Impact of crowdsourced transcriptions from the Library of Congress

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Dual goals: Collection enhancement & user engagement

Collection enhancement

• Discovery
  Enabling page-level keyword search

• Accessibility
  Easier to read for all people, as well as accessibility technologies

• Datafication
  Opening computational research

User engagement

Close reading, primary source analysis, & forging personal connections to history & the Library
Volunteers transcribe and review at crowd.loc.gov

Ashes of Roses
Dust of the dead -
ashes of blue & gray.
- ashes of battle-pits.
solemn & strange cement —
not a [field] crop grows hence in the field, of north or south
= [Not] Nor moisture of the river, nor falling rain
We publish completed transcriptions on loc.gov
And package as datasets

www.loc.gov/collections/selected-datasets/?fa=contributor:by+the+people+%28program%29
Why

What

How

- Valuing volunteers
- Library mission
- Iterative improvement

- Discoverability
- Accessibility
- Engagement

- Accessibility evaluation
- Web analytics
- Volunteer survey
- Reference data
- Researcher interviews
Researcher impact: Accessibility

Sept. 2022 screen reader assessment by LC Accessibility Team

“In general the content are accessible but would benefit from some changes to improve the experience of screen reader users.”

Result: Ticketed improvements that will impact loc.gov experience for all online text
Researcher impact: Discoverability

Clara Barton Papers
- 2x the visits and views on pages with transcriptions

Branch Rickey Papers
- 37% of successful search terms in transcriptions alone

Carrie Chapman Catt Papers
- 44% of successful search terms in transcriptions alone

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Researcher impact: Story-telling from data
Volunteer impact

Volunteers said they gained:

- A sense of purpose, satisfaction or accomplishment
- New knowledge of history
- New skill or ability
- A greater sense of well-being
- An enjoyable & relaxing hobby

Volunteer-identified motivations:
Volunteer impact: Collection connection
Volunteer impact: Community

New YSU club transcribes nearly 7,000 historical documents...and counting

MAY 28, 2021

Julie Centofanti faced a bit of a dilemma.

As a freshman member of Youngstown State University’s Honors College, the Biology major was required to complete at least 60 hours of voluntary service, a task made even more daunting in the midst of a pandemic that nearly overnight switched the world into isolation mode.

So, she did what anyone her age would do: Googled.


“I know I’m a Biology major, but I love learning about the past,” said Centofanti, a graduate of South Range High School. “I found the historical aspect of these documents so interesting, and eventually I couldn’t stop typing and reading.”

So Centofanti recruited fellow students and organized the YSU Transcribing Club, which over the course of the past academic year logged more than 800 hours of work and transcribed nearly 7,000 historical documents, from letters to Teddy Roosevelt to notes of early 20th-century astronomy experiments.

This letter to Thomas Salmon in January 1903 is one of the nearly 100 observers that the club members have transcribed. It was sent from the Mount Wilson Observatory in Pasadena, Calif., to the University of Chicago, and was written to describe work the team is doing to compile the building’s early data.

Signed,

Edward Hubble

[Image of a handwritten letter]
Try it out at crowd.loc.gov

Learn more
blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/category/by-the-people-transcription-program/

And please keep in touch!

Email
lalg@loc.gov
crowd@loc.gov

Twitter
@Crowd_LOC

Newsletter
https://go.usa.gov/xsyzc

Github
github.com/LibraryOfCongress/concordia