

## Organic, Symbiotic Digital Collection Development

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### Introduction

The University Library at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis<sup>1</sup> (IUPUI) has been creating digital collections since 2001. Several factors facilitated this library's early move towards digital cultural heritage collections, including: a university and library mission rooted in community collaboration; forward thinking, flexible, and innovation-valuing library leadership; and flexible, open-minded individuals on the staff, passionate about creating worldwide access to unique collections but also willing to think creatively about funding and workflow models. This case study will first provide background on the characteristics of the library that facilitated the digital collections' creation, then follow up with several specific, exemplary collections. Details will include project workload balance between collaborators and funding lines. Finally, there is a summary of lessons learned and thoughts on how to proceed with this community model in the future.

### Introduction to the university and library

- IUPUI is an urban university situated on the western edge of downtown Indianapolis. This location makes collaboration with geographically close businesses and cultural heritage institutions ideal and is recognised in IUPUI's mission and value statement. 'IUPUI provides for its constituents' excellence in Civic Engagement, Locally, Nationally, and Globally,' and this is characterised by, 'collaboration within and across disciplines and with the community.' The goal is for IUPUI students, faculty, and staff to benefit from the expertise and hands-on experience of local community practitioners, while community members benefit from university groups providing cost-effective solutions from highly motivated individuals, recently trained in cutting edge methodologies. This give and take mentality has lent itself well to the Digital Libraries Team of IUPUI

University Library. As a fairly young institution (established in 1969) IUPUI has less archival/historical content than many of the university and college libraries doing digitisation work. While we have special collections and archives - and indeed our earliest collections began with (and continue to come from) our own archival collections - we have always had an eye on community institutions as the supplier of source material for digitisation. Our tag line early on was; 'we have the technology, they have the stuff.' A symbiotic relationship grew out of IUPUI University Library being able to provide technological support (both in terms of equipment and expertise) to cultural heritage institutions which had a plethora of historically significant documents, photographs, and artifacts but did not have the technological capabilities or funding streams to support digitisation projects. As with many symbiotic relationships, this university/community connection was organic, developing over time in varied directions with a goal of providing wide, free access to local historical resources, but with an open mind on how best to reach this goal in terms of production and funding. The following project descriptions will exemplify this organic nature.

## Digital collection community partnerships

### *Indiana Landmarks*

The creation of community digital collections began in 2004 when an IUPUI Geography Department graduate who volunteered at Indiana Landmarks<sup>ii</sup> connected the foundation with a fellow Geography graduate who was also a member of the IUPUI Digital Libraries Team. After reviewing the collection and needs, the two groups decided to pursue a Library Services Technology Act (LSTA) grant administered by the Indiana State Library. LSTA is part of the Institute of Museum and Library Services Act. This federal funding is used to

increase the use of technology in libraries, foster sharing among libraries, and target library services to special populations. LSTA funding has stipulations limiting which entities may apply. While Indiana Landmarks did not meet the institutional criteria, IUPUI did and a joint project allowed for grant application. IUPUI University used the grant award to purchase slide digitisation technology and to create an hourly wage budget to cover digitisation of 3,000 slides. Technology included a slide scanner, portable laptop, and an external hard-drive.

IUPUI University Library staff members oversaw the digitisation process and uploaded images onto an external hard drive. Being the curator of the original collection, Indiana Landmarks was responsible for creating image metadata. Once the metadata was complete, the hard drive was returned to IUPUI University Library for uploading into the content management system CONTENTdm. Both institutions performed quality control measures. The initial collection contained 3,000 slides and metadata for each image.

While the initial project was grant funded, both institutions leveraged internal resources to increase collection content post-grant. Over the years, processes have been streamlined to accommodate the needs of each institution. Indiana Landmarks staff now have the network capacity to handle importing and uploading images. They also continue to create metadata for the digitised slides. IUPUI University Library sets aside a specific amount of time and money each year for the continuation of the Indiana Historic Architecture Slide Collection.

#### *Conner Prairie Interactive History Park*

As the IUPUI University Library digital libraries programme began to grow, there was a desire to extend the technology capabilities and explore the digitising of three-dimensional artifacts using digital cameras. The library administration was supportive of this idea and used internal funding for the purchase of camera equipment including: two professional cameras, backdrops, lighting, battery packs, and small camera gadgets to simplify the processes. With minimal

camera experience, Digital Libraries Team staff reached out to the Conner Prairie Interactive History Park professionals who were interested in capturing digital images of their quilt and coverlet collection.

Acknowledging the Digital Libraries Team need to develop expertise in the area of digital photography, Conner Prairie agreed to be the test case for the project and allowed the library to experiment with the new digital equipment. The digitisation process took place on location at Conner Prairie and curators from the museum prepared the physical materials to be digitised while the library worked with the new technology to create high resolution images. The Digital Libraries Team members found proper lighting techniques to be the most significant challenge to digital photography work. We became very familiar with aperture, shutter speed, and ISO (International Organization for Standardization). We also had the opportunity to experiment with various lenses including macro and wide-angle lenses. The digitisation took place over the course of five days with the successful completion of 62 digitised artifacts. A digital collection was created utilising the digital images and metadata exported from the Conner Prairie records database.

This quilt digitisation project demonstrates community partnerships fulfilling complementary needs and goals. The Conner Prairie Living History Museum had in its possession a deteriorating quilt and coverlet collection that was unable to be viewed by the public. Digital access to these fragile textile legacies has not only allowed this restricted collection to be viewed daily by a world wide audience but also enhances the viewing experience with the ability to zoom in, beyond the capabilities of the naked eye. The Digital Libraries Team acquired much needed, hands-on testing of digital photography techniques. As IUPUI University Library has become more experienced with digital photography, LSTA funding was awarded to work with Conner Prairie to create additional artifact collections, including: historic clothing, arms making, blacksmithing and transfer ware.

### *Indianapolis Recorder Newspaper Archive*

The *Indianapolis Recorder* is an historic African-American newspaper published in Indianapolis but of national significance as the fourth oldest, consecutively published African-American newspaper in the country. Dean David Lewis of the University Library reached out to the publishers, a local, well known, philanthropically minded Indianapolis family, and secured permission to digitise the full run of the newspaper, 1899-present. Gaining this permission was essential (though rarely granted by newspaper publishers), offering the library but also the newspaper a unique opportunity to be one of the few full run newspapers made freely available online to a world wide audience. The University Library sought funding from the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), a community foundation committed to helping transform the lives of central Indiana residents. In 1989 an anonymous donor established a Library Fund to benefit designated public, academic and high school libraries in Indianapolis. CICF was especially interested in the *Indianapolis Recorder* project because of its collaborative nature between digitisation expert (library) and long-time Indianapolis community member (newspaper), and because its content captured a unique historic view of the community CICF aims to support.

IUPUI University Library used internal funding to purchase the microfilm version (originally produced by the Indiana Historical Society) of the newspaper, but sought to outsource the microfilm's digitisation because the library's internal digitisation lab was not equipped with high speed microfilm scanners. Again, leveraging the variety of funding resources available, digitisation was through Lyrasis.<sup>iii</sup> Lyrasis is the nation's largest regional non profit membership organisation serving libraries and since 2008 has been supported in part through a grant from the Alfred P Sloan Foundation to provide cost effective mass digitisation services. Indicative of a willingness to experiment, the University Library was approached by Lyrasis to test a new digitisation service provider. We were happy to oblige and were thoroughly pleased not only by the product

provided by Creekside Digital but by the opportunity to lend our support to an important organisation like Lyrasis.

Once the digital files were transferred from Creekside Digital to the library, internal library staff were used to prepare the files (renamed and grouped into appropriate folders) for upload into CONTENTdm. When added to CONTENTdm, files undergo Optical Character Recognition (OCR) which creates a computer generated transcript from the digital image. Once uploaded the OCRed transcripts of the images were also spot checked by library staff. The grant through CICF supported the outsourced digitisation and internal file manipulation. Because of the national significance of this collection, the Digital Library Team partnered with the library's External Relations Team to plan and hold a community collection launch. Funded by CICF, IUPUI University Library, and an Indianapolis utility company, Citizens Energy Group, this two hour event was open to the Indianapolis community and included a reception, brief introduction to using the digital collection, and a panel presentation on the significance of the newspaper both from a historical and digital perspective. Ultimately, this collection received local and national attention because of its historical significance but also because University administrators and newspaper managers promoted the collections' launch. The digitisation of the *Indianapolis Recorder* is a highly successful example of a multi-faceted approach to workflow, funding, and advertisement of new collections.

### Insights for the future

Above are highlighted three of over 30 community partnered digital projects led by IUPUI University Library. Our success in these collaborations is a result of openness to thinking innovatively about digital collection creation and levels of ownership (a community partner owns the original but IUPUI University Library supports the digital version). The fact that IUPUI's mission is rooted in a connection to local community makes these collaborations all the more relevant

and our local partnerings increase the types of funding sources to which we have access. As with many digital library projects, our initial years were spent primarily looking for partners, promoting our services, and building our technology core. Over time, we have become a sought after collaborator, with local cultural heritage institutions and for-profit entities (the Indianapolis Motor Speedway being the newest partner) seeking us out as a means of creating digital access to their valuable (often deteriorating) collections. Overall, our allowance of organic relationship development has been wildly beneficial.

One minor pitfall we encountered recently in connection with one of our regular funding agencies involved confusion over our participation in a multitude of grant applications filtering through their agency. We apply to this fund for our own projects but are also often named as a partner on other libraries' applications. The review board was concerned that funds were not being dispersed widely enough across new applicants. While our own and our partners' projects were funded, the board's comments have encouraged us to think about what is best for both our own funding lines and those of our partners. We continue to collaborate but are now more cognisant of how our partnership is described in grant applications. We fully anticipate experiencing more growing pains but are equally as confident that our culture of innovation and openness to experiment will pave the way to new partners with amazing collections to share with a world of researchers.

To access all collections mentioned in case study, Google: IUPUI digital scholarship

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.iupui.edu/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.indianalandmarks.org/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.lyrasis.org/>