Honest Description for Honest Abe: Applying CCO Standards to Improve Discovery and Access of the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniiana

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INTRODUCTION

This case study rethinks the practices of description of a private collection and presents the best practices established by Mississippi State University archivists and the lessons learned to allow for better description and ultimately better discovery and access of cultural objects in archives.

The Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniiana

- Chief Justice Frank J. Williams began collecting Lincolniiana (or materials relating to Abraham Lincoln) when he was in the sixth grade. He used his lunch money to purchase books and photographs. Over fifty years later, he and his wife Virginia have amassed a collection of over 16,000 artifacts, manuscripts, statues, numismatics, and ephemera. They have also collected over 24,000 volumes of books, microfilms, journals, and 19th-century pamphlets related to Lincoln and the Civil War-era.

- Image 1. Screenshot of Lincoln-Calhoun Composite Portrait created by William Pate.

Acquiring the Collection

- Negotiated with donor what we as a repository could provide:
  - New climate-controlled storage.
  - Brand new gallery space devoted to collection.
  - Establish annual speaker’s series.
  - Agreed to provide single staff member devoted to collection.

Size and makeup of collection

- All types of materials but significantly high number of cultural objects such as prints, ephemera, statuary, and artwork.

- Processing plan developed by Mississippi State to preserve the needs of the collection:
  - Sorted materials after arrival.
  - Rehoused items into archival-quality enclosures.
  - Inverted processed print and three-dimensional materials.

- Discovered that this plan would not work.

- Image 2. Image of The Charleston Mercury’s “The Union is Dissolved” broadside, which was the first Confederate publication as its standard to include:
  - All types of materials but significantly high number of cultural objects such as prints, ephemera, statuary, and artwork.

- Development of Website and Digital Collection:
  - Per the donor agreement, a Website and digital collection were developed to make the collection fully available online.
  - Website provides background information on the donor and the collection.
  - Digital Collection houses information on the entire collection. This was built in three phases:
    - Phase 1 included materials on display in the gallery.
    - Phase 2 included batches of materials with completed inventories.
    - Phase 3 included the cataloging of pamphlets.

LEGACY DATABASE

- Image 3. Image of John Roger's sculpture, The Council of War, which features the likeness of President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, and General Ulysses S. Grant.

- The MSU archivists found traditional archival description (i.e., DACS) unsuitable for this collection and needed a standard for item-level description:
  - Original artifact inventorying
  - The donor’s personal archival created a locally created description guide
  - The guide contained only 21 Class types: e.g., Cartoons, CDVs, dolls, ephemera, maps, sculpture.

- Image 4. Screenshot of original FileMaker Pro database featuring six descriptive fields for John Roger's statue The Council of War. Note the addition of vital access fields such as Title, creator, date, etc.

CHOOSING CCO

- Thus, the team chose Cataloging Cultural Objects: A Guide to Describing Cultural Works and Their Images due to its focus on describing individual cultural works and their visual surrogates (e.g., physical and digital reproductions).

- Looked to DACS’s companion standards for advice on how to catalog objects not supported by traditional archival description. CCO was the suggested standard for the cataloging of objects (DACS, 2013, p. 142).

- Assess the benefits of adopting CCO standards:
  - Unlike traditional archival standards (e.g., DACS), CCO allows for consistent description at the item level (Baca et al., 2006, p. 1).
  - The standards were easily molded to fit our resource management system (RMS) platform, FileMaker Pro.

- CCO can be easily mapped to other descriptive standards, such as Dublin Core, which allowed for the use of the same metadata in our digital collection platform.

- Most importantly, CCO supports end-user access (Baca et al., 2006, p. xii).

- Image 5. Screenshot of updated FileMaker Pro database featuring CCO descriptive fields for John Roger’s statue The Council of War. Note the addition of vital access fields such as Title, creator, date, etc.

DATABASE REDESIGN

- The team redesigned the collection’s RMS, FileMaker Pro, to accommodate CCO and mapped it to the library’s digital standards, Dublin Core.

- In the revised FileMaker Pro work record, fields were expanded to include fourteen fields:
  - Title, creator, date, etc.
  - Image 6. Screenshot of an updated FileMaker Pro illustrating the revised FileMaker Pro illustrating the revised FileMaker Pro.

ADMINISTRATIVE METADATA

- Administrative metadata were created. These serve to track what items have been cataloged and digitized. These metadata fields also manage specific storage locations for objects and preserve the original subject terms used in the legacy work record.

- Image 7. Screenshot of a work record from FileMaker Pro illustrating the revised FileMaker Pro.

CONCLUSION

- MSU Special Collections will establish CCO as its standard to include:
  - Museum pieces in the Ulysses S. Grant Museum, Charles Templeton, and John Grisham collections.

- CCO sets a standard for entire University Libraries.

- We hope to eventually upload CCO data into OCLC.

- Unlike manuscript collections, item-level description of cultural objects is necessary for access, CCO sets this standard.

- This will allow archives to standardize language for different institutions to use CCO as well.

- We encourage repositories to implement similar projects to standardize the description of cultural objects and widen the pool of sharable metadata.

REFERENCES