



Opening up the Urban Archive: Digital Outreach to Urban Studies Scholars

Morgan Gieringer, Head of Special Collections, University of North Texas

Jaime Janda, Collections Processing Manager, University of North Texas

Abstract

“Post-War Industry and Development of the Southwest Metroplex” is a project seeking to connect users with previously hidden archival collections at the University of North Texas. Electronic finding aids are the primary access point to these collections; however, this project also seeks to connect individuals with archival resources through digital outreach methods. Digital outreach is an important component of this project because of social scientists’ perceived difficulty in accessing and using archival collections, and finding grey literature within archival finding aids. To meet this need, project staff are using a blog and social media as outreach tools to highlight the diverse nature of these collections and their potential for use by historians, social scientists, journalists, and scholars in other urban studies-related disciplines. Social media strategies employed by project staff include use of hashtags and connecting blog posts to current events to increase the likelihood of being shared. Plans for future social media outreach include expanding the scope of the blog to include a greater geographic area, and using video content. Through these efforts, project staff hope to further expose the content of particular collections and attract new users to the archive.

Introduction

Post-War Industry and Development of the Southwest Metroplex is a two-year initiative to process eight archival collections related to the growth of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex following World War II. This project also seeks to connect scholars in a variety of disciplines with archival resources relevant to urban studies through digital outreach methods. Prominent urban studies scholars have been outspoken about the scarcity of archival collections that document the modern history of the Dallas/Fort Worth region. In addition to reaching users currently seeking archival resources, project staff are reaching out to urban studies scholars who may not regularly use archival collections or who might benefit from increased access to grey

literature (unpublished papers and reports) found within collections. To this end, project staff are using a blog and social media as outreach tools to highlight the diverse nature of these collections and their potential for use by historians, social scientists, journalists, and scholars in disciplines related to urban studies.

The transformation of the Dallas/Fort Worth area after World War II began with the expansion of the national interstate highway system, which placed Dallas at the intersection of major east-west and north-south highways. In 1969, Dallas and Fort Worth began joint construction of the largest inland port in America—the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport—further transforming the urban landscape and solidifying the region as a major transportation and industrial



center. Almost five million new residents came to the Dallas/Fort Worth area between 1960 and 2010, making it the largest metropolitan area in the southern United States (Social Science Data Analysis Network 2002). Cities within the Metroplex have raced to accommodate this new population by developing transportation and municipal services to serve the residents and industries fueling the growth.

Demonstrated Need for Access to Urban Studies Resources

The special collections department of the University of North Texas Libraries holds evidence of Dallas/Fort Worth's growth and development in the form of original records, photographs, and collections of personal papers. Eight of these collections were selected to form the 2013 hidden collections proposal to the Council on Library Information Resources (CLIR) for the project Post-War Industry and Development of the Southwest Metroplex. These collections include the papers of Texas Representative Lanny Hall, which document local constituent concerns during years of massive growth in Fort Worth and Arlington as well as political redistricting taking place on the state level (1979-1984). Also included are the archive of *Texas Metro* magazine and the Southwest Federal Regional Council Records (1964-1984), which document the planning and creation of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. Other collections reveal how implementation of the federal Model Cities Program (1966-1974) and the Community Development Block Grant programs of the 1970s affected north Texas cities. Topics included in these collections are especially relevant to scholars studying modern urban issues such as affordable housing, urban design, transportation, crime, education, and employment.

Urban studies scholars have been fervent in their support for making these collections more readily

available, citing both the relative lack of existing scholarship on the Dallas/Fort Worth area for a metropolitan area of its size and the failure of other local repositories to adequately collect resources in this area. Harvey J. Graff, professor emeritus at The Ohio State University, supported this project, saying, "The development of much needed fundamental research on this important area has been retarded by the lack of serious and sustained library and archival collection development" (Graff 2013). Carl Abbott, professor emeritus of urban studies at Portland State University, noted, "There is great need for these sorts of research materials." He compared important recent work on Sun Belt cities such as Phoenix and Los Angeles by saying, "Indeed, Dallas/Fort Worth seems especially underserved by scholarship when compared to greater Los Angeles" (Abbott 2013). Robert Fairbanks of the University of Texas at Arlington provided further support for this project by commenting, "As an urban historian writing on the twentieth century urban Southwest, especially the Dallas-Fort Worth Region, I am acutely aware of the dearth of sources available for the post World War II period, an era of the region's most spectacular growth" (Fairbanks 2013).

Issues Preventing Use of Urban Archives

Although these comments strongly indicate the desire for access to these collections among those who regularly use archival collections, project staff are also focused on outreach to scholars who may not regularly use archival collections. Urban studies of major metropolitan areas is an area of research that traditionally has relied heavily on quantitative research methods such as data collection and statistical analysis. However, developments in the field of contemporary social theory in the past 20 years have led scholars to embrace more qualitative approaches (Jacobs 1993). Ethnographic techniques

such as participant observation and interviews are examples of qualitative methods that are regularly incorporated into urban studies.

Textual analysis, a method of research that examines the content, meaning, structure, and discourse of texts, is another qualitative method that is highly applicable to urban studies and could make good use of archival resources (Lockyer 2008). Textual analysis in urban studies scholarship has used texts such as municipal regulations, public comments, campaign literature, program reports, and policy papers. These last two categories—program reports and policy papers—hold the greatest potential for scholars in the urban studies archive. Unpublished papers and reports, also known as grey literature, are found within many records collections dealing with urban issues (Figures 1 and 2).

Members of the Grey Literature Network Service have identified 72 types of grey literature, according to the 2004 Grey Literature Survey. These include many of the types of documents a researcher would encounter in the urban archive, including bulletins, case studies, feasibility studies, legal documents, policy statements, project proposals, research reports, and white papers (GreyNet International 2004). Specific examples of grey literature found within this project include items such as a brochure for the Southwest Federal Regional Council, proposals and feasibility studies for a new drinking water reservoir, and Dallas/Fort Worth's proposal to bring a major scientific center to North Texas, "A Look into Tomorrow: The Plan to Bring the Superconducting Super Collider to Texas." One particularly noteworthy example is a 1968 report summarizing the initial plans for construction of the airport. This report, titled *Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Planning and Development*, shown in Figure 3, describes the location, size, terminal

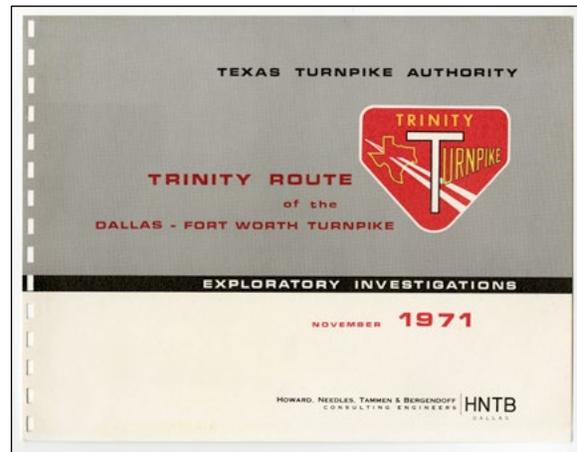


Fig. 1: Trinity Route of the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike: Turnpike Exploratory Investigation, 1971

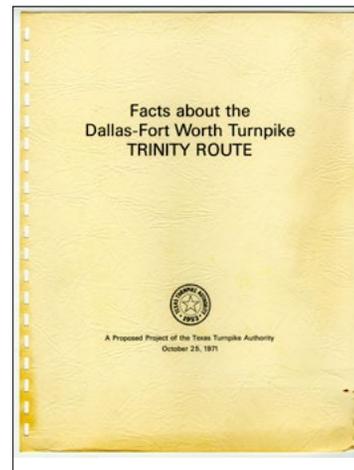


Fig. 2: Facts about the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike Trinity Route, 1971

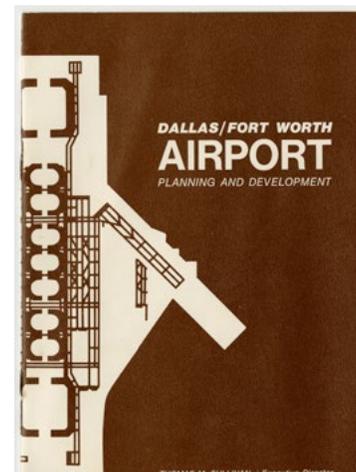


Fig. 3: Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Planning and Development is an example of grey literature found in the collection.

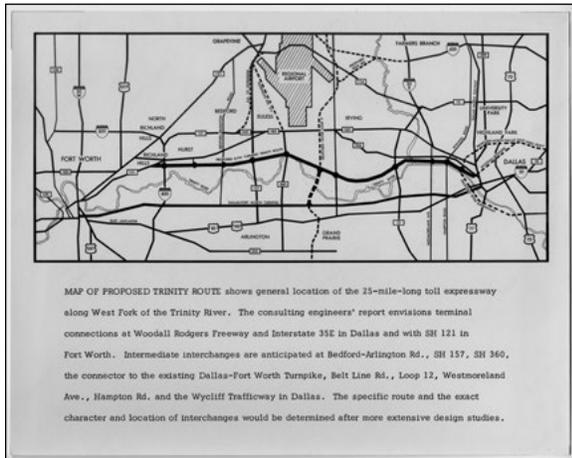


Fig. 4: Map of Proposed Trinity Route. Lester Strother Collection (AR0327), University of North Texas Special Collections.

facilities, ground transportation plans, airspace requirements, and financing for what would become the world's largest airport. (See Figures 4, 5, and 6 for more examples of grey literature).

Library literature supports the potential for grey literature's contributions to scholarship as well as the need for archivists to use outreach methods to connect users with these valuable hidden resources. A 2013 article in the journal *Library Management* cited growing use of grey literature because of increasing opportunities for electronic publishing and digitization. "Many special collections units have increasingly made their deposited non-circulating resources available as digital assets and those collections, once

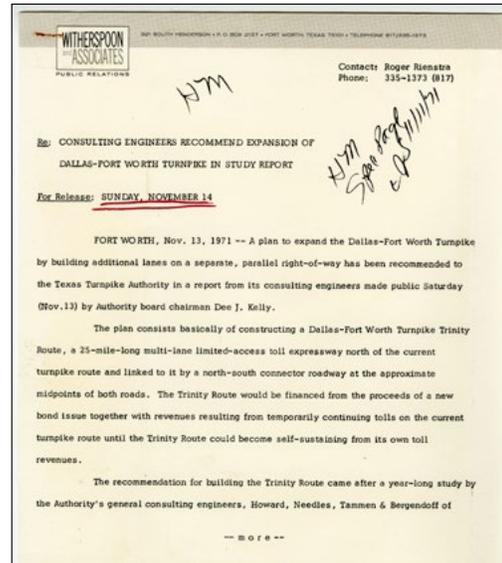


Fig. 5: Witherspoon and Associates 1971. Consulting Engineers Recommend Expansion of Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike in Study Report, November 13 1971. Lester Strother Collection (AR0327), University of North Texas Special Collections.

considered visibly grey, become less grey. The encoded archivists' description tool kits provide resources for librarians and archivists to create user guides to such collections" (Gelfand and Lin 2013, 541). In this instance, the authors suggest that access points, in the form of electronic finding aids, perform as the outreach strategy to increase use of grey literature. Often, however, the size of an archival collection precludes item-level description, as is the case with the collections that make up this project. Project staff have decided

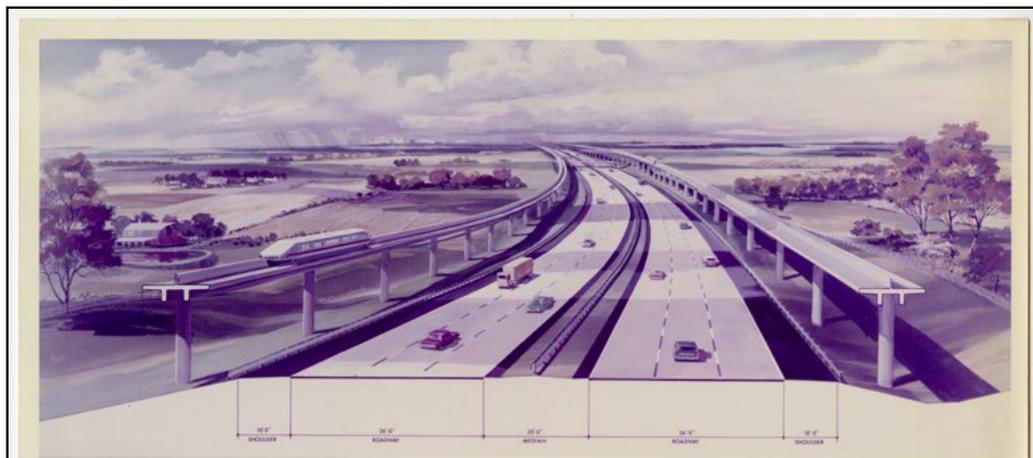


Fig. 6: Rural Trinity Route. Lester Strother Collection (AR0327), University of North Texas Special Collections.

instead to use selective digitization and description, combined with a social media strategy, to provide increased access to grey literature and to visual and other types of under-described textual materials.

Digital Outreach Methods

Making collections available through electronic finding aids and digitization is a major step toward outreach to researchers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, as well as to other institutions across the country, yet it is still only one step. To make processing, digitization, and finding aids more widely accessible, project archivists chose to conduct outreach through social media and other available services. A blog called “Discovering the Southwest Metroplex,” hosted on the University Libraries website, together with the special collections Twitter account, provide the main channels for collection outreach. The special collections Facebook page, university newsletters and listservs, and press releases to the local community constitute secondary methods of outreach.

The project blog is used to promote specific entries through social media outlets, primarily Twitter and Facebook. Between May 2014 and January 2015, project archivists created 14 original blog posts. Of these, about 65 percent have been shared through other media outlets by library staff, special collections staff, and the public. Of the posts shared through social media, 26 percent were tweeted, and 39 percent were shared on Facebook pages (Figures 7 and 8).

In examining the figures related to outreach through social media, project staff thought that the statistics fell short of original expectations. In the second year of the project, staff must ask themselves what more can be done to enhance social media outreach.

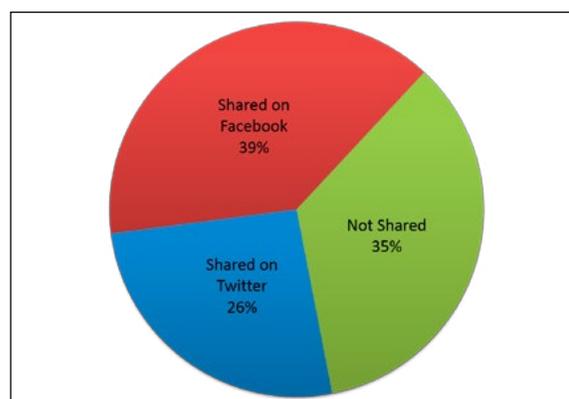


Fig. 7: Statistics of blog sharing

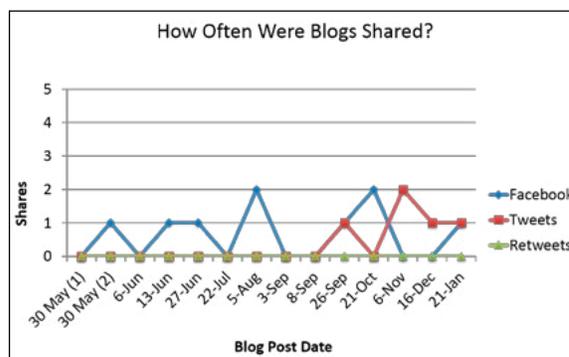


Fig. 8: How often were blogs shared?

Early on in the project, a major problem staff faced was lack of knowledge about collection contents. Collections that qualified for inclusion under this grant were hidden collections and thus lacked any descriptions besides the most rudimentary accession records. Staff selected boxes at random and sifted through them to find general information or specific items to write about in a blog. To overcome this obstacle, staff supplemented blog posts with information from related collections that were not included in the grant, but were connected to the grant collections through larger themes of transportation, housing, population, and tourism. Some examples of blog post topics include the Texas State Fair, the El Chico restaurant chain, the Fort Worth Stockyards, and the construction of the Dallas/Fort Worth

International Airport. Once processing started on the grant collections, staff wrote more specific posts highlighting potential research areas in the hidden collections.

Project staff looked at several ways to improve the reach of blog posts through social media. The first method is to tweet specifically to potential interested parties through established Twitter conventions (Figure 9). Staff used this method in a post on the Texas Rangers baseball team.

When special collections staff tweeted a link to this blog post, they made specific mention to “@Rangers.” This method can also use specific hashtags. Because there is no automated way for the designated tweeter in special collections to be notified of a new blog entry, this method works best when the blog author notifies the Twitter account holder, and makes specific suggestions about people to mention or hashtags to incorporate.

A second method is to connect blog posts with current events. For example, the Rangers Stadium blog post is scheduled to be retweeted closer to the opening of baseball season. Staff also plan to encourage wider outreach to baseball fans by including AT&T Stadium, the Houston Astros, Major League Baseball, and even Six Flags over Texas in the tweet because they also were mentioned in the blog post. This method will cast a wide net that will attract a larger audience and new researchers.

Because the primary audience for this project is urban studies and geography scholars, social scientists, historians, and journalists interested in the development of the Southwest Metroplex, project staff have identified the need to package collection information in a way that is useful and relevant to these audiences. By enlarging the scope of the blog to include closely related cities, project staff anticipate an even larger audience. Future posts will incorporate information not only about

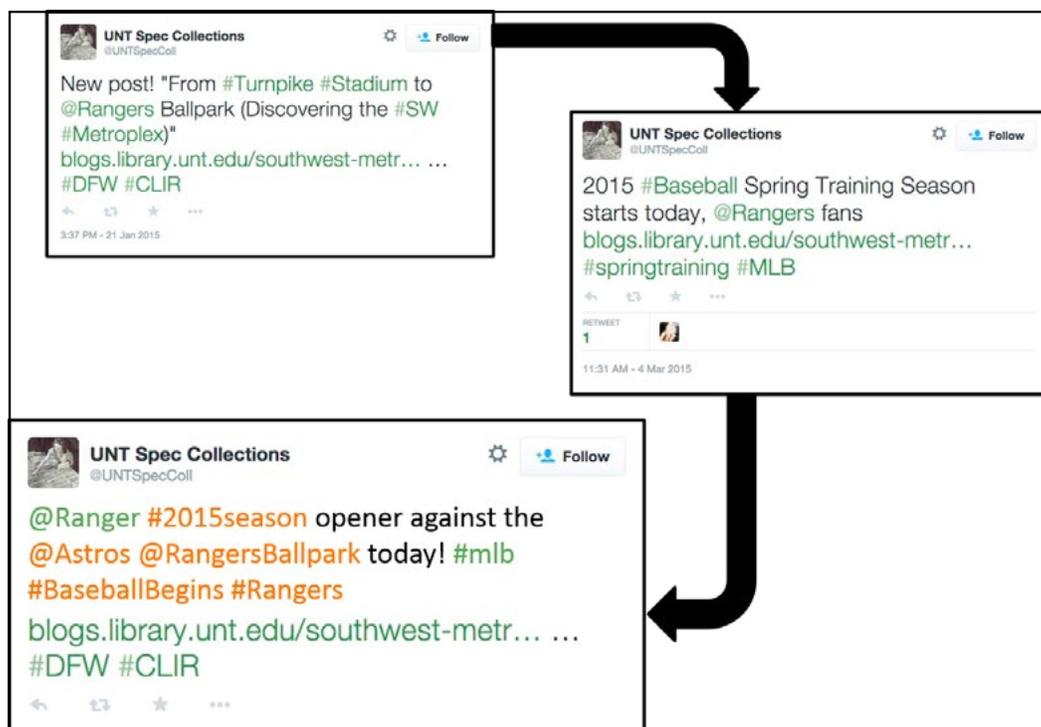


Fig. 9: How blogs should be tweeted



the growth of Dallas/Fort Worth, but also (if available) the growth of other cities in Texas and surrounding states. For example, the records of *Texas Metro* magazine contain photographs, brochures, and articles on many Texas cities outside the Dallas/Fort Worth area that experienced growing tourism in the 1960s and 1970s. Lester Strother, a journalist and later owner and publisher of *Texas Metro*, also traveled to other states and countries, writing articles on hotels and vacationing spots. These topics are not the main concern of this project, but they can be highlighted to appeal to urban studies scholars, historians, journalists, or whoever else might be interested.

Forging connections with scholars interested in the Dallas/Fort Worth area as well as other Texas metro areas such as Austin, Houston, and San Antonio opens up the possibility of partnering with university and city archives in places that share similar collections. For example, in the Lanny Hall Collection are materials related to many universities and towns that project staff could connect with outside of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. Lanny Hall not only was a Texas state representative during the 66th, 67th, and 68th legislative sessions, but he also studied at the University of Texas and at Hardin-Simmons University, where he later became president. In addition, he has professional ties with Howard Payne University, Baylor University, and Wayland Baptist University, among others. Even though the collection deals mainly with his time as a state representative in the Fort Worth area, researchers may be interested in all aspects of his career, including his speeches and other publications, his involvement in major projects around Dallas/Fort Worth, and legislation he authored or helped pass. The benefit of connecting with scholars interested in what these collections have to offer is their communication with fellow scholars in their disciplines.

Another area of outreach staff identified was partnerships with local libraries, museums, and universities to host events about the growth of the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Events can be used to promote the eight grant-funded collections and highlight others that may be of interest to the local community. Videos can be taken during the event and used to create a specific YouTube channel for special collections and then easily shared through established social media networks. Other ideas for video content include short videos of staff processing parts of the collections. In these videos, staff plan to highlight maps and blueprints that show the expansion of road systems, neighborhoods, lakes, and the Superconducting Super Collider. These videos will encourage use and raise awareness of the department's collections and services. They can benefit the department by showing the effort put forth to make collections available to the public, which may also encourage collections donations from local businesses or personal papers from well-known community members.

For collection outreach, staff are now evaluating many types of social media outlets. Facebook, Twitter, and the project blog are the top choices; others are just as good but are currently overlooked, such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram, Reddit, Google+, LinkedIn, and even the long-lost MySpace, which is becoming popular again with artists, writers, musicians, and others in similar industries. These outlets will let us reach out locally and eventually, we hope, worldwide, while staff engage locally in more personal and one-on-one conversations.

Conclusion

The success of the Post-War Industry and Development of the Southwest Metroplex project hinges on the ability to connect users with



previously hidden collections. Electronic finding aids are the primary point of access to these collections; however, this project also seeks to connect scholars in a variety of disciplines with archival resources relevant to urban studies through digital outreach methods. Digital outreach is an important component of this project because of social scientists' perceived difficulty in accessing and using archival collections, and finding grey literature within archival finding aids. To meet this need, project staff are using a blog and social media as outreach tools to highlight the diverse nature of these collections and their potential for use by historians, social scientists, journalists, and scholars in other urban studies-related disciplines. Social media strategies employed by project staff include use of hashtags and connecting blog posts to current events to increase the likelihood of being shared. Plans for future social media outreach include expanding the scope of the blog to include a greater geographic area, and using video content. Through these efforts, project staff hope to further expose the content of particular collections and attract new users to the archive.

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