



Message from the Editor

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The 2015 CLIR Unconference & Symposium was the capstone event to seven years of grant funding through CLIR's Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives program. The two-day event brought together more than 180 past and current grant recipients as well as others interested in the new phase focusing on digitization. The atmosphere was energetic and passionate about the vast array of projects completed or in progress. The more than 25 presentations vividly illustrated the impact of the Hidden Collections grant.

Since 2008, CLIR and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation have funded 129 projects. To date, institutions have processed at least 2,952 collections, comprising 53,608 linear feet, an additional 4,229 cubic feet, plus 960 boxes of mixed materials. The projects have also created 273,728 item-level records of materials including:

- 50,551 books and manuscripts
- 46,702 audio and audiovisual recordings
- 29,393 items of ephemera
- 27,125 pamphlets
- 15,600 pamphlet plays
- 8,560 maps and map series
- 6,956 artifacts
- 5,537 artworks
- 2,978 architectural drawings

As shown in the [Hidden Collections Registry](#), grant recipients represent academic institutions, government and nonprofit organizations, historical societies, independent libraries,

museums, and public libraries. The topics are vast, ranging from activism to book and print history, and from earth sciences to media studies.

We can't know precisely how many researchers have used these newly processed collections and items, but the number is likely to be in the hundreds. At a time when many institutions face chronic processing backlogs and underfunded departments, this program has created jobs, provided resources to catalog collections, and facilitated access to rare materials that will benefit researchers for years to come.

Through my work on a CLIR-funded project and, subsequently, as a grant reviewer, I have greatly broadened my archival knowledge. During my three-year project, [Archives from Atlanta: Cradle of the Civil Rights Movement](#), I was privileged not only to work with amazing civil rights collections, but also to hear how others implement processing procedures and what tools they use. Learning about others' procedures and projects helps me grow as an archivist, and as a manager I share this knowledge and apply many of these practices in my current institution.

In 2010, CLIR hosted its [first symposium](#) for grant recipients. At that symposium, archivists presented on topics ranging from architectural records to processing metrics, and from research communities to appraisal. Five years later, the [2015 symposium](#) continued that spirit of connecting and sharing. Attendees learned about others' practices and tools, but also made connections with each other that have led to further collaborations, recognition of expertise, and friendships.



CLIR “aspires to transform the information landscape to support the advancement of knowledge.” From the presentations and conversations, it was clear how the program contributes to that goal. In these proceedings, participating archivists and librarians reveal their perspectives, approaches, and ways of sharing information. Readers will see the discovery through the author’s eyes.

These proceedings group presentations by theme. *Collaborations* provides examples of multi-institutional projects, including one international collaboration; *Student and Faculty Involvement* reports on practices of engaging students and faculty in processing as well as outreach; *Cataloging* presents projects that experimented with unique ways of classifying unusual formats; *Arrangement and Description* includes a variety of item-level and minimal processing techniques; *Audiovisual Collections* addresses the unique requirements of and advances in providing access to audiovisual items; *Science Collections* focuses on how institutions deal with challenges of science and medical collections, including practical ways to address privacy issues; and *Outreach* describes ways in which projects are engaging current and future patrons.

The [Unconference](#) featured in-depth discussions about practical applications, with a choice of workshops in the morning and discussions in the afternoon. Hidden Collections project staff joined with other archivists and information professionals to lead the workshops and discussion sessions. The leaders focused on hands-on tasks, sharing ideas, and reinforcing that we all have similar needs and should work together to learn new skills and implement practices. Notes from the Unconference, like the symposium presentations, are grouped by theme, including data tools, metadata, sustainability, community, promoting collections, donors, and

assessment. Each workshop and discussion leader started with their project as a basis and demonstrated how using tools and ideas, such as GIS and K-12 outreach, can be integrated and accomplished. Their purpose was not to just showcase a specific project, but to actively engage participants in discussion and exchange of ideas and experiences.

Archivists routinely exchange information about their profession through conferences, literature, blogs, social media, and other means. The Hidden Collections grant program has taken that to a new level. CLIR has provided a [platform to disseminate knowledge](#) that expands beyond the usual means and allows recipients to share their publicity, outreach, finding aids, workflows, templates, and manuals. This platform collates resources that can benefit all archivists. One can see finished projects as well as the procedures and tools to accomplish them.

As editor of these proceedings, I attended nearly all workshops, discussions, and sessions, albeit some for only a few minutes. I wanted to glimpse as much as possible to ensure the most comprehensive representation of the event. I learned too much to list. Some ideas were brand new and others reinforced my current practices. One suggestion that bears repeating is that one does not need to be an expert before embarking on something new: the only way to become an expert is to jump in and try.

What was apparent throughout the two days was not only participants’ depth of archival knowledge but also—and this may be obvious—that we are responsible for a great number of tasks to make our unique materials available: appraisal, acquisition, arrangement, description, and access. To carry out these tasks, we need to understand outreach, cataloging, digitization,



standards, and researchers' needs. When I mentioned this to Michael Edson, who has contributed the epilogue to this volume, he asked if I thought the array of tasks was a product of how fast-paced and demanding our society has become. That specific connection had not occurred to me before, but yes, I do.

As technology develops faster than anyone can keep pace with, our researchers' expectations also grow quickly. We frequently get the

question "why can't you digitize everything?" While we know that is a monumental directive, CLIR's [new iteration of the Hidden Collections program](#) is one step in that direction. The accomplishments from the past seven years indicate that CLIR will continue to provide opportunities for more collaboration on and access to hidden collections that will significantly impact the profession and advance research.