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# Local History in E-Books and on the Web

## *One Library's Experience as Example and Model*

*A medium-sized (forty thousand service population) public library digitized a substantial number of local history documents and posted them to its Web site. The materials selection process, digitization process, and resultant products are reviewed. Relevant Web-use statistics are analyzed to assess use frequency, one measure of the digital products' value, and to further determine which products and methods were most frequently used. This case study illustrates that digitization and Web publication of local history materials is within the technical and financial capabilities of even small libraries, and that such projects are valuable at several levels: by adding to the historical record, by providing exemplary service to a library's patrons, and by affording opportunities for library collaboration with organizations and individuals within a community.*

Digitizing local history has become a growth industry as national and grassroots efforts have moved rare items from archives and basements to the Web.<sup>1</sup> While national initiatives such as the Making of America (MOA) Project and the Library of Congress American Memory project have been well documented, many local projects fly below the radar of appreciation and critical analysis.<sup>2</sup> While MOA, American Memory, and similar projects digitize with the goal of true preservation—to produce extremely high-quality digital files intended to be suitable and available for later use as master copies—grassroots efforts have aimed for what Lee calls “rescue digitization”—the creation of high-quality digital surrogates that will satisfy most users’ demands and therefore reduce the need to look at and handle source items themselves.<sup>3</sup> The increase in access to local history information provided by digitization, regardless of the degree to which preservation is achieved, is a great

public service and public relations opportunity for libraries that themselves have or can obtain from other material worth digitizing.

How important is local history to libraries? One rough measure is the degree to which libraries self-identify themselves through their interest in local history, genealogy, and other collections. Take as an example the state of Wisconsin, which ranks close to the United States median in size, population, and affluence: among all Wisconsin public libraries with listings in the *American Library Directory 2002–2003*, eighty specifically reference local history, local genealogy, or the local history of part or all of their service area as a subject interest or special collection. An additional twenty-seven libraries make reference to Wisconsin history, a Wisconsin collection, or history as an interest or collection. Fifteen more Wisconsin public libraries, while not making specific references to history, note long backfiles of local newspapers in print and microfilm formats or collections related to a famous native, or make general reference to local authors and materials.<sup>4</sup> If at least 122 public libraries in a single mid-sized state have sufficient interest in local history, genealogy, and collections to publicize that interest to the rest of the library community, nationwide interest in this subject by libraries large and small can be comfortably characterized as broad and deep.

By reviewing the case of one local digitization effort and measuring its impact, this study intends to share

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lessons learned and seeks to benefit other libraries anticipating, planning, or implementing similar projects.

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## Methodology

Library and information science research methods instructors and other academics have long frowned upon the case study in a field where “how I run my library good” articles too often stand in for research. Yet case studies arguably have a place in the library literature. Yin notes that the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events.<sup>5</sup> Stake identifies case studies as a choice of what is to be studied, as compared to a research method per se; in this context, the case study is one of several approaches to qualitative analysis, one that allows researchers to draw attention to what can be learned from the single case.<sup>6</sup> Yin suggests that categorizing case studies merely as qualitative analysis is unnecessary and that generalizing case study findings to theory in an analogous fashion to the scientist generalizing from experimental results can be acceptable.<sup>7</sup>

Stake distinguishes between intrinsic (to gain better understanding of the particular case) and instrumental (to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization) case studies, acknowledging that some characteristics of each may apply to a particular situation.<sup>8</sup> Local History Online (LHO-L) is an intrinsic case to the extent that it deals with a relatively unusual set of circumstances: a library developing a way to use a historical document (for example, the Tom Taylor book), the historical value of which was clearly evident, yet was ill suited to usual library technical services and reference approaches for mining that value. Detailing the process of dealing with this unusual situation is useful, if only because the Tom Taylor book is an example of the often-unwieldy nature of historical documents and artifacts. The case of LHO-L is an instrumental case to the extent that it demonstrates the ability of a small library with average resources to use technology to achieve demonstrably positive results in terms of programming quality, user acceptance, and community collaboration, providing a model and an alternative view to the perception that only generously funded projects in large institutions can successfully digitize and Web-publish historical documents.

In Davey’s categorization, this case study is illustrative; it is descriptive, uses the case to show what a situation is like, serves to make the unfamiliar familiar, and presents a case that is typical of important variations.<sup>9</sup> While this study presents Web use statistics to illustrate the degree of user interest in LHO-L, the authors do not purport to address explanatory or causative relationships between Web use and other factors discussed in the study.

While the case was selected primarily owing to the direct involvement of the authors in its execution, its identification as a case worthy of discussion is well established.

As the 2002 recipient of the Wisconsin Library Association Highsmith Award, LHO-L clearly demonstrated, among other award criteria: “Significant contribution to its institution, organization, school, or community; Creative or innovative program development and implementation; Ease of replication in other libraries, demonstrated by a clear and concise outline or plan; Minimal funds required for program execution.”<sup>10</sup> In August 2003, LHO-L was selected as an Innovative Web-Based Reference Service in the Locally Produced Databases category by the Machine Assisted Reference Section (MARS) of the American Library Association’s Reference and User Services Association, by meeting the following criteria: “makes use of Web-based technologies; present a service, old or new, in an innovative and creative manner; is something that could be readily done by any library.”<sup>11</sup>

It is useful for case studies to be “bounded,” in other words, to identify specifics of a case that especially bear both on its particularity or uniqueness and on how well it can be generalized elsewhere. While such criteria are noted throughout the following discussion, certain factors are worthy of mention at the outset. This case is bounded by the institution in which it occurred: an institution that, while noted for its innovation and quality in library programming, has an operating budget and collection size near the average for others of similar service-area population. As in many communities, a local foundation occasionally supports nonoperating fund projects, and in this case their support provided seed money during the early stages of the project. The regional system to which the library belongs, Wisconsin’s South Central Library System, supported the project by satisfying the electronic data storage needs of LHO-L. Prospects for the project’s successful outcome were also influenced by the experience of the library’s assistant director/webmaster and head of adult services, both of whom had work experience in special libraries with substantial history collections, had pursued genealogical research personally, and were conversant with historical and genealogical reference. Combinations of the foregoing particulars may collectively limit the significance of the case as it applies to other libraries.

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## Assumptions

An assumption of this case study, that local history and genealogical materials have sufficient normative value to make it worth libraries’ while to digitize and Web-publish them, is not only important for an appreciation of the case at an intrinsic level, but is significant even at an instrumental level, since local history and genealogical materials are likely to be the most appropriate locally based material for libraries to digitize and Web-publish.

Such a discussion is necessary due in part to a surprisingly persistent conceit that genealogy and local history

are less worthy of study and hence of academic review. Addressing this view, Filby strongly asserted the value of genealogical reference more than three decades ago, pre-empting the explosion in genealogical and local history interest that began in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> DuLong illustrated a trend critical to genealogy's popularity becoming egalitarian, broad-based, and immensely popular from the 1970s to the present: the evolution of the dominant motivation for genealogical inquiry from a lineage-based perspective—to affirm, justify, or enhance social status—to a heritage-based perspective—to develop and enhance one's identity through an appreciation for one's role in larger historical, social, and cultural developments.<sup>13</sup> Litzer demonstrated that libraries of all types not only serve genealogists but often engage in institutional relationships with genealogical organizations to optimize genealogical services and collections available to the community.<sup>14</sup> There is little doubt that the field of local history and genealogy, especially in public libraries, is a widely established subject area of interest and a vital area of library service for many libraries.

The value of any document or work is not a single amorphous property but has one or more of several aspects based on physical characteristics and the information it contains. Libraries often accumulate original or duplicate copies of documents through donations and collections such as vertical files. In one archivists' glossary, among several types of value mentioned, informational value—that which derives from information on persons, places, subjects, besides the document's creator—is the value most familiar to librarians and patrons.<sup>15</sup> A second type is evidential value—value that provides documentation of an organization's functioning.<sup>16</sup> In LHO-L, "Wood County Parks in the Making, 1935–1951" is an example of evidential value.<sup>17</sup> Items may have archival value, that is, they're generally worthy of indefinite or permanent preservation.<sup>18</sup> A fourth value libraries may find is intrinsic value, the inherent or monetary value that derives from some unique factor such as a document's age, circumstances regarding its creation, a signature, or an attached seal.<sup>19</sup> The multiple aspects of value contained in a variety of books, documents, other physical items, and their facsimiles, coupled by their rarity if their existence is not duplicated in other repositories, argues for their inclusion, when possible, in library collections.

Disputation of the value of local history and genealogy as an object of study and further, of taking an intensive approach with primary, secondary, and derivative materials as suggested in this article, also may derive from a supposed distinction between amateur historians—generally associated with interest in local history and genealogy and driven by nostalgia and parochialism—and professional historians, who by comparison apply a sense of detachment and clinical skill to important issues in satisfying a desire to find the truth in more general themes and subjects. Instead of finding such a clear distinction, however, Kyvig and Marty found a blurring of roles, with professionals identifying value in the detailed consideration of single communities or local institu-

tions, and amateurs showing greater sensitivity to larger perspectives. To account for the complexity of historical sources and levels of appreciation for them, Kyvig and Marty coined the term "nearby history" to encompass the entire range of possibilities in a person's immediate environment, including those of place (local or community history), relationship (family history), and objects (material culture).<sup>20</sup> Viewing local history and genealogy content thusly reaches beyond its utilitarian value, such as for genealogists searching for names, dates, and immediate context, by illuminating its significance as potential resource material for historical research generally. Further defining the research potential of nearby-history information is Finberg's view of the world we seek to elucidate through study of the historical record as a series of concentric circles, extending from the nuclear family to the local community to the larger society, with interrelationships within and between those circles deserving of study.<sup>21</sup> By making readily available the raw material with which they are most conversant—the historical detail of their own communities—libraries can provide the building blocks for historians of all stripes and training to satisfy a wide range of personal and professional information needs.

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## The Evolution of One Library's "Local History On-Line"

McMillan Memorial Library serves a community of eighteen thousand in the central Wisconsin city of Wisconsin Rapids, in addition to approximately twenty-five thousand people in surrounding areas.<sup>22</sup> Wisconsin Rapids is a paper-mill town, with cranberry growing, dairying, and a sprinkling of high-tech business rounding out the local economy.

At McMillan, local history is an established subject specialty, with a collection built over several decades through the efforts of librarians, local historians, and genealogists. Its basement contains a familiar assortment of crumbling city directories, postcards, photographs, and pamphlets, as well as multiple copies of locally published books. One such item, *100 Years of Pictorial and Descriptive History of Wisconsin Rapids*, commonly referred to as the "Tom Taylor book," commissioned by the city and compiled by photographer and real-estate insurance agent Tom Taylor in the early 1930s, presented itself as an unusually strong candidate for digitization and Web-publication, both as a content resource and a physical artifact.<sup>23</sup>

The Tom Taylor book is in fact a pair of massive volumes. Volume 1 is a narrative of typewritten text on 225 pages of 12" x 18" paper (with 375 blank pages for future additions never made). Volume 2 is a collection of more than 460 photographs in sizes ranging from 4" x 5" to 14" x 20", mounted on cardboard stock, cross-referenced to text in volume 1, and bound in a 25" x 27" x 10" tome. For two decades, available to young and old, the volumes of the Tom Taylor book were wonderful display pieces whose leaves were paged

through in a manner reminiscent of monks before medieval texts or of researchers poring through courthouse ledgers. When the volumes began to deteriorate, however, the only avenue of preservation available was to lock them away from public use. During the 1980s, in an attempt to reclaim intellectual access to the Tom Taylor book, some of the volume 1 text was retyped using an electric typewriter; the project was only partially completed. A step toward preservation of the work was taken in the mid-1990s, when most of the photographs in volume 2 were carefully removed from the acidic paper stock on which they were mounted. Presenting the work's content in a unitary fashion separate from the original work proved to be, however, a nearly impossible task.

Digitization presented an opportunity to return the text and the photographs of the Tom Taylor book to the community whose history it had recounted almost seventy years previously. Since the book had been commissioned by the city and given to the library with all rights, copyright permission was not an issue in developing and producing alternate versions of the work. The challenge, then, was to apply technology to the task of bringing together online the words, the images, and the connections between them that existed in the original Tom Taylor book—a daunting project. Even the volume 1 text posed challenges, typed in blue ink on yellowed pages too large for conventional page images. It was decided to scan the part of the text that had been retyped on an electric typewriter with OCR (optical character recognition) software—a laborious task in itself—while the remainder of the text was retyped into Word documents from which HTML files were then created. The photographs from volume 2 were scanned and used to create a GIF and JPEG scrapbook. The HTML files and the scrapbook were then connected by more than one thousand hyperlinks, thereby recreating the cross-references between the text and photographs of the original.

While digitization and rescue preservation of the Tom Taylor book progressed, another opportunity expanded the library's digitization horizons in another direction. The library had been awarded a grant for preservation of ten rare local history titles, including Wisconsin Rapids's six earliest published city directories dating from 1892 to 1930. The grant was awarded by the Consolidated Papers Foundation of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, which has since changed its name to the Mead Witter Foundation. When the grant was secured in 1997, standard technology for such a project was a photocopy machine and acid-free bond paper; in 1999, however, the library developed a plan to spend the grant by contracting with a vendor who digitized the books' content into TIF files, from which multiple buckram-bound hard copies on acid-free stock were then published. A CD-ROM of the resulting files was provided as well, almost as a throw-in, from which Portable Document Format (PDF) files suitable for Web publishing were later created.<sup>24</sup>

Final fruits of both digital projects were made available to the public in late 1999, when the Tom Taylor book and the outsourced titles were uploaded to the library's Web site. Copies of the works were also produced in CD-ROM format and placed into circulation, giving patrons a more convenient way to use the digital books on their home computers.

Emboldened by the experience of transforming the Tom Taylor book and establishing a core collection of digitized historical texts, the library sought out worthy candidates for further projects, both from the assortment of items relegated to basement storage and from the community outside its doors. Target materials ranged from short pamphlets—many retrieved from obscure status in the library's vertical file—to entire books. Of particular note is the library scanned and Web-published *Centennial Story, 1880–1890, a history of McMillan Memorial Library*, an excellent example of the library history genre.<sup>25</sup> An LSTA grant was secured in 2000 to outsource the scanning of the 1923 work *History of Wood County, Wisconsin*, providing electronic access with text-searching capabilities to the 795 pages of narrative, biography, and portraits from the county's most recently published countywide history.

The library also received as donations several finding aids compiled by local genealogists, who were inspired to develop indexes for area high-school graduates, plat books, and other subjects. Library staff developed a form letter to obtain permission from copyright holders that also informed them of the project's value. The combination of other people's money, other people's time, and a modest investment of staff and equipment, resulted in a sizeable collection of local history that has come to be known as McMillan Memorial Library's LHO-L.

Throughout the various projects, the library relied on standard office hardware and software. The software used, with the exception of Adobe Acrobat, was already employed elsewhere in the library and easily adapted for the digitization projects. The software was widely available and easy to keep current, and training in its use was readily available. Use of office computers and desktop scanners permitted ready replacement or upgrading of hardware through standard channels. This off-the-shelf approach to digitization technology, born of budget constraints and a constant drive towards simplicity, has truly made the library's program an easy example to replicate.

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## The Products

The products that comprised McMillan Memorial Library's LHO-L during the study period are listed in table 1. Since the library used a variety of methods to create or obtain these digital works, they are in a variety of formats. Many of them are in PDF, which most closely reproduces the original document, though in rather large electronic files.

Whenever display of page images was desirable, PDF was the preferred format. Though software exists to manage, convert, and display the original TIF files, the library desired to avoid the added complexity and expense that using such software would introduce.

Other documents were converted to HTML texts, which produce smaller files, allowing for faster downloads and better readability; HTML files are also more easily retrieved by search engines. Some of these HTML documents incorporate graphics or include a separate graphic section.

Several of the finding aids donated to the library were saved as HTML tables, reflecting their original format as Excel spreadsheets. While it is not difficult to load databases on the Web, the library deliberately decided to keep data in the visible part of the Internet as HTML tables, rather than hiding it behind a search interface. The simplicity of creating the files by using the "Save As" command was also appealing.

Links to all of the library's LHO-L digitized items were placed on a single page of the library's Web site ([www.scls.lib.wi.us/mcm/local/local\\_history.html](http://www.scls.lib.wi.us/mcm/local/local_history.html)) where they are arranged by type (books, directories, photographs, finding aids, and shorter items). Links were also created from this page, under the heading "About Local History On-Line and Digitization," to several documents useful for librarians interested in grassroots digitization, including presentations on this subject by one of this study's authors at Public Library Association and Wisconsin Library Association conferences, and the acceptance speech given by one of the authors when awarded the 2002 Wisconsin Library Association/Highsmith Award in recognition of this project.<sup>26</sup>

To publicize the page beyond the local community, the library registered the items with the Internet Public Library and the Online Book Page where appropriate. Dublin Core metadata was prepared and added to each document. Finally, a Google search box was added to the library's Web site so that, as an option, searches limited to PDF and other files on the library's Web site could be made. The library is considering the addition of a Google search function that would limit results solely to the historical documents.

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## A Protocol to Measure "Local History On-Line" Use

Web site statistics are notoriously unreliable and usually reflect a vastly inflated account of actual use.<sup>27</sup> Due to WebBots, spiders, in-house use, and other factors, statistics are generated that have no bearing upon actual research or other patron use. Several methods were employed to distill actual patron use from the statistics in table 1 and minimize the inclusion of other "noise." These include "Selecting a Limited Time Period for Study," "Qualifying

Maximum/Multiple/Robot Uses," and "Selectively Tabulating Local Uses."

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### Selecting a Limited Time Period for Study

This study reflects use from July 2002 to June 2003. During this time, no exceptional maintenance or other use of these files was made by library staff. The library undertook no special publicity regarding the documents, though the project and individual items in it were covered by articles in the local newspaper and the library's newsletter. All of the items measured in this study were established parts of the library's Web site and only mentioned under the general heading "Local History On-Line."

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### Qualifying Maximum/Multiple/Robot Uses

To develop the statistics shown in table 1 under "High Estimate," aggregate-use statistics from Web logs were analyzed to exclude traffic from most WebBots and spiders. This analysis provides statistics that better reflect the number of times an item was requested by humans.

If an item was comprised of multiple sections or components, only statistics for the single most accessed section of that item were included in table 1. For example, if the digital files for a city directory were split up so each letter of the alphabet had its own file, and the digital file for the part of the directory with names beginning with "S" was most often accessed, only the "S" file statistics are included in table 1. Accessing the HTML page that describes a work was not counted either. Applying this criterion decidedly understates use, by not counting the accessing by patrons of either less popular or multiple sections—photographs, graphics, chapters, alphabetically divided sections—of a particular digitized multipart item.

Despite these efforts to filter the effects of WebBots and other extraneous noise use, the "High Estimate" numbers are undoubtedly inflated. The authors would assert that these statistics are relevant only as a general guide to use frequency, perhaps overstated by a factor of two or more.

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### Selectively Tabulating Local Uses

To develop the statistics shown in table 1 as "Local Use," a different variable was controlled. Rather than excluding types of use, a user profile was employed to distill local uses from aggregate Web statistics. Because of access limitations to Internet service providers in the library's service area, an assumption could be made that local users would be identifiable by their use of one of two local Internet service providers (ISPs) or the cable provider Charter Communications, which uses a narrow range of addresses for its area customers, to access the Web.<sup>28</sup> By limiting tabulated

**Table 1***McMillan Memorial Library "Local History On-Line" Use, July 2002–June 2003*

Title	High Estimate	Local Use	File Type	Size (in Kb)	Origin
As You Were (82nd Airborne)	8,620	142	PDF	611	In-House
Tom Taylor Book	6,391	254	HTML	106	In-House
History of Wood County, Wisc. (1923)	4,833	488	PDF	4,225	Outsourced
Wisconsin Rapids directory [1921]	4,571	880	PDF	3,122	Outsourced
Grand Rapids directory 1911–12	3,350	2,405	PDF	2,138	Outsourced
Wisconsin Rapids area [197?]	2,682	751	HTML	106	In-House
Bellis' Twin City directory, 1892	2,029	351	PDF	2,661	Outsourced
Grand Rapids city directory 1905–06	1,458	133	PDF	1,845	Outsourced
Wright's Wisconsin Rapids city directory 1930	1,447	873	PDF	1,696	Outsourced
Official Historical Program—Wood Co. Centennial	1,342	183	PDF	2,297	In-House
Grand Rapids city directory [1913–14]	1,162	118	PDF	1,954	Outsourced
Historical Highlights, 1855–1967, Riverview Hospital	1,151	697	PDF	1,115	In-House
A Short History of Wisconsin Rapids	1,148	191	HTML	31	In-House
Index to Elsie's World War II Scrapbook	998	60	HTML	243	Donated
Postcards (Young Collection)	980	192	HTML	12	In-House
Along the Wisconsin River	870	96	PDF	4,643	Outsourced
The Twin Cities	826	134	PDF	1,772	Outsourced
Vesper Photograph Collection	794	150	HTML	12	In-House
Wisconsin Valley Leader Index (1902–1906)	776	113	HTML	194	Donated
Wood County place names	747	174	PDF	1,026	In-House
Art work of the Wisconsin River Valley	613	143	PDF	8,234	Outsourced
Grand Rapids (HTML version)	535	53	HTML	105	In-House
Grand Rapids (PDF version)	535	112	PDF	3,161	Outsourced
Wisconsin Rapids bridge history (HTML version)	497	63	HTML	18	In-House
Wood County parks in the making, 1935–1951	434	63	HTML	44	In-House
Wisconsin Rapids bridge history (PDF version)	385	72	PDF	487	In-House
Index to the Works of David Engel	350	53	HTML	350	Donated
Upon the objects to be attained	244	<5	HTML	45	In-House
1928 Wood Co. Plat Book Index	230	143	HTML	500	Donated
Centennial story, 1890–1990	186	20	HTML	18	In-House
Rules and Regulations of the T. B. Scott Public Library	124	10	PDF	1,706	In-House

uses to those generated via these three providers, all extraneous use by WebBots and spiders was eliminated. Use by library staff was also excluded, though some in-library use at public-access PCs was not.

By counting only local patron use through local ISPs, research and patron use was actually somewhat understated, as legitimate use from outside the immediate vicinity as well as use by patrons on some in-house workstations was not counted. Confirmation of such distant use, however, has been well established by e-mail requests from several U.S. states and at least one foreign country (the Netherlands).

## Assessing "Local History On-Line" Use

Web statistics can be, at best, slippery to count and usefully analyze. In developing both sets of use statistics shown in

table 1, however, criteria were established to limit the effect of noise statistics. While the higher-use count may be optimistic by an unknown and unknowable factor, it signals that an item is at least being used, and if so, suggests that at least a portion of said use is by actual patrons and researchers. The lower-use count, reflecting more restrictive criteria relative to subject population and counting of multiple uses, still provides a reasonably reliable baseline frequency that is instructive in determining site popularity. In this case, the likelihood is high that frequency of actual use by patrons is a number somewhere between the "High Estimate" and "Local Use" figures in table 1.

The "Local Use" statistics in table 1, however modest, are still impressive given the esoteric nature of the subject materials, many of which had languished in the library's basement or vertical file for decades, and the relatively small target audience—the library's service-area population and kin thereof—that would be expected to have a

strong interest in such materials. Only a few libraries in the world own these items, and only a handful of dedicated genealogists and local historians had previously been aware of their existence. Therefore, that any of these items were used even five times in a year reflects a quantum leap in availability compared to pre-digital times. Judging by local-use frequency, the program can be considered a success.

Although McMillan's program focused almost exclusively on items of local interest, table 1's "High Estimate" statistics suggest that such an approach will still generate significant nonlocal use. Any genealogically related item has a wide audience, and photographs and postcards will attract a measure of national and international attention. The benefits of Web-publishing local history, therefore, extend locally and globally.

The strong interest in the Tom Taylor book likely reflects the visually attractive material it contains. On the other hand, the popularity of the text-dense city directories highlights the value of data-rich finding aids, directories, and similar materials, often produced for and coveted by genealogists. The shorter works did not, on the whole, generate as much use as longer works. These works may have generated less use because they contain less information useful to genealogists, are less interesting, or simply because they are smaller in size and scope and more easily overlooked.

Donated electronic materials proved their worth, both in terms of use and effective use of staff time. The library, having worked with the creators of the donated databases in the past, was confident in the quality and accuracy of their work. Staff worked with the donors in setting up, formatting, and arranging their data, so that the documents came to the library needing only minor formatting to be Web-ready.

The outsourced titles were probably the most cost effective in terms of staff time expended per use. These items generated high Web-use statistics, especially among the national audience, as reflected in the "High Estimate" use statistics, while Web-publishing and producing CD-ROMs from the items, digitized by an outside vendor, involved minimal staff effort to produce.

Two items were nonlocal in nature and generated different use patterns. *As You Were* (brief accounts of WWII service by Wisconsin members of the 82d Airborne Division) generated a modest local-use frequency but was the most widely accessed document worldwide. The library classic *Upon the Objects to Be Attained by the Establishment of a Public Library* generated low-use frequency at both levels.<sup>29</sup>

File type did not seem to present a noticeable barrier to use frequency. Both PDF and HTML files appeared among the most and least frequently used items. There also appeared to be no correlation between use and file size. Web-site links indicate document file size when file size might be an impediment to easy downloading, though users arriving from a search engine would not necessarily be aware of the size of the file they are accessing. In the two cases where the library provided HTML and PDF versions of

the same item, there was no obvious favorite between the HTML and much larger PDF files.

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## Observations on Financing, Selection, and Intellectual Property

LHO-L has not only set an example but has also served as a model for other libraries considering grassroots digitization and Web publishing. When the authors were notified that the site had been named a MARS Innovative Web-Based Reference Service, it was referred to as "the best example of a locally produced database that explained some helpful suggestions for creating a digitized site on a budget."<sup>30</sup> As noted above, one of the authors has given presentations and copresentations at state and national library conferences based on the LHO-L project; links to handouts or PowerPoint slides from those presentations accessible from the "About Local History On-Line and Digitization" link at Local History On-Line are recommended to anyone interested in this subject.<sup>31</sup>

Outside financial support for LHO-L was modest but useful. A local foundation, the Consolidated Papers Foundation (now the Mead Witter Foundation) had provided the library with a \$2,500 grant for materials preservation that funded materials digitization outsourcing; \$500 of that grant was used to procure archival containers for the scanned originals and other fragile library materials, thereby achieving progress on both access and preservation fronts. Later, through the South Central Library System, an LSTA grant was secured to have a contractor digitize the area's most recently published county history (1923) and provide print copies to other libraries in the system in addition to a digital file that was Web-published and reproduced on CD-ROM.

Financial considerations should include external funding possibilities and expenses for hardware, software, and office supplies that would be covered in an operating budget, as well as, most significantly, staff resources to produce digital images and Web-publish them in-house. The resources necessary to do so will depend on the item's complexity (for example, The Tom Taylor book, with its complex cross-referencing structure between text and images, required the greatest amount of staff time to prepare), the level of staff competency as staff gain experience, and whether an item is produced in-house or outsourced—several less popular titles, even though used less frequently, could be viewed as more cost effective in terms of use relative to staff time required, because the digitization was outsourced.

Outsourcing digitization is often a good option, and is relatively inexpensive, especially for long works like directories or local histories. Working with a contractor demands a certain discipline—developing rapport and understanding each other's terminology, capabilities, and

limitations—that can prompt frustration or a deepening of one’s knowledge in a subject (sometimes, both). In the two outsourcing projects funded by grant monies, most of the expense went to production of acid-free print copies of each item, and not to the actual digitization itself. While using digital files to produce print copies is highly recommended, and grant proposals for output in multiple formats will likely be more successful, it is still noteworthy that the cost to actually produce the digital image is modest. Staff members, however, should still ensure that they gain expertise in the process, which they can best accomplish by processing shorter documents in-house.

Materials selection for digitization is multifaceted, as with any selection process. One rule of thumb is to begin with “low-hanging fruit”—projects that offer easily surmountable technical challenges—although McMillan Memorial Library’s adventure in taking on a significant challenge at the outset bucked that trend and was worthwhile in the long run, based on strong interest in the Tom Taylor book and experience gained by producing digital versions of it.

Pretty images sell in local history as they do on the rest of the Web, and the popularity of scanned photos and postcards in LHO-L bore that out. On the other hand, the popularity of the text-dense city directories highlights the value of data-rich finding aids, directories, and similar materials, which genealogists especially covet.

In some cases, an original’s condition or rarity will dictate priority treatment, while in other cases its informational value will take precedence. In LHO-L, *Bellis’ Twin Cities Directory, 1892* scored on both counts: it was digitized from a photocopy because no extant original could be located; only later on was a single original copy located in possession of a private party—and as the community’s earliest city directory, it was an important historical document.

Some items may have a place, as in any balanced collection, even though the local interest they have is at a greater remove. As *You Were*, edited by a local resident, did not generate high local use but was the most heavily accessed source by the public generally. The classic *Upon the Objects to Be Attained by the Establishment of a Public Library*, the 1852 pronouncement by the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, was discussed by the library board and staff in the course of the library’s long-range planning process, and was considered to reflect the institution’s view of its mission, thereby warranting its inclusion on the library’s Web site.

Donated electronic materials, which included indexes to local high-school graduates and photograph collections of nearby communities, proved their worth, both in terms of significant use and in effective use of staff time. The library, having developed a rapport with the creators of the donated databases, was confident in the quality and accuracy of their work. Donors compiled their databases in familiar programs such as Microsoft Excel and Word. Staff assisted the donors in setting up, formatting, and arranging



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their data so the donated documents needed only minor formatting to be Web-ready.

Copyright concerns were taken into account early in the LHO-L project. The earliest digitization targets were items for which the library held rights, such as The Tom Taylor book, and items published in 1922 or prior that are indisputably in the public domain. Beyond that, Library Digitization Projects and Copyright ([www.llrx.com/features/digitization.htm](http://www.llrx.com/features/digitization.htm)) is a recommended reference for treading the murky waters of copyright law.<sup>32</sup> For items created locally, such as community histories, a form letter was developed explaining the LHO-L project to the creator and requesting permission to digitize and Web-publish their work. To date, only one inquiry for copyright clearance has been denied—by a state genealogical society in whose newsletter a land atlas/plat book index had been published.

The library states several aspects of its policy in the form letter to improve the likelihood of gaining author permission for digitization and Web-publication. For example, the library does not claim exclusive rights to the work, and the library agrees that the digitized works, in any format, will only realize revenue on a cost-recovery basis, to obviate the need for negotiating royalties or other compensation.<sup>33</sup> This approach strengthens the library's case that their rights are protected by fair-use.

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## Implications and Conclusion

If the use statistics provided in this study are close to representative, they indicate strongly that, as a public service, the use of digitized local history made available by a small to medium-sized public library on the Web is significant and worthy of the investment made in it. Whether a library digitizes in-house or out-sources; whether it digitizes its own materials or accepts donations of digitized documents, the demand exists, waiting to be satisfied, for digitized local history.

This descriptive case study prompts several avenues for further investigation. A survey of local history and genealogical content currently posted by libraries on the Web could, for example, ascertain the activity of libraries, categorized by size and type, in developing content at several levels, including linking to institutions and organizations with relevant content, linking to local institutions and organizations with local content, posting unique local content on one's own site, and posting unique local content of others on their site. Libraries could also be surveyed to assess the degree to which they own materials that would be prime candidates for digitization and Web-publishing, such as rare materials and materials whose research utility is limited by poor physical condition.

Local history and genealogy, while an obvious subject area for library digitization and Web-publishing, is not the only area with such possibilities, and experience

gained in digitizing local history may serve as a departure point for other initiatives using the Web to serve a library's community information needs. Indeed, as visions of the next-generation Internet emerge from fantasy into reality, such local initiatives may suit new technology in ways yet unexplored. For the time being, however, grassroots projects such as LHO-L, by innovatively providing access and content while prudently staying within the bounds of established technology, serve patrons well as library users and funding partners.

Beyond the issue of supply and demand, however, a strong philosophical case can be made for the value of grassroots digitization of local history and collections, whether as rescue preservation or to improve access. Recent scholarship, articulated by McCabe, Barnett, and others, has emphasized the potential that exists for public libraries to serve as a center of the communities they serve.<sup>34</sup> The interest that libraries have demonstrated in establishing collections of local history, genealogy, and other materials reflects not only patron demand, but an instinctive desire to be repositories of the collective memory of their communities. In this light, digitization of local materials is not merely a high-tech information transfer, but another way in which libraries can unify their communities by reminding them of the history and legacy they share. ■

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