Jump In Too/Two: The Casa Tabor Collection at New Mexico State University

## Caitlin Wells, Archivist for the Rio Grande Historical Collections, New Mexico State University

I signed on for the Society of American Archivists’ “Jump In Too/Two” initiative as a way to begin assessing the digital holdings of the Rio Grande Historical Collections at New Mexico State University. While my colleagues in the Archives and Special Collections department as well as in the library at large are familiar with electronic records and aware that we need to take action with our current holdings, we have yet to start actively working on digital preservation policies or procedures. I saw this initiative as an opportunity to start addressing our increasing collection of electronic records.

I originally intended to survey one specific large collection that included hard drives, CDs, and flash drives, but soon after committing to the project, the RGHC received an addition to a processed collection that struck my interest in both its form and the way in which it was acquired. The Casa Tabor records document the human rights work of Father Peter Hinde and Sister Betty Campbell at the Tabor House Community, located in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The electronic records for this collection were acquired in August 2012 from Father Hinde by the Latin American studies liaison librarian at NMSU, and kept by her until February 2014 due to the lack of an RGHC archivist at the time. I decided to survey this collection both because it had high donor interest—Father Hinde would like the documents in the collection to be available for public use as soon as possible—and because of the challenges it poses for our digital preservation procedures.

The Casa Tabor digital files consisted of one folder of material ripped from a burned CD and downloaded onto the shared archives LAN. In order to survey the records, I made a copy of the folder and saved that in a separate location so as not to accidentally alter the content while opening folders or files. I went through each folder and wrote down the format types, document types, and noted what information was already present in the paper portion of the collection and which electronic files were unique. Because of the small size of the collection and lack of an analog medium, the survey took only a few hours.

The contents of the collection point to the original CD being a “data dump” of the contents of the Casa Tabor computer, with programs and installation files included along with Microsoft documents. A majority of the pertinent files are in early-2000s Microsoft Word, Excel, and Access formats that are still accessible to current technology. The content of these files is mostly unique and highly relevant to the collection, the largest portion being digital copies of Casa Tabor’s newsletters that are not available in paper form. The digital collection also includes personal letters, sermons, administrative files, and other information documenting the work of Casa Tabor and its leaders’ interactions with activists across Latin America. Almost all the files are from 2000-2010, and there are 2010 files in all (including the installation and program files from the hard drive) taking up 390 MB of memory.

One of the main challenges of this collection—and the main reason I chose it—was the way in which it was acquired and accessioned. The librarian copied the files from the CD on which they were received to her computer hard drive and then made several more copies. One of these copies remained on a flash drive, which the librarian delivered to the archives by copying the files from flash drive to computer hard drive about 1.5 years after receiving the files. This highlighted the need for set procedures to ensure that digital materials are ingested and preserved in a uniform manner across the library. While it is expected that we will acquire digital materials on physical media through our usual accessioning procedures, this case brought to my attention that we need to institute a standard procedure for digital accessions that come to us separated from their physical carriers. The collection also raises questions of how to best serve these files to our patrons. At the moment, we do not have scanned archival collections online apart from our photograph collections, so we are not entirely sure about the best way to house these files internally and present them publically.

One of the great advantages of this project was that it allowed us to get more information about the Casa Tabor digital files and highlighted the need for us to institute a digital collections acquisition policy for archives and special collections. NMSU is currently drafting plans to digitize the analog Casa Tabor collection and make it available online, which will also give us the opportunity to address how best to share the digital files in the collection. There are also plans to put together a task force in the near future to address digital preservation needs and procedures. My work with this collection emphasized our need to move forward with our digital collections and preservation initiatives, and I am looking forward to applying this same exercise to our other electronic collections.