William Jordan Patty

Manuscripts and Archives Librarian

George Mason University Libraries

SAA Manuscripts Section Jump In Too/Two Essay

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I am pleased to submit this essay and accompanying documents to the SAA Manuscript Section. We didn’t participate last year due to many collections being moved around in preparation for some minor construction in the department. A new wing is being added to Fenwick Library on the Fairfax Campus of George Mason University and some adjustments needed to be made to the existing building, which includes Special Collections & Archives (SC&A). Another reason was that SC&A received a grant from the NEH to hire a consultant to conduct a preservation assessment. So it seemed to make sense to wait and integrate this Jump In survey into the other recommendations in the preservation assessment report.

For accessioning and description of digital content on electronic media, the staff in SC&A writes descriptive statements about the media, such as 10 CDs containing board minutes or 5 Zip discs containing annual reports. We rarely itemized the electronic media and write down specific features and requirements of the media. However, most of the electronic media is housed together in either the same container or the same series.

For this project, we decided to focus only on manuscript collections because more of those collections have detailed finding aids than the university archives and would provide a template for doing this same thing with the university archives in the future as a second part to this project. Staff in SC&A work on many other projects, so this survey of only the manuscript collections was done because of time constraints.

Jordan Patty, the manuscripts and archives librarian, conducted the collection-level search of the manuscript collections and compiled a list of those finding aids and preliminary inventories with electronic media. He then handed off the list to Bianca Rawlings, a student worker, and she actually went through the boxes and filled in the spreadsheets. Greta Suiter, the processing coordinator, also worked on one of the collections. After the survey was complete, Jordan Patty compiled the information for the report.

Finding aids are created in EAD then converted to HTML for online access. A Google Custom Search provides keyword searching across all of the finding aids. Using the keyword search, Jordan Patty looked for the variations of electronic media terms: “CDs” “CD” “Compact disc” “DVD” “DVDs” “Digital Versatile Disc” “Floppy Disc” “CD-ROM” “3.5 inch” “5.25,” and “disk.” This Searching helped reveal inconsistent spelling, such as “disc” and “disk,” and shows the need to standardize our use of those words to describe electronic media.

The most numerous formats in the survey are CDs and DVDs. There are over 200 DVDs and about 100 CDs, although the DVDs appear to be mostly duplicates created for analog videotapes by SC&A staff. The 5.25 inch floppy disks are also found in a lot of the collections, about 150. When added together, there is 2,091 GB of estimated maximum storage.

The university records were not part of this survey, so that still needs to be completed. There is probably still electronic media that was not surveyed because it is interfiled with paper records, but that material can be added to the list as it is located. This project would also help with possible collaborations with the possibility of a shared resource for reformatting to be purchased by WRLC. The inventory would help with priorities and also tracking the materials as they are sent offsite and returned.