

I was hired as the first professional archivist by the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Dubuque, Iowa in October 2012. Shortly after I began working, I saw the first notice about the Jump-in Initiative and was immediately interested. As I familiarized myself with the collection after being hired, I found numerous 3.5 inch floppies, CDs and DVDs and even the occasional flash drive; I was pleasantly surprised to not see any 5 ¼ floppies. All of these various formats been put in drawers, cabinets, or occasionally a box, and forgotten about. I felt the Jump-in project provided the perfect opportunity to investigate these materials and possibly even determine a plan to preserve them. We currently do not have any archival materials stored on the server, so that was one thing I did not have to worry about – at least for now. The current method for dealing with electronic records is either to store them on removable media or print them out and bring the print-outs down to archives.

For the inventory sheet, I modified the Sample Inventory Template provided on the Jump-in webpage. I modified the meaning of “location” to mean where the item was physically located; if it was unaccessioned, then the location was “unaccessioned.” I created a “Series/Collection/Folder etc.” column to denote where the media would be located when formally accessioned. I tried to leave this very broad due to my still relative unfamiliarity with the collection. I broke down the “Media Type,” “Label Info” and “Media Markings” provided in the template to “Media Type,” “Maximum Capacity” (for ease of later calculations), “Label Markings” (for what brand, etc. the media was) and “Label Info” (what documents/information was saved on that media.) I also added a “Notes” column for any information I felt necessary to add – usually that there was more than one copy. Finally, I also added a “Preservation Priority” column, to identify media that I felt needed to be at the top of the list for future action.

I started by first putting most of the materials in one location for ease of access. This also provided me a space to return the items when I was done with them. The only exception was the few discs and flash drives that had been accessioned as part of a collection. I inventoried those first and left them with the collection.

I then turned my attention to the myriad floppies and discs that remained. I found one of the most vexing issues was trying to determine if the disc was a CD or DVD. In many cases, the label did not identify the media type and the label itself often obscured any markings on the disc. When in doubt (which was quite often!) I used the DVD notation. By the time I was finished cataloging, I had identified over 210 floppies, CDs and DVDs.

My next step was to attempt to prioritize some of the material for preservation, beginning with the floppies. I was fortunate that I only had thirty-five 3.5 inch floppies. I am fortunate in that the disc labels appear to be correct as to the content. My IT department provided me with an external disc drive so I could find out what was actually on those floppies. Twenty-three floppies were discarded, chiefly because the files were corrupted and could not be opened. I also discarded floppies that contained files found elsewhere. I discovered some files that were created with a word-processing program that we did not have. After consulting with IT, I elected to discard these discs due to the age of file and the difficulty of locating the appropriate software; it was simply not cost-effective to continue working with these few discs. In cases where I could not identify the file type, I kept the discs but noted the problem,

in the hopes that my next consultation with IT will provide possible ways of opening the file. I ended up keeping a total of twelve discs, ten of which are accessible. For preservation purposes, I will be printing out the files, as well as uploading the files to the server.

I then turned my attention to the CDs and DVDs. I first went through and identified what I thought the preservation priorities should be. I then sent the list to the Archives Advisory Committee for discussion at our meeting in the middle of April as I felt the members of the Committee would have a better idea of what was historically significant given their knowledge of the Congregational history. With their input, I developed a "final" list of CDs and DVDs to be preserved. At this point in time, preservation will consist of maintaining the CDs and DVDs, uploading the content to the archives drive on the server and copying the content to two external hard drives, one kept on-site and the other given to a Sister currently living in Chicago. The only exceptions are the DVDs of the wake and funeral services for a Sister. Those have been placed in her personal file and most likely will not be a preservation priority as the "unique" parts of each service have been transcribed and placed in the file.

I feel this has been a beneficial exercise. I now know what formats of electronic media I have in the archive. I also now know that I may have as much as 615 GB of data. The Jump-in Initiative allowed me to bring the issue of electronics records to the attention of the administration and begin a discussion on how this media should come to the archives and be preserved.