

Building a Digital Cultural Heritage Community

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<http://images.grainger.uiuc.edu/dchc>

Interim Report

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1 Introduction

The Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded a National Leadership "Model Program of Cooperation" grant of \$158,000 to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library. The Digital Cultural Heritage Community (DCHC) project is for an eighteen-month period, commencing April 1st, 1999. The grant is intended to support the creation of an electronic database of historical material, helping teachers to meet statewide goals for education that have been mandated by the Illinois State Board of Education. Third-, fourth- and fifth-grade social studies curricula are the primary focus of the project. Participating schools are Lincoln Trail Elementary School, Mahomet; Oakland Elementary School, Bloomington; and Thomas Paine Elementary School, Urbana. Participating museums and libraries are the Early American Museum, Mahomet; Rare Book Room and Special Collections Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Lincoln Trail Libraries System, Champaign; Illinois Heritage Association, Champaign; and the library and museum of the McLean County Historical Society, Bloomington, which have since adopted the name, McLean County Museum of History.

2 Project Organization

2.1 Time Line

Before the project commenced, a time line was set up to monitor activities during the duration of the project and to help ensure that the project ran smoothly. The time line, accessible on the project Web site at <http://images.grainger.uiuc.edu/dchc/about.htm>, is updated constantly as the project progresses. Communication among project participants was undertaken initially by e-mail and telephone. The first conference call, held March 22nd, 1999, centered discussions on planning for the project. Participants approved the project timeline, and planned the equipment necessary to carry out the project.

2.2 Initial Meeting

The project partners met together at the Early American Museum, May 12, 1999. At this meeting, discussion included content selection and lesson plans using the Illinois Learning Standards, the need to determine digitization and metadata standards, and database development, as well as the partners' need to incorporate images and text into lesson plans.

It was agreed that all partners would immediately review teaching goals for Social Science in the Illinois Learning Standards, focusing on the early and late elementary grades. Using their Curriculum Units for the Learning Standards 14-16, teachers would identify examples of the types of primary source materials to which they would like to have access. Curators, librarians, and archivists would identify materials (text, images, video) that have already been digitized or would need to be digitized for inclusion in a digital repository. It is important that the museums, libraries and archives do not check off whether or not they have items from a list given each teacher, but that each partner considers the Curriculum Units and collections in the light of the Learning Standards. Partners made known each of their equipment needs to carry out the project and equipment orders were subsequently submitted. Job searches were already underway for the positions of Project Coordinator and Research Information Specialist.

2.3 New Staff

Two new staff members joined the project June 21st, 1999. Nuala Bennett accepted the position of Project Coordinator. Nuala has a B.A. in Computational Linguistics and German from the University of Dublin, Trinity College (Ireland), and a M.S. in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois. Her previous experience includes Research Information Specialist with the NCSA (National Center for Supercomputing Applications) for the "Interspace" project, Research Programmer and

Project Coordinator for medical informatics projects with the CANIS (Community Architectures for Network Information Systems) Laboratory at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

Amanda Grunden assumed the half-time responsibilities of Research Information Specialist, being responsible for the integration of technology into the DCHC project. Amanda, who holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Illinois, has significant experience with the Web Technology Group of the Academic Outreach Program at the University of Illinois. She was also instrumental as a project leader for the University of Illinois Spurlock Museum's work on the Museums in the Classroom project, and she operates her own educational technologies consulting business, Acadimage.

3 Collaboration

3.1 Communication

The vast majority of communication and collaboration between the participants was initially undertaken by electronic mail. A Listserv was set up solely for the project participants where they could discuss every aspect of the project. Most recently, a threaded electronic mail system known as Webboard, <http://webboard.webtech.uiuc.edu:8080/~dchc>, has been set up to improve upon the format of discussions among participants. Members of the Resource Group (See Section 5) are also able to access the Webboard and monitor discussions about the project.

3.2 Classroom Visits

Participants have visited the other partner institutions and continue to do so. Museum curators and librarians have visited the classrooms, and the teachers visit the partner museums and libraries. This is an invaluable opportunity for everybody to observe the work of the other partners and to come to a better understanding of their requirements for the project and how best they can collaborate with each other.

4 Conferences

4.1 Material Culture Conference

The Fall Conference on Material Culture was held September 13th, 1999, at McLean County Museum of History. The title of the conference was "*Integrating Primary Resources into Teaching*", <http://images.grainger.uiuc.edu/dchc/conference1.htm>. There were 55 attendees for the morning session. As well as the participants from the project partner institutions, representatives also attended from the following Illinois institutions: David Davis Mansion, Bloomington; Des Plaines Historical Museum; DuPage County Historical Museum, Wheaton; Eastern Illinois University, Charleston; Franklin Middle School, Urbana; Funk Prairie Home and Rock & Mineral Museum, Shirley; Illinois Amish Interpretive Center, Arcola; Illinois State Museum, Springfield; Illinois State University, Normal; Lakeview Museum of Arts & Sciences, Peoria; Macon County Historical Society, Decatur; Northern Illinois University, DeKalb; Prairie Aviation Museum, Bloomington; Spurlock Museum, Urbana; Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, Rockford.

The conference was opened by the Executive Director of McLean County Museum of History, Mr. Greg Koos, who willingly and ably prolonged his speech to substitute for Prof. Paula Kaufman, the University of Illinois Librarian, who unfortunately could not attend at the last moment due to two flat tires en route to the conference. The first guest speaker was Dr. Thomas Schlereth, Professor of American Studies and Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. Dr. Schlereth, whose interests include 19th-century American technology and material culture, spoke on "The Art of the Word", and

used many colorful slides to illustrate his presentation. He was followed by Dr. E. Duane Elbert, Professor Emeritus of History at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Elbert has previously been State Historian and Executive Director of the Illinois State Historical Society, as well as Executive Editor of the Illinois Historical Journal. His presentation, "Yes, I understand you, I think", included many artifacts which had been lent for the day by the Early American Museum. The third guest was Prof. Frances Jacobson, the University of Illinois High School Librarian and Associate Professor of Library Administration. Most recently, Prof. Jacobson has been involved with the American Memory Fellows Program, "Learning about Immigration Through Oral History". Prof. Jacobson's interactive presentation, "Interpreting Material Culture in a Classroom Setting", ensured that all attendees, using copies of 19th century sheet music, got involved in the analysis of material culture. Following the presentations, the floor was opened to the audience who held an active discussion with the three guest panelists.

Before the audience departed for lunch, they were asked to complete evaluation forms. The remarks on the evaluation forms confirmed that the conference had been very successful. 20% of respondents rated the conference "excellent" overall and the remaining 80% rated every session "good". When analyzing the three individual presentations, each was given a much higher rate of excellence (ranging from 35-80% "excellent" and the remainder "good"). The panel discussion was found to be useful to everybody, and participants departed with comments such as "I can't wait to share ideas from all three speakers. The teachers in my building will benefit and appreciate".

The afternoon session was specifically designated for the project participants to discuss the project. As well as the project participants, the three guest speakers also attended. This was a useful opportunity for the partners to learn from their combined experience. Many suggestions were made regarding how the participants could better communicate ideas to one another and also, how the teachers might use the artifacts in their classrooms. Attendees at the afternoon meeting also included Jan Waas, curator at the Illinois State Museum. Ms. Waas was invited to be a member of the project Resource Group.

4.2 Metadata Conference

The second conference for project participants was held October 25th. This "*Metadata*" conference, <http://images.grainger.uiuc.edu/dchc/conference2.htm>, was restricted to project participants. It was set up as a hands-on workshop on metadata. As there are several different types of participant institutions with artifacts, which will be used by the teachers and students, invariably, they each have different methods of cataloging and describing their collections. At the workshop on metadata, curators and librarians came together to discuss how their different methods of working can be combined together for the database. Martin Dillon, Executive Director, of the OCLC Institute, was invited to come and speak for a half-day on Dublin Core and related issues. During the workshop, participants had an opportunity to use OCLC's Cooperative Online Resource Catalog (CORG) and enter data about images and artifacts from their museums and libraries, which they had brought with them. Participants also heard about EAD (Encoded Archival Description), and TEI (Text Encoding Initiative).

In the afternoon, participants discussed intellectual property issues involved in the digitization of their images. Topics included the right to distribute materials, permissions to host materials, content, which could possibly be offensive to some users, institutional ownership, and conditions of use. Partners agreed that a collaborative agreement would be drafted for the consideration of each institution, as well as a "Conditions of Use" statement for the project Web site. Museums and libraries will together develop a set of terms and conditions for digital access to their collections.

Participants also discussed the actual database of materials, which will be used by the teachers and their students. As well as the metadata formats, participants have given feedback on the type of database design. Options, which are being considered, include the creation of dynamically delivered

HTML and ASP (Microsoft Active Server Pages) using Microsoft Access as a database source and PastPerfect, a museum software package used by several of the partner institutions.

The workshop closed with the participants agreeing that the museums, libraries and archives would continue examining and utilizing the various digital file formats for access and archival purposes, metadata (indexing and description) formats, and thesauri that are used across the professions. The teachers did not attend the workshop on this occasion, but the other participants realized the need to examine metadata issues with teachers to determine their information needs. Finally, the museums, libraries and archives would determine the steps necessary to make the data elements available to teachers. Evaluation forms completed by participants after the meeting confirmed that the entire day was useful in many ways. They would have liked more time to continue digitization work with the images and artifacts. Participants were also eager to have more workshops, particularly to give them the opportunity to learn to use their equipment to its best advantage. The first workshop, which is now in the planning stages, will be on scanning and scanning equipment.

5 Resource Group

A Resource Group is being set up as an advisory committee to the project. It is planned that the Resource Group will be made up of seven people from a wide variety of fields who are interested in the work of the project and have relevant experience to guide the project further. The Resource Group will be asked to visit our Web site regularly and to offer comments; to suggest links that we could include on the Web site; to attend meetings of project partners; and possibly to attend a meeting of the entire Resource Group together. As well as Ms. Waas, Dr. E. Duane Elbert and Dr. Larry McBride, a specialist in teacher education in history and social sciences from Illinois State University, have also agreed to participate.

6 Publicity

6.1 Web Page

The project Web site (<http://images.grainger.uiuc.edu/dchc>) has been active since the beginning, but has already undergone many changes. The site includes the project proposal abstract, links to each partner institution; an up-to-date time line for participants and others to monitor project progress; links to news reports about the project; relevant URLs from other sites helpful to teachers, museum curators, librarians and archivists, and the Webboard. The Web page will include access to a searchable database of digitized images from the museums and libraries. The database is in the early stages of development and will be soon available to all members for inclusion of their images and the corresponding metadata.

6.2 Presentations

Presentations have been given to several groups visiting the University of Illinois. Wednesday, July 14th, 1999, a large group of East European library and information science students visiting the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Mortenson Center heard about the project. The following week, July 20th, a delegation from the Chinese National Library, was given a 20-minute talk about the project. That same week, the 1999 Medical Librarians Association Cunningham Fellow, Mr. Timothy Shola Abolarinwa from Nigeria, visited with Nuala Bennett to learn about the project. Wednesday, October 6th, a group of visitors from NgeeAnn Polytechnic of Singapore visited the Digital Imaging Initiative, and were given an hour-long presentation including much information about the DCHC.

As well as presentations given to visiting groups, project participants have been to the following conferences to talk about the project. Nuala Bennett attended the Illinois Library Association (ILA)

Annual Conference in Chicago, Tuesday, October 19th, 1999. Together with Ms. Jeanne McConnell of the IMLS and two other Illinois IMLS-funded project representatives, Nuala gave a presentation to an interested group of people. Beth Sandore attended the National Science Foundation Digital Libraries Initiative Phase 2 (DLI2) Project-Wide Workshop, which was combined with a meeting of IMLS National Leadership grantees, October 17th-20th, in Ithaca, NY. At both the ILA and DLI2 conferences, issues in which people were most interested included the use of the Illinois Learning Standards and individual teacher curriculum units to encourage content selection; use of the Webboard as a communication vehicle, and the fact that we are looking at what it takes to accomplish this type of cooperative project, and to make it work for the future.

6.3 Publications

Several articles have been published about the Digital Cultural Heritage Community project. In particular, the University of Illinois News Bureau published two press releases: *Technology Grant To Fund Electronic Database Of Historical Material*, December 22nd, 1998; and *'Electronic artifacts' to be made available for children to examine*, February 1999. There was also a newspaper article in the Paris, IL, Beacon-News, January 6th, 1999, *A museum in the classroom: Paris native's Urbana fourth graders have access to state's heritage, thanks to U of I grant*. The project was also promoted internationally in "Digital Imaging", published by Ingram Micro Inc., Ontario, Canada. Issue 2 of "Digital Imaging", a newsletter which is issued to over 2,000 computer resellers in Canada, devoted a half-page article solely to the DCHC. The Central Illinois newspaper, News Gazette, published an article about the Digital Cultural Heritage Community project on October 17th, 1999. (A copy of each article is included in the Appendix.)

7 Accomplishments

The DCHC involves a clear progression of tasks that build upon one another. Firstly, all partners reviewed the teaching goals for Social Sciences in the Illinois Learning Standards, focusing on the early and late elementary grades. Thus far, the teachers have put into writing their curriculum units for Social Sciences Goals 14-16. They have also identified examples of the types of primary source materials to which they would like to have access. Curators and librarians have already started reviewing these units, together with the learning goals. The review process is ongoing through discussions in person with the teachers and on-line.

The curators, librarians and archivists are looking closely at materials in their collections that have already been digitized or will need to be digitized for inclusion into a digital repository. Simultaneously, they are examining metadata issues with each other and the teachers to determine information needs. Together, the project participants shall determine the steps necessary to make the data elements available to teachers, and create a digital repository that is accessible through the Internet. This in turn will enable teachers to integrate digital cultural heritage materials into the curricula. An important issue for the museums and libraries at the same time is to develop a set of terms and conditions for digital access to their collections.

At this point in the project, our interactions have yielded several significant discoveries that may be of interest to other similar endeavors. First, we found that each school district had created its own interpretation of the Illinois Learning Standards. This necessitated additional review of local standards to insure that the project addressed goals and objectives that were pertinent on a local as well as a state level. Second, as teachers made their curriculum units available, it became clear that there will not always be a good fit between curriculum needs and museum/library collections. In particular, teachers in these three grades are teaching history units that contain events that occurred prior to the settlement of the Midwest. Finally, an interesting outcome of the Material Culture Conference was the curators' desire to visit the classrooms and to observe the teachers and students.

Appendix

- I. Web pages
 - a. Main page (color and b/w)
 - b. Project "About" page
 - c. Project "Resources" page
 - d. An example curriculum unit (4th grade)
 - e. Webboard opening page
 - f. Webboard discussion
- II. "Technology Grant To Fund Electronic Database of Historical Material", *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign press release*, December 22nd, 1998.
- III. "Electronic artifacts' to be made available for children to examine", *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign press release*, February 1999.
- IV. "A museum in the classroom: Paris native's Urbana fourth graders have access to state's heritage, thanks to U of I grant", Paris, IL. *Beacon-News*, January 6th, 1999.
- V. "Digital Cultural Heritage Community Project", *Digital Imaging*, pg. 7, Issue 2, Ingram Micro Inc., Ontario, Canada, August 1999.
- VI. "UI sites demo digital library, museum possibilities", *News Gazette*, Champaign, IL, October 18th, 1999.
- VII. Fall conference brochure