

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

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Introduction

“Post-War Industry and Development of the Southwest Metroplex” is a two-year project to process eight archival collections related to the growth of the Dallas/Fort-Worth Metroplex following WWII. 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 regarding the scarcity of archival collections which document the modern history of the Dallas/Fort Worth region. In addition to reaching users currently seeking archival resources, project staff are working to reach out to an audience of urban studies scholars who may not regularly use archival collections or whom might benefit from increased access to grey literature found within collections. To meet this need project staff are utilizing 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 urban studies related disciplines.

The transformation of the Dallas/Fort Worth area following WWII started during 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 jointly began construction to build the largest inland port in America, Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, further transforming the urban landscape and solidifying the region as a major transportation and industrial center. Almost 5 million new residents came to the D/FW area between 1960 and 2010

making it now 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 growth and development in D/FW 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, "Post-War Industry and Development of the Southwest Metroplex." The papers of Texas Representative Lanny Hall document local constituent's concerns during years of massive growth in Fort Worth and Arlington as well as political redistricting taking place on the state level (1979-1984). The planning and creation of D/FW International Airport are well documented in the archive of Texas Metro magazine and in the Southwest Federal Regional Council Records (1964-1984). Other collections reveal how implementation of the federal Model Cities Program (1966-1974) and the Community Development Block Grant programs of the 1970's 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 issues.

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. Dr. 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). Dr. Carl Abbott, professor emeritus of Urban Studies at Portland State University noted that, “There is great need for these sorts of research materials.” He compared important recent work on Sunbelt 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). Dr. Robert Fairbanks of the University of Texas at Arlington provided further support 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 comments from these scholars 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 are an area of important research which traditionally have 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 twenty 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 regularly are incorporated into urban studies.

Textual analysis, a method of research that examines the content, meaning, structure, and discourse of texts, is another qualitative method which is highly applicable to urban studies and could make advantageous use of archival resources (Lockyer, 2008). Some uses of textual analysis in urban studies scholarship have employed texts such as municipal regulations, public comments, campaign literature, program reports and policy papers. It is these final two categories, program reports and policy paper, which hold the greatest potential for scholars in the urban studies archive. Unpublished papers and reports, also known as grey literature, are found within many collections of records dealing with urban issues.

According to the 2004 Grey Literature Survey there are 72 types of grey literature that have been currently identified by members of the Grey Literature Network Service. 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 like 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 "Planning and Development of the Dallas/Fort Worth Regional Airport," describes the location, size, terminal facilities, ground transportation plans, airspace requirements and financing for what would become the largest airport in the world.

Library literature supports the potential for grey literature's contributions to scholarship as well as the need for archivists to employ outreach methods to connect users with these

valuable hidden resources. A 2013 article in the journal *Library Management* cited increased use of grey literature due to increasing opportunities for electronic publishing and digitization efforts. “Many special collections units have increasingly made their deposited non-circulating resources available as digital assets and those collections, once 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 & Lin, 2013). In this instance the authors suggest that access points, in the form of electronic findings aids, perform as the outreach strategy to increase use of grey literature. In many instances 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 to instead utilize selective digitization and description combined with a social media strategy to provide increased access to grey literature as well as 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 towards outreach to researchers from the Dallas/Fort Worth area, as well as other institutions across the US, yet it is still only a one step forward. To make processing, digitization, and finding aids more worthwhile, project archivists chose to strongly utilize outreach through social media outlets and other available services. A blog titled “Discovering the Southwest Metroplex” hosted on the University Libraries website, and the special collections Twitter account are the main sources for collection outreach. Use of the special collections Facebook page, University newsletters and listservs, and outreach to the local community with press releases were identified as secondary methods of outreach.

The project blog is utilized to promote specific entries through social media outlets, primarily focusing on Twitter and Facebook. Between May 2014 and January 2015 project archivists created 14 original blog posts on the project blog. Of these posts, approximately 65% have been shared through other media outlets by a combination of library staff, special collections staff and the public. Of those posts that were shared through social media 28% were tweeted, and 42% shared and liked on Facebook pages.

In examining the figures related to outreach through social media outlets, project staff felt that the statistics fell short of original expectations. Preparing to enter the second year of the project, staff must now ask themselves what more can be done to enhance social media outreach and what changes can be made to make our approach more fruitful?

Early on in the project a major problem that staff faced was lack of knowledge regarding collection contents. Collections which qualified for inclusion under this grant were hidden collections and lacked any descriptions beside the most rudimentary accession records. Staff selected boxes at random and sifted through them to find general information or specific items to write about. To overcome this obstacle staff also 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, increasing population, and tourism. Some examples of blog posts include the construction of the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, the Texas State Fair, the El Chico restaurant chain, and the Fort Worth Stockyards. Once the grant collections had begun to be processed, staff were able to make more specific posts highlighting potential research areas in the “hidden collections.”

Project staff have 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. This method was utilized in a recent post on the Texas Rangers baseball team. When a link to this blog post tweeted by special collections, a specific mention was made to “@Rangers.” This method can also utilize specific hashtags. Since 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 has been 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 since they were mentioned in the blog post as well. Although this will cast a wide-net, it is a bridge to connect to a larger audience, and attract new researchers.

Since the primary audience that this project seeks to connect with is urban studies and geography scholars, social scientists, historians, and journalists who are interested in the development of the Southwest Metroplex, project staff have identified a 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 are planned which incorporate information not only about the growth of Dallas/Fort Worth, as well as the growth of other cities in Texas or surrounding states (if it is available). For example, the Texas Metro Records contain photographs, brochures, and articles on many Texas cities outside the Dallas/Fort Worth area with growing tourism attractions during the 60’s and 70’s. Strother even traveled to other states and countries, writing articles on hotels and vacationing spots. These topics may have not been the main concern of this project, but it doesn’t

mean that they shouldn't be highlighted to appeal to urban studies scholars, historians, journalists, or whoever else might be interested in those areas.

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 to partner with University and city archives in those areas that also share similar collections. For example, in the Lanny Hall Collection, there are numerous 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 Hardin-Simmons where he later became President of the University. He also has professional ties with Howard Payne University, Baylor University, Wayland Baptist University, and many more. Even though the collection mainly deals with his time as a State Representative in the Fort Worth area, it doesn't mean that there isn't someone from one of these other universities who might be interested in Lanny Hall's total career, and would be interested to see what major projects around Dallas/Fort Worth he was involved in, his speeches and other publications, as well as any legislation he helped pass or authored. The benefit of connecting with scholars interested in what these collections have to offer is their communication with fellow scholars in their disciplines.

Partnerships with local libraries, museums, and universities to host events about the growth of the Dallas/Fort Worth area are another area of outreach that project staff have identified. Events can be used to promote the eight grant funded collections and also highlight other collections 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. Video content can then easily be 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 Super Conducting Super Collider.

Videos will encourage the use of and raise awareness of collections and services offered by the special collections department. They can benefit the department by showing the effort put forth to make collections available to the public, which may encourage others to donate collection from local businesses, or personal papers from a well-known member of the community.

There are many different types of social media outlets which staff are now evaluating for collection outreach. Facebook, Twitter, and the project blog are the top choices when it comes to outreach, but there are others just as good that 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 similar industries. These outlets will let us reach out locally and eventually (hopefully) worldwide, while locally staff engage 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 due

to social scientists perceived difficulty in accessing archival collection, utilizing archival collections, and finding grey literature within archival finding aids. To meet this need project staff are utilizing 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. Various social media strategies employed by project staff include use of hash tags and connecting blog posts to current events to increase the likelihood of being shared. Plans for future social media outreach include expansion of the scope of the blog to include a greater geographic area as well as use of 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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