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Champaign County Historical Archives

Jump In 3 / Third Time’s the Charm Essay

**Why Jump?**

Established in 1956, The Champaign County Historical Archives is a department of The Urbana Free Library that maintains a research-level collection on the history and genealogy of Champaign County, Illinois. Housing over 3,000 linear feet of archival records and 177, 400 individual county records it was designated the official repository for non-current Champaign County records in 1987.

I joined the staff of the Champaign County Historical Archives in May 2014. When Jump In 3/Third Time’s the Charm enrollment came around in January 2015 I felt that I was ready for full immersion into our collection and what better way to acclimate than a complete survey of our holdings in search for digital material.

**What I Knew Going In**

The Champaign County Historical Archives is home to the photograph collection of the local community newspaper, *The News-Gazette.* Spanning from 1974-2002, the film negative collection is a vast collection of not only the photographs published in the newspaper, but their complete film library. The newspaper switched to digital photography in 2003 and now the Archives is receiving CDs, DVDs, and hard drives of their images. I knew that this collection would comprise the bulk of our digital holdings, and weighing in at 5.2 TB and comprised of 2 hard drives, 226 DVDs, 185 CDs, and 3-3.5” floppy disks it is the heavy hitter. The extent of other potential media present in the collection was unknown.

**What I Found**

The process of conducting the survey was in itself an enlightening exercise. The survey process began by reviewing the Accession Register, an Excel spreadsheet of all incoming collections from 2005 forward.  The spreadsheet is a bare bones accounting of incoming material, with a brief description of date, donor, description, amount of material, location, and acknowledgement. I then moved on to the Collection Guide, another Excel spreadsheet that includes a keyword and description field. There is no controlled vocabulary for the format of materials so the spreadsheets ultimately had to be scanned line by line to make sure that I was not missing any material.

The most surprising aspect of the survey process was the amount of digital material unaccounted for on two computer drives used by the Archives. The Archives has a general drive and a dedicated media drive and during the survey process I found born digital material and digitized materials that were often not accounted for on either the Accession Register or the Collection Guide. These materials consisted of digital accessions, materials digitized for access and preservation, records digitized as part of grant requirements, and institutional records created by The Urbana Free Library.

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| **Media Type** | **Quantity Found** |
| 3.5” Floppy Disk | 16 |
| CD | 721 |
| DVD | 227 |
| USB Drive | 1 |
| Hard Drive | 2 |
| Born Digital/Digitized Files | 114 GB |

**The Other Side**

The Jump In 3/Third Time’s the Charm project marks the start of a longer-term project to improve preservation and access to digital files accessioned and created by the Archives. Our survey identified that we have 5.689TB of digital information in our collection. 5.2TB of that total is *The News-Gazette* photograph collection. Going forward we will need to develop a plan to address this growing collection specifically.

Another lesson gleaned from this exercise is that digital media should be accurately identified and recorded at ingest. We also need to look into our file management structure to create a more streamlined system and reduce duplication between the two computer drives. There should also be some retroactive clean-up of the accession and collection records to include the digital files discovered during this project. Future work will include these tasks plus a thorough processing of our few collections containing digital media to include extracting files from their physical format and transferring the files to a dedicated server.

While working on the Jump In project I was simultaneously processing the records of The Urbana Free Library, and it became obvious in a way that it had not before that the Archives is also the institutional repository for The Urbana Free Library. Although, we have a substantial record collection for the library we have no system in place for collecting and managing the digital media created by the library. The Archives will be at the forefront of this conversation with library administration and by getting our smaller digital repository in shape we will be well positioned to tackle the larger library wide digital output.