Shifting Gears

What do digital projects look like when you can’t digitize anything?

Esmé Cowles
Kim Leaman
Before COVID

Tons of work to do, but we had a great team and a solid digital content ecosystem

- Repository to build objects
- IIIF to drive a viewer
- Viewer showing up in focused frontend discovery apps
- Syncing metadata instead of forking
Pain points

● Workflows never used as planned
● Unaddressed technical debt
● Bandwidths maxed out with tons of projects
● Metadata, conservation, IT work underestimated

Work had begun to address these problems...
When COVID hit

- Who needs what to work from home?
  - can they be productive?
- What if you can't do your job remotely?
- Logistics for shipping/receiving
- Helping newly-remote staff adjust
By the end of March...

What will digital projects look like if we are closed indefinitely?

Photo by Esmé Cowles
Getting content unstuck
New flexibility

- Revisiting stalled migrations
  - new curators, new flexibility

- Imperative to make content accessible
  - doesn't need to be perfect

- New possibilities for collaboration
  - more staff time available
  - functionality has improved since the last time we revisited some of these projects
Western Americana Collection

Photography & the American West

Native American History
Mormon Americana

Photography & the American West

The College of New Jersey began acquiring books and other materials about the trans-Mississippi West long before Western Americana was collectible and well before the 1890 U.S. Census announced the closing of the American frontier. Some accounts of early explorations, such as Jonathan Carver’s Travels through the Interior Parts of North America (1784), came to the college in 1812 with the purchase of John Witherspoon’s former library. The 1884 subject catalog of the college library lists several government publications on the exploration of the American West, such as John C. Fremont’s Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, Oregon, and North Carolina (1845) and F. V. Hayden’s Annual Reports of the Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories (1874-1878). More notable, however, for their early inclusion in the holdings of the college are several collections of documentary photographs of the American West taken from the 1850s through the 1890s.

Learn more about the history of the Western Americana photograph collections

Digitized Collections

The Western Americana Photograph Collection
5,472 ITEMS

The William Henry Jackson Photographs of North American Indian Collections
3,015 ITEMS

The Sheldon Jackson Collection of Indian Photographs
5,320 ITEMS
Online audio archive of Princeton University's performance ensembles. Browse on the ensemble picture to view the available performance archive. This archive is constantly growing and the performance that you are looking for might not be available online yet. If the performances you are seeking are not listed under the specific ensembles, contact the Mendel Music Library to check for a hard-copy recording of the concert. These performances can be listened to on site at the Mendel Music Library. If you have a copy of a performance that you feel should be included in our audio archive, please let us know!
Features to support throughput

- Google Drive upload not working
  - drag and drop ingest
- Migrating Special Collections content
  - improving metadata from EADs
- Lots of new staff scanning for course reserves
  - automatic PDF ingest
Enriching existing content
Helping staff be productive

- We never had the staff time to review and enrich content
- Staff at home had time to add page numbers, table of contents
- With support from IT and some small workflow features
It’s all in the facets

- Limit to items that need structural metadata
- Refine searches by date
- Let staff claim items to work on to avoid duplication of work
Coordinating new contributors

- Communication and Collaboration
  - explaining purpose and benefits
  - training and workflow documentation
  - coordinating staff from multiple departments

- Benefits
  - making digital objects much more usable
  - making a concrete contribution
  - using language skills
  - learning more of a frequently-used app
  - being part of a team

Photo by Josh Calabrese on Unsplash
Reusing existing content
How to Build Exhibits *a guide for curators*

https://dpul.princeton.edu/exhibits_documentation

- Spotlight exhibit to show how to build Spotlight exhibits
- Training and individual support
Curated collections program

- Collaborated with Special Collections staff
- Streamlined workflow
- Training and outreach opportunities with public services
Getting There (New York and the urban park)

Beginning in 1904, the Interborough Rapid Transit Company operated and managed the New York City Subway’s overground and underground lines, including the Pelham Bay Park Branch that ran up the city’s East Side all the way to the titular park in the northeast corner of the Bronx.

Three times the size of Central Park, Pelham Bay Park was a one-time brainchild of Frederick Law Olmstead, pet project of John Mulcahey and the New York Park Association, and the subject of a lengthy camping permit controversy at the turn of the 20th century.

These calls to action from the Elevated Express, a publication of the Interborough Transit Commission, speak to the ideals and appeal of Pelham Bay Park. Due to its distance from the city, in contrast to Central Park, the land at the peak of Hunter’s Point was left unlandscaped, providing a recreational wilderness only a stone’s throw from bustling, hot, and overcrowded Manhattan.
Other collaborations
Different contributions

- Metadata vendors
  - sponsoring accounts
  - access restrictions
  - "save draft" feature
- Vendors transitioning
- Faculty collaborations
- Staff scanning and transcribing at home
Sharing what we have

● Improving OAI support
  ○ France in Americas
  ○ Digital Cicognara

● Contributing to OPenn
  ○ metadata review and enhancement
  ○ faculty and departmental support

● Prioritizing digitization for fall instruction and research
Bottom line

- Improving access to our collections
- Adding value to existing content
- Helping staff be productive
- Building relationships & encouraging collaboration