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The Oregon Sustainable Community Digital Library:
Built to Fill a Need

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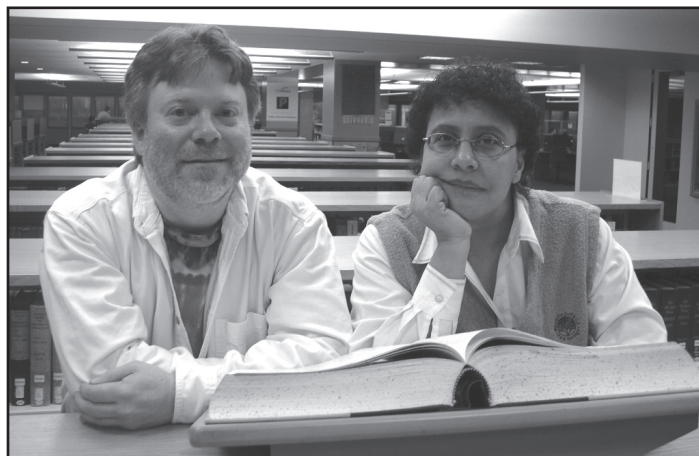Cataloging Librarian and NACO Coordinator, Portland State University

Introduction

What can nineteenth and twentieth century urban planners and policy managers teach today's researchers? And how can we best represent this material to these twenty-first century students and scholars? Those are the questions librarians at Portland State University (PSU) Library hope to answer with the launch of the Oregon Sustainable Community Digital Library (OSCDL). What makes the OSCDL so great is the collaboration among the university, the library, state and municipal agencies to create a central repository for the accession of historical planning documents scattered across the metropolitan area.

As noble as the goal of the project is, it would not have been possible without start-up funding from the Oregon State Library via a Library and Services Technology Act (LSTA) grant. With the first two years of funding the digital team is hoping to convert a significant amount of the vital planning reports and images from the 1960s through 1990s into a digital format so that researchers are not hindered by barriers such as physical location or the off-site storage of print material, thereby limiting accessibility to records.

What's in the Collection?

As this article goes to press, the OSCDL is completing its first year and preparing for its public unveiling in January 2006. The collection development goals of the project are contained in the framing paper commissioned from Professor Carl Abbott, a noted scholar on the history of planning in America. Carl developed a list of categories and agencies of record that can be viewed at: http://oscdl.research.pdx.edu/framing.php.

The authors Gary W. Markham and Rose M. Jackson.

Based on his detailed analysis, the team selected the following material for the launch of the project. Each collection provided opportunities (read: challenges) to how best to catalog and represent the data.

Metro

Becky Shoemaker, the archivist at Metro (the Portland area metropolitan service district), identified several key advisory policy committee meeting notes for inclusion. Currently the OSCDL hosts the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT) notes from inception in 1979 until 1994. We hope to have the complete holdings in the collection by the end of 2006. This type of document lends itself to cataloging similar to a serial record; the monthly notes are added to the base record.

Mark Bosworth, the Data Resource Manager at Metro, had nearly a dozen years of Regional Land Information System GIS data on CDs. The OSCDL now hosts this material, making it available freely to researchers within geography, urban studies, history, and other fields. Since GIS is a dynamic representation of information, the team decided to employ, as much as possible, geo-referencing fields in the MARC record to link other documents to the associated GIS.

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There are varying amounts of usefulness to implementing these fields based upon predicting future informational needs. We can foresee a time that a patron will want to view documents or images specific to an individual street in a specific neighborhood, during a specific time period, related to a specific GIS data layer.

The Ethan Seltzer Collection

Ethan will be delighted to find he has a library collection! Ethan Seltzer is the Director of the School of Urban Studies and Planning at PSU and the library team is using his name as the official name for all contributions from the School of Urban Studies. Not only is he a noted scholar in the field but Ethan has led planning departments for several major municipal agencies. He had several major land use plans in his office that are now in the collection. Documents selected from his collection were traditional book-like material. Some had existing bibliographic records in OCLC and a few were already in PSU's catalog. Considering that he had assembled and maintained this collection over several moves and years gave impetus to our fully cataloging this gray literature.

The lead cataloger decided to fully implement the MARC field 583, the preservation action note (see generally http://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/stmanf.html. Fields identifying other types of record keeping information were also employed, such as who provided these documents (MARC 541), whether they donated or lent them (field 580), and collection and/or sub collection information (field 773).

TriMet

Dareth Murray, TriMet librarian, has contributed material relating to the first light rail project—the Banfield rail system, which is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. Additionally, TriMet has contributed material on the development of Portland's Fareless Square. TriMet has a significant amount of streaming videos on light rail projects and we hope to develop standards for their incorporation into the library during the upcoming year.

City of Portland Archives

Archivists Diana Banning and Brian Johnson contributed the neighborhood community plans for the City of Portland and are working on compiling all the Annual Reports of the Parks Director, starting with the Olmstead report of 1901 for inclusion in the OSCDL. The Archive has recently contributed maps and reports from the 1880s requiring original cataloging and the creation of a method within the library for searching static maps.

Oregon Department of Transportation

Laura Wilt, the Librarian for ODOT, recommended digitizing the series of Biennial Reports of the Oregon State Highway Commission. The collection holds years 1916–1922. The ODOT archive holds a substantial collection of images of the bridges that we hope to include in the upcoming year, again necessitating a method to search images being added to the site interface.

The Ernie Bonner Collection

Ernie Bonner was the former Director of Urban Planning in Portland in the 1970s. His wife, Lynn, donated his papers to the PSU Library special collections. Ernie was also a wonderful teacher and lecturer and his papers were arranged in thematic areas, such as "Harbor Drive" and "Front Street." His papers have been cataloged based on these themes in the library's catalog and the digital library. The OSCDL has digitized approximately 70 percent of his donated papers for inclusion in this first year.

Hardware, Software, Design, Data Management

Based on several financial factors, the project team has limited outsourcing to the

digital conversion of print materials; all other aspects of the project are organic to the university. The PSU Office of Information Technology (OIT) designed our Web interface and architecture, and retrieves material from our Innovative Interface online catalog system. OIT provides our storage and is in the process of building the "backend" of the content system so that we can perform all editing and administrative functions within the library. This collaboration has given us more financial and design flexibility as well as strengthened the working relationship between our departments.

The Way Forward

Besides the ability to collaborate across the metropolitan area, the most time consuming and fascinating aspect of this project has been implementing a methodology of geo-referencing the material. For the team, deciding which material to code what specific coordinate positions has been illuminating for subject selectors, catalogers, and system designers alike.

Consider the following. While a very general book on city planning in Portland for the 20th century will have little foreseeable need for encoded longitude and latitude data, the decisions regarding how and why the public market in Portland turned out how it did in the year 2000 based on decisions made in the 1940s could be very interesting and information-rich. The decisions made determining the granularity of describing a document with regard to its geo-referencing will be informed (or limited) by the availability of resources.

Planning minutes from historical counsel meetings will receive different treatment than the commercially published general planning book on the development of Portland, due to the specificity of the nature of the two examples: decisions to implement a certain planning decision on the Portland public market made in 1940 can be specifically geo-referenced with available map images of that area and therefore should receive detailed geo-data, but not necessarily other traditional cataloging attention. These minutes do not require a well thought out title supplied by cataloger or even that they were originally produced on leaves versus pages, but their being linked to relevant coordinate-level and time period data could potentially be very interesting to researchers.

As we complete the end of the first year, and finalize plans for the second and beyond, we hope to entice other librarians, archivists, researchers, and interested citizens to recommend items and methods to be added to the collection and to assist in identifying, obtaining, and sharing access to these key local, regional, and state agency treasures. ❧

Web site for the Oregon Sustainable Community Digital Library (OSCDL) http://oscdl.research.pdx.edu/