Challenges in Representing Local Image Collections:
The Case of the Titusville Historical Society

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local history and genealogical collections provide valuable information to the public, when adequate reference services and access to the collection are provided. Arranging such access presents numerous challenges for small historical societies and local public libraries that often lack the staffing, training, and resources available to larger organizations. The evolution of digitized records to represent photographic and other records presents even greater obstacles to the staff of small repositories. The Titusville Historical Society presents a useful case study of the decision-making process utilized in determining what directions are most desirable and feasible for small, local repositories. The organization's makeup, staffing, and resources are overviewed and the digital environment described for similar organizations within its own and five surrounding counties. The Historical Society membership's goals and abilities are utilized in making a final judgment as to the best process for providing access to collections.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Located at the heart of the Oil Region in Pennsylvania, the Titusville Historical Society maintains a small, but important collection of artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts relevant to local history and genealogy. The organization of approximately forty members provides email reference services and physical programming to the public on genealogy, local history, and historic preservation. The membership has contributed volunteers and consultation to regional projects, such as the Ida Tarbell House project (Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry, and Tourism) and grant planning for the Titusville City Hall renovation (City of Titusville, Titusville Redevelopment Authority, Titusville Renaissance), and it plays an important role in recognizing local and regional historic preservation achievements. The society lacks a dedicated space for interaction with the public, but houses an important archival collection for the history of Titusville and the birthplace of the oil industry in the United States.

Though an earlier organization of the same name existed early in the twentieth century, the current incarnation of the Titusville Historical Society emerged in the 1980s with the creation of formal bylaws that dictated a governing structure of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and three-member Board. In addition, a committee structure would be utilized to facilitate the regular work of the Society. The Society also obtained 501 (c) (3) status. It has maintained a monthly meeting schedule that intersperses business meetings with a few public programs each year. The Society maintains an active community profile through stories of their planning and activities in the local newspaper and participation in the local Chamber of Commerce. It maintains good working relations with other surrounding organizations, particularly with the Crawford County Historical Society, Drake Well Museum of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and Oil Region Alliance.

The early focus of the Society organizers was on the materials donated by members and others in the community that formed the society's collection. It received a grant to organize and catalog the collection, which was carried out using archival methods for housing, and a single guide to the entire collection, maintained in a Microsoft Word file, was created. Since the completion of initial cataloging in 2005, no further formal processing has been carried out, so a large backlog of unprocessed donations has accumulated. The Society receives regular unsolicited donations from the community and, occasionally, items de-acquisitioned from the Drake Well Museum, which are more pertinent to local Titusville history than oil history. Besides the problem of backlog, some artifacts, such as the items from a silversmithing collection, were not documented in depth in the original cataloging records. Since

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