"Picture Perfect: West Virginia History On View" Conducting a Large Digital Archives Project on a Shoestring Through Collaboration in an Academic Library Setting

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Abstract: In 2005, the West Virginia and Regional History Collection began an ambitious project to digitize a core collection of 25,000 historical photographs for both access and preservation purposes. The project includes the creation of high resolution scans and detailed Dublin Core metadata records for each photo presented on the web using DLXS (Digital Library Extension Service) image class software.

While grant funding was initially considered essential for this project, the WVRHC later determined to undertake the project without external resources relying instead upon student workers and collaboration within the WVU Libraries. Scans and initial metadata records are created by students who have found this assignment exceptionally rewarding and educational, some staying with the project for several years. The students' work is initially edited by the WVRHC Photographs Manager and then by a Librarian Cataloger who modifies the records and subject headings as needed. The Library Systems department loads the data into DLXS along reduced size JPEG peg images and provides permanent storage of the high resolution scans. Both the Cataloging and Systems staff have embraced the project, finding their work to be a welcome respite from other duties.

Now in its sixth year, this project has exceeded expectations in every regard. Currently offering approximately 40,000 photographs, the project website, *West Virginia History OnView,* draws more than a half million visitors to the WVRHC website annually, accounting for more than a third of all traffic on the WVU Libraries' website. The project has benefitted the WVRHC in countless ways and has exponentially increased research use of the photographs collection as well as other components of the WVRHC. Copy services and use fees have created a revenue stream that supports not only the continuation of this project but other needs as well. The project has also led to collaborations and donations which have enhanced the WVRHC and WVU Libraries' programs and collections.

About the author:

John A. Cuthbert is Curator and Director of the West Virginia and Regional History Collection and Special Collections at the West Virginia University Libraries. A graduate of Worcester State College (BA), the University of Massachusetts (MA) and West Virginia University (MA and PhD), he has written extensively on assorted topics in West Virginia history and special collections care. His books include *Early Art and Artists in West Virginia* (West Virginia University Press, 2000) which won him accolades including the West Virginia Humanities Council's Charles H. Daugherty Award (2001) and the West Virginia Library Association's 2002 Literary Merit Award. He is a member of the West Virginia University Benedum Distinguished Scholars.