

How Do We Keep the Archives Viable and Digital Surrogates Sustainable?

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Abstract: The digital revolution has brought many advances to the archives and the professional field. Digitized collections allow for a broader spectrum of users than ever before that can access and research collections without visiting the actual archives. This leveling of the learning field has not only increased popularity of the archives but scholarship on collections as well. But at what price? While online surrogates of collections are becoming very popular, the intrinsic value of the original item is endangered. With a digital surrogate, the information held in the physical item is no longer unique. Many users cannot rationalize visiting the physical archives when a digital copy is available at their convenience. Archivists need to actively participate in marketing their collections. Their goal should be to convince users that, while the digital surrogate of an item is a wonderful resource, it can never be considered a replacement of the original. This importance placed on the digital surrogate also brings into focus preservation issues of digital materials. The constant changes in digital technology, hardware, and software make it very difficult to create a surrogate with a longer shelf-life than a few years. How can we stop the degradation of information before it's too late, and the digital generation becomes an unsustainable memory? By looking at the latest trends in digital capture and preservation as well as current research into future methods, archivists can hopefully extrapolate the most sustainable digital formats that will not only grant existing users access, but maintain access for future generations.

About the author:

Heather Ball holds a Bachelor's degree from NYU and a Master's from the University of Glasgow, both in Medieval Studies. I am currently completing my MLS degree with a dual certificate in Archives, Record Management, and Preservation at Queens College, where I recently received the H.W. Wilson Scholarship for academic excellence. This summer I was a Junior Fellow at the Library of Congress in the Manuscripts Processing Division. It was my duty to survey and fully process the papers of a Washington journalist, Meg Greenfield, as well as to create a finding aid, assess any conservation needs, and handle disposition. I also presented research on Sigmund Freud's early letters to a childhood friend at a press conference held at the Library. During the spring semester I was an archival assistant for the Freedom Summer civil rights collection at Queens College. I worked on processing the collection, creating the finding aid, and co-curating the exhibition for the collection held in May.

I have presented independent digitization research at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan this past May, as well as sat on a panel for the Medieval Academy of America. I will also be presenting my research at the New York City Regional Archives Student Association panel this September. I have been published in *Metropolitan Archivist* and am in the process of

publishing two more articles with other journals. I sit on the awards committee for the Metropolitan Archivists Round Table of New York, I am the president of my SAA chapter at Queens College, and am an active member of various library associations.