Chapter 10
Becoming the Gothic Archive:
From Digital Collection to Digital Humanities

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ABSTRACT

The Gothic Archive is the flagship digital humanities project for the Marquette University library. The project was birthed from a simple digital collection, and through the partnership of faculty and librarians, was transformed into something more. The core tenets of digital collection creation were adhered to in order to create a solid foundation upon which to build the Archive. The expertise of both groups and communication were key in the evolution of the collection, and in discovering and highlighting the relationships between the objects. This case study reviews the steps Marquette took in creating the collection and taking it to the level of digital humanities project.

INTRODUCTION

Certainly, support for Digital Humanities (DH) research has grown in the past decade with the launch of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Digital Humanities Initiative in 2006 and the transformation of the initiative to the Office of Digital Humanities in 2008. Panapacker (2009) called DH "the first 'next big thing' in a long time"(para. 1). Multiple DH centers are popping up around the world, and the NEH and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) continue to offer grant funding for DH-centric projects. So the question for librarians and archivists becomes, "what about us?" As Vandegrift (2012) offered in his response to Kirschenbaum:

Libraries have struggled to define their role in digital humanities, as the discussions around DH often resort to theoretical discourse or technical know-how. Arguably, however, because the library already functions as a interdisciplinary agent in the university, it is the central place where DH work can, should be and is being done. DH projects involve archival collections, copyright/fair use questions, information organization, emerging technologies and progressive ideas about the role of text(s) in society, all potential areas of expertise within the field of librarianship. (para. 2)

Libraries are natural partners for DH projects; much of what DH needs, libraries have and librarians do. According to Vandegrift and Varner (2013) "Libraries and the humanities have always had a great deal in common." (p. 67). So libraries at the outset have had an obvious role in Digital Humanities research (Ramsay, 2010; Sula, 2013). Providing access and increasing wide accessibility have been historic tenets of librarianship, and the shift to digital access as a primary method has only increased librarians' awareness and efforts in this area (Kamada, 2010; Vandegrift, 2012). As the primary maintainers of institutional repositories and digital archives, librarians are concerned with preservation and sustainability of digital initiatives and have experience with the challenges of obsolescence and migration (Cantara, 2006; Cole, 2002; Thomas, 2013; Kretzschmar, Potter, Warwick, and Singer, 2010). Additionally, librarians have honed skills of collection development and curation that allow for broad recall without sacrificing coherence. This is crucial for current researchers as, "information overload is now a hazard of the humanist's job." (Little, 2011, p. 353).

At Marquette University, the Gothic Archive is an online collection of primary resources and contextual materials that is currently a pilot project with hopes of one day becoming a flagship. This digital humanities project began as a simple digital collection and grew significantly in its first year of being, but it now faces the ubiquitous challenges that all digital humanities research projects must conquer or side step in order to persevere. It needs to conquer challenges of funding and technological limitations as well as needs for personnel and technical expertise. At the same time this project offers the ideal mix of opportunities for creating a robust and exciting digital humanities collection that can forward the research and innovation of scholars focused in various areas including, but not limited to, Gothic literature. This progression from digital collection to digital humanities project has included growing pains that are likely familiar to other library - digital humanities partnerships, but the current state of the Archive and its future potential lead all those involved to call it a success.

BACKGROUND: DEVELOPING THE GOTHIC ARCHIVE

The Digital Programs Unit of Raynor Memorial Libraries is just barely out of its fledgling state, having recently been re-named from its more temporary sounding predecessor, Digital Projects. A librarian co-ordinator, Rose Fortier, leads the unit and oversees a staff of 2.5 full-time employees as well as a rotating crop of student workers. The unit's main responsibilities center around e-Publications@Marquette (e-Pubs), the university's institutional repository, established in 2008. The repository serves as a showcase for Marquette's research output. In addition to faculty research and publications, e-Pubs also provides access to graduate student theses and doctoral dissertations. Digital Programs is currently involved in the retrospective digitization of thousands of theses, dissertations, and Master's essays. The unit also provides support for Special Collections and Archives digitization efforts.

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