

Interviewee: Watson, Adam
Interviewer: Valerie Emhof
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Emhof: Can you tell me about your position at the State Archives? What are your responsibilities, and what are your daily duties?

Watson: My title is photographic archivist; my responsibilities are for managing the photographic collection and also accessioning new collections, bringing in new collections; and providing copies of images and documents digitally or photographic prints to patrons. Anything else you want to know? ... I mean, that's the one thing I do here. There is also Florida Memory.

Emhof: Can you tell me about Florida Memory?

Watson: I am also on the Florida Memory Committee, which involves digitization of various material within the Archives, and producing CDs - the Florida Folk Life CDs that we produce for those -, and dealing with and consulting about what goes on the website in terms of education material and other things that are digitized at the State Archives.

Emhof: Were you hired directly for the Photographic Collection?

Watson: Yeah. I mean, I started out cataloguing photographs initially, and then I was an archivist, a reference archivist, and then I worked in arrangement-description as an archivist. And then worked in records management, in consulting and doing presentations on archives and records management. And then finally just as photograph archivist.

Emhof: Did you start early having to take care of digitization of photographs? When did the digitization project start?

Watson: When did it start for the photographic collection? It began actually way before me, in the mid nineties, that they started digitizing the photographs and putting them up on the website.

Emhof: Now, what is your involvement in regards to the digitization of the collections?

Watson: First of all, getting the collections and identifying collections to be digitized. That would be number one. And then bringing in new collections. As far as digitizing for the website, mine is just – how should I describe it... [pause] ... really it is deciding what should go up. Once we decide that, then my role is just making sure everything is correct on the website. We have cataloguers that do the actual cataloguing. We have people that do the scanning. So once we

decide what is going to go up there, I am only telling them what needs to go into the description, and then they do all that and do the actual cataloguing. Which I did at one time, but don't do anymore.

Emhof: Now, you said the first step was to decide which collections are going to be digitized. How do you decide that?

Watson: We base it on what we think is most historically significant and what will get the most use. Everything that we have - every photograph or image that we have in the archives - is not necessarily going to be on the Florida Memory website or on the photographic collection website. But if we think there is a lot of interest in it historically, then we make the decision that it should go on the website. For instance, we have photographers, like the Slate collection, where he did a lot of commercial photography for around Tallahassee. All of that has some historical value because it has pictures of businesses, pictures of the city, pictures of Leon county. And all that pretty much goes on the website. But he also did portraits; so every portrait that he did that are unidentified - some are identified. But we have other photographers that were portrait artists, we do not know who they were; so that would not go on. And there would not be that much interest in individual portrait. If it is a person that has historical significance, like a Supreme Court judge, or something like that, then we might put it up, if we are able to recognize it in a collection.

Emhof: So the digitization is more based on what will be of interest to the public, and less on preservation issues? Do you have photographs that are in danger? Do you take preservation into consideration?

Watson: That is a consideration. If they, first of all, have historical significance. If it is just something we are not interested in but we are not looking at individual images necessarily, but more at collections that we get in. If we feel that a collection is in danger of deteriorating, then we would preserve it. Regardless ... we would do the entire collection, and there may be things in there that are on the website, and some things that are not. We would look at that first, I guess, if there is something in there that we are interested in. More than likely, we would not have it here if there was not some interest in it. So we would not have taken it in the first place. Or if a photographer comes in and it is not Florida related, we will not accept it. So, if it looks like it is going to break down or reticulate, then we would scan. Most of that stuff has already been digitized. If we smell the vinegar in the back [laughs], then we... we have done it already, but we need to go back and possibly make another copy in negative or something.

Emhof: What kind of issues can you encounter with photographs? You said something about vinegar?

Watson: Because photographs are different than say paper, there are more chemicals involved in the production of them, and therefore more chances of something breaking down within those chemical. So you have some sort of base, which could be metal, iron, copper, or tin,

or polyester or acetate. So, all those different bases have different level ... you know, some are going to rust, or some of them are going to break down if they have not been stored in good conditions. And on top of that, you have some sort of emulsion, so you have various chemicals that went into that depending on the time period. And then those can break down in different ways. So there is salt, and there is all kind of.... like the emulsion has eggs or things like that. And a lot of them are just unstable. So, those are some of the problems.

Emhof: Now, in regard to the process of digitization, can you tell me how you process an order?

Watson: When we get an order, well, in terms of getting stuff out to patrons, mostly we are dealing with publishers and film makers - tv, films - University of Florida Press, textbooks, that sort of things. And most of them have now a standard that they want which is 300dpi at least. And that seems to get higher and higher, so it has change over time. So we scan them at 300dpi, and then usually put them on a CO, although we are more and more uploading that to a FTP site. So that is how we are getting stuffs out to patrons and to researchers. Most of the researchers, if they want an image, they usually want to publish it. It used to that people would come in and just research and look at the photograph and get the information they wanted from it and write it down and say... they look at an architecture and say it is what it looks like, or whatever. They would not necessarily need a picture. But now everyone wants the actual image. Or sometimes they even want to digitize the document. Just to show that they saw the original, and here it is, and here is a picture of it.

Emhof: So, you said that this was for patrons' orders. Do you have other kinds of requests?

Watson: [Ponders on it for a few seconds] Well, I mean, when I say patrons, I mean everybody: researchers, publishers, anyone that wants some copies; there are commercial uses of our images; some galleries take the digitized images and make a larger print, and clean it up and make something more beautiful, something someone wants to buy, and then they sell them for more than we charge [laughs]. And then you have just researchers doing stuffs for historical purposes.

Emhof: How do you handle copyright? What is the policy?

Watson: The policy for us, in terms of use of images or documents in the collection... the only thing they need to do is credit us; credit us using "State Archives of Florida." When we bring in a collection or accession something, the donor or the loaner signs a deed of gift, or if it is from the state it is a transfer from that state agency to the archives. And that deed of gift says essentially that as far as the donor or loaner knows, there is not copyright issue, and nobody else owns the rights to that image, or to this document. So, that's what we have. But you know, since photographs are not always ... if you have a written document, it is going to be an original more or less, and you would know whether it is the original or a copy. Whereas photographs, it could

be a copy of a photograph. So there is a potential that someone could say that I actually own the right to that photograph' and that person signed off on it, but did not necessarily own the rights on it. So the way we deal with that is that we have a disclaimer saying that if that situation would arise, it would be up to the user to resolve that between them and the copyright-holder.

Emhof: When you digitize, and save on a CD or upload it, do you also keep a copy on a server?

Watson: Initially, when we get the collections, we are backing them up. They are backed upon a server, and they are backed-up on DVDs. They have been. Now, we have moved on to backing them up just recently onto those Raids, and not using DVDs. So before that we were just backing them up on CDs, but they were also held on our hard /drives. And then we also have the website where the images are in lower-resolution, but essentially they are there too.

Emhof: So do you, each time, get a user copy and a master copy?

Watson: The user copy would be what is on the website. The master would be what is on the server or on a DVD.

Emhof: And what are the standards for both?

Watson: For... gosh, I would have to go back and look at the standards [laughs] ... I do have those written down if you want me to get you a copy. Because, mostly, what we are dealing with here ... but I do have that stuff written down. I know essentially what...like, if you look at one of those images [points at a picture], it is 3200 pixels per inch, but that could be a very tiny image. So, when we get something in, say when someone brings a digital image, that is born digital, we would not take anything unless it is a least 300 dpi, and at least 5x7. That is kind of our standard, but there are more technical stuffs that I can get you. But we like to get it... I think... I was just looking at some 8x10 and 450, somewhere around that; between 6x3 and 600, and 8x10.

Emhof: So, I know there is your team working on photographs, and another team upstairs. What are the differences between the two, how is it coordinated?

Watson: As I said before, there are cataloguers and scanners, and that is what they do. So when we get the collection in, we identify what it is, give them the basic information about the information, and then the images are scanned and the cataloguers go back in and add the information that is uploaded to the website, using Library of Congress headings, essentially.

Emhof: So, they do the general digitization, and you focus more on patrons' orders?

Watson: I focus more on patron orders and bringing in new collections; so collection management and accessioning the collections. I would say that the patron orders take up about

80% of my work even though ... [shows a big pile behind him] ... have all this stuff here; this is all things that need to be worked on, as far as bringing collections in. And this always takes the back burner to people actually using the collection. [laughs][phone rings]

Emhof: Your collection also includes some video that you have transferred, correct?

Watson: Yes, we do have videos that were transferred from film footage to Beta and three-quarter inch master tapes. And now we are in the process - as you know - to hopefully [laughs] digitize them.

Emhof: Now, what are your relations with the IT department? Do you have regular meetings with them to talk about standards, back-ups?

Watson: The IT people here in the building are, I think, generally... we only go to if we have an issue with existing machines or tools that we have. In terms of acquiring new things and keeping up with it, that just comes through, more so I think with the Florida Memory team and lady Norman, and all of us keeping abreast of what is going on in the industry. If something new comes up, like with the RAIDs servers that we found out about that it might be a good way to store material, then we see about acquiring it, and then the IT people help us implement it.

Emhof: About the RAID, is that something the Florida Memory team found out about and then went to the IT Department?

Watson: That happens sometimes. I think that it is back and forth. Now, it is true that they might know something more about the computers and storage, and might suggest something as well. But as far as having regular meetings with them, no. It is generally hit or miss. What are our needs; whenever we start running out of server space, which happened recently, then we get new suggestions. We all start talking about what we should do about it.

Emhof: Did you say you were running out of server space recently?

Watson: Yes [laughs]. Recently, Florida Memory did.

Emhof: And I am guessing that it is how the RAID system came up?

Watson: No... Well, actually, that is part of it. The RAID system right now is just backup, and access to the digitized images for us to implement. But we are talking about purchasing more server space, like real server space. But I do not know what the status of that is ... [laughs] This is not going to be published, right? [laughter]

Emhof: Now, my last question is more about your personal opinion. What do you think about the future of the digital format in the Archives? Is it a good think? Are people rushing too much? Will everything end up being digital and accessible online?

Watson: I think it is a good thing. I think it is a great thing in terms of access, providing access to people that cannot make it to the archives. And then, of course, it does help with preservation issues, so that the materials are not handled so much. That certainly has been the case here, where in this room I have a whole collection of 8x10 prints that all have been digitized. So there are still patrons that come in and want to look at those, but everything that we have is online, so they can look at it at home if they are able to use a computer. So there is nothing really... well, there are images that are not digitized, but I would say the most important things we have are already online and can be accessed anywhere in the world where there are computers.

Emhof: Do you see any downside to the digital?

Watson: [ponders on this for a few seconds] I guess it is a double edge sword. The one downside is the belief that it is a true preservation tool, because you cannot necessarily... because we don't know exactly how long a DVD or a CD is going to last as a preservation tool. And I think there is a misconception with the public thinking that their materials also can be preserved on CD or DVD, when actually they may break down, depending on how well they have been manufactured, there can be problems with them. So, that hurts us in the long run, because those materials, if they are not preserved by the public, then we are not going to get them in the future. So that would be the one downside. Also, I think people believe everything is already digitized, and that everything is already out there for them, but it is not necessarily true. I don't think the public realizes how intense the work of doing that is. As I said, we have three cataloguers and two scanners just to do everything that we do, and they can barely keep up with all that we have. And that is not just stuff that we are getting in continuously, but things that are backed up. But, I still think that overall it is a positive thing. I was just looking at the European website, where they ... did you see that? The huge library and archives? That is a pretty amazing thing to make that accessible, these treasures.

Emhof: So, for you, digital is a good access tool, but not a good preservation tool?

Watson: I think it is a great preservation tool, but I just think that we need to be aware that it is not the ultimate preservation tool, necessarily. There is still the problem of

migration, because the RAID servers may not work and who knows what is going to happen. We might need to move them to different servers, and they are not going to work. We have all kinds of machines piled up in the back, different formats for different types of recording devices, for audio particularly, that are not obsolete. So, there is the danger of that as well. Thinking that we are preserving it, and then that same computer language, or program is not going to be able to be used in the future. And the possibility of losing it; and metadata issues.

Emhof: So, I am guessing digital also needs some preservation work?

Watson: People need to look at that. Of course, there is all kind of ways, all kinds of

people talking, like IAD, and trying to make some kind of uniform. I think that is part of the preservation issue, that you could lose all this metadata that connects to the actual object, it could all be lost if we don't figure it. But it has not been worked out yet.[laughs]

[End of Transcription]