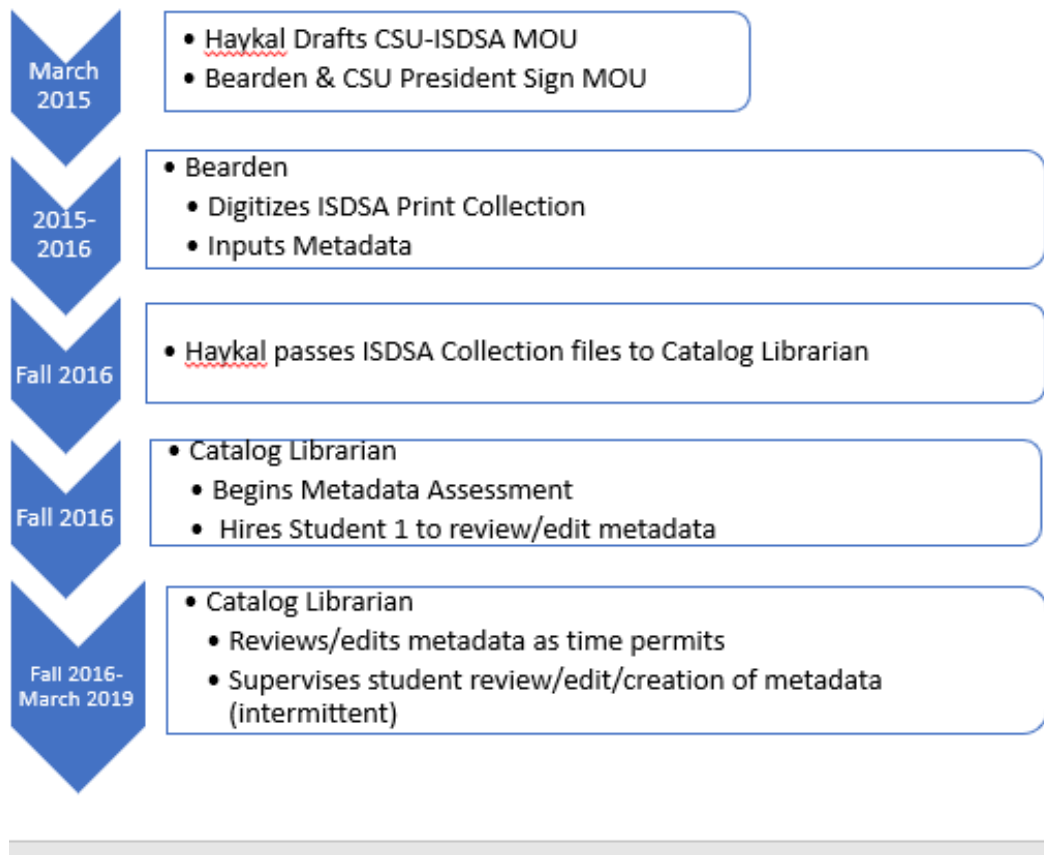
Figure 8. Angel A. Christian, student worker; Gayle Porter; Anastasiia Goncharova, student worker.
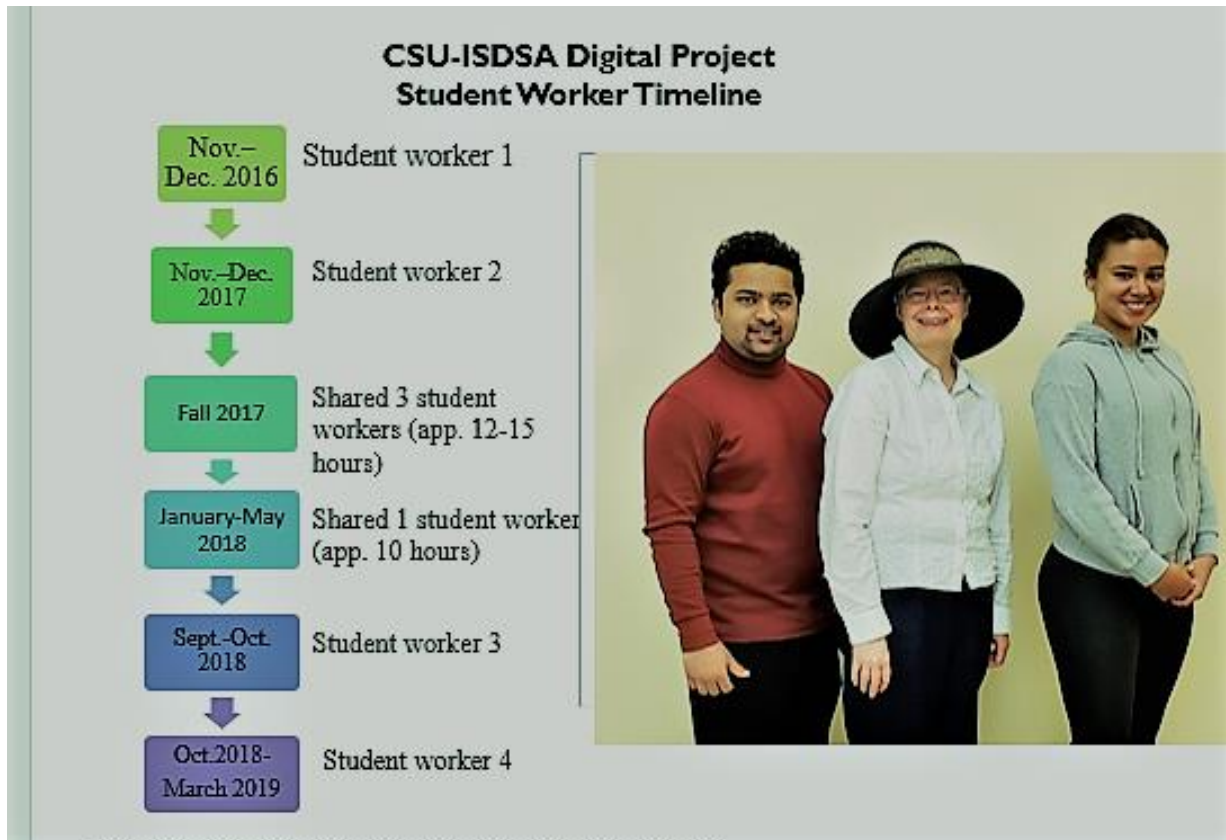
Figure 9. Deidre White-Bradshaw, student worker.
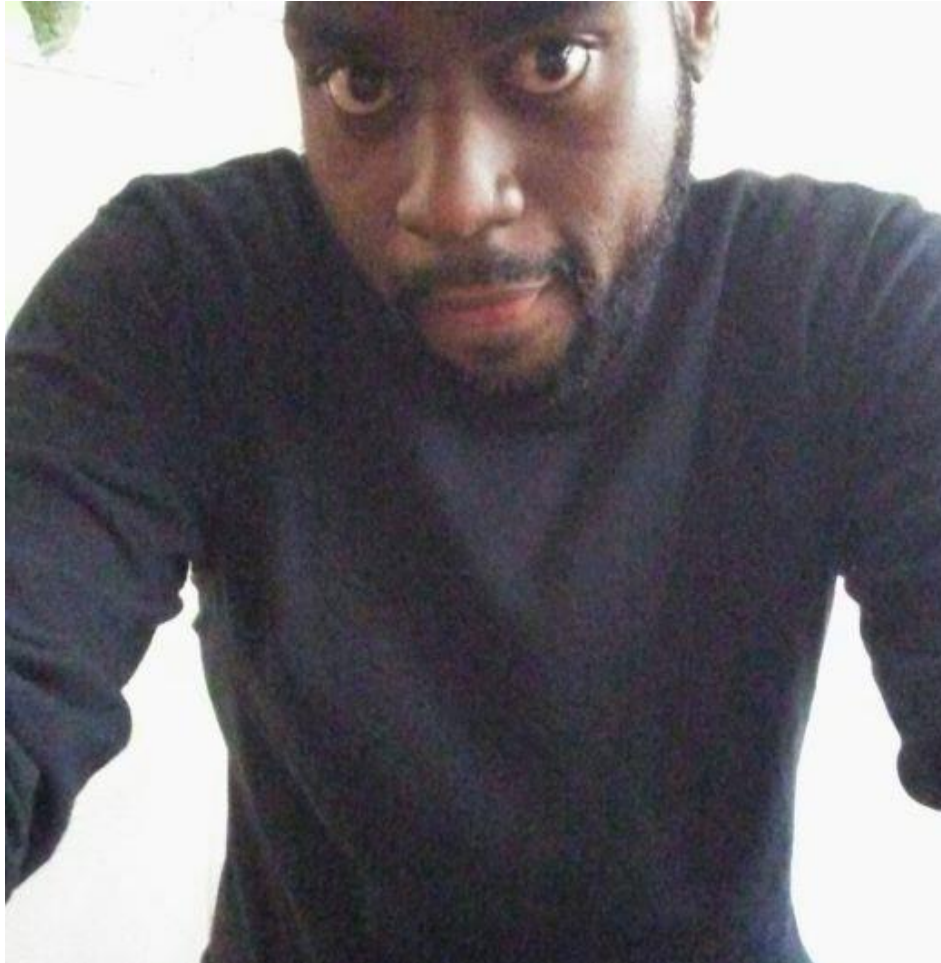
Figure 10. Allen Buie, student worker.

Figure 11. Ludmilla Bomfim, student worker, with Gayle Porter.

Figure 12. Gayle Porter with Jonathan Katta, student worker.

Figure 13. ISDSA-CSU Collaboration Timeline -2

Figure 14. ISDSA-CSU Collaboration Timeline -3

Figure 15. (Right to left) Pat Bearden with her Aunt Ozella and daughter Theresa in front of the ancestral portrait of Fredonia Parrish (1840-1913) at the ISDSA Exhibit, Chicago, Illinois.

Figure 16. (Right to left) Glasco King and his wife Nancy King. This image is from the ISDSA Collection. King (ca. 1862-ca. 1941) was the first African American postmaster in the United States.
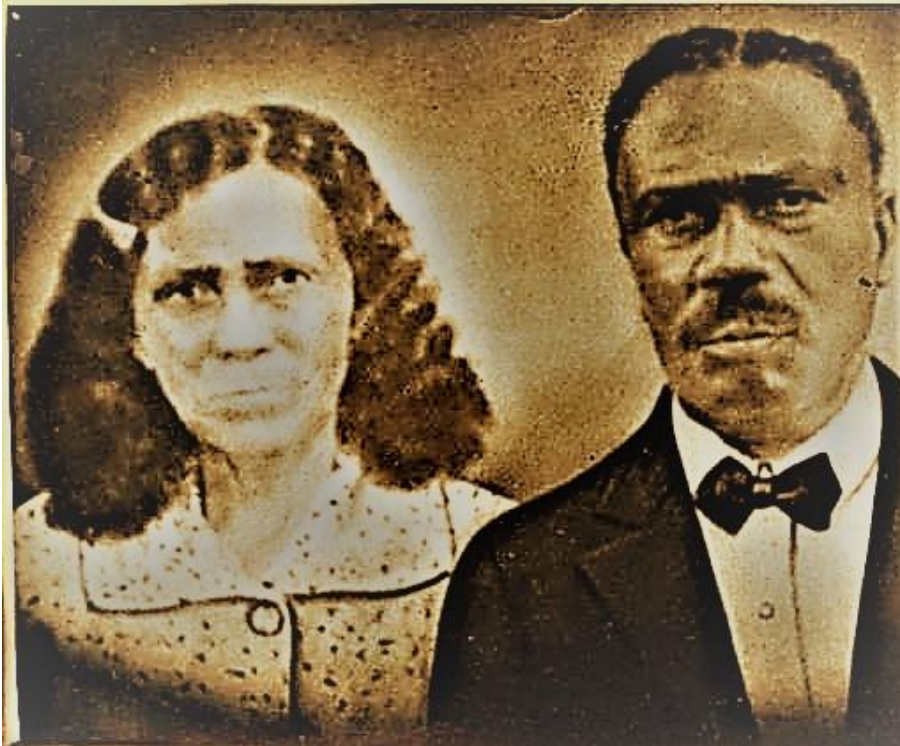
Figure 17. Pat Bearden, curator, and Gayle Porter at ISDSA Exhibit, Juneteenth Celebration at Du Sable Museum, Chicago, June 2019.