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Chapter 5

A Road Taken: A Cataloging Team Becomes a Metadata Team

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Abstract

This chapter describes the issues confronted along the “road taken” by a technical services team as it transitioned from traditional monographic cataloging to metadata for digital collections. To serve changing user needs, the team shifted focus to providing quality metadata. Along this road, the team confronted and welcomed a number of changes. These included a unit merger, off-site relocation, shedding the cataloging role, learning how to produce metadata, identifying areas for growth with a library-wide Metadata Summit, working with new stakeholders, and managing new staff and faculty. The chapter concludes with the lessons the team has learned and its prospects.

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study which describes the transformation of a traditional format-specific cataloging team into a metadata team at Clemson University Libraries. In response to changing technologies and user needs, the Libraries needed to rethink its organizational structure and team roles. It took Libraries’ administration, faculty, and staff over two years to assess issues,
plan, and implement changes, and required four more years for the transformed teams to adjust to and learn new tasks.

To accomplish the transition from cataloging to digital collections metadata, multiple changes occurred. Two units merged to form the technical services and collection management (TSCM) unit, which was then physically relocated. Teams were reconfigured and cataloging and metadata responsibilities reassigned. Team members received new training, and new intra- and extra-unit collaborations formed. To further strengthen these collaborations and identify areas for improvement, two unit heads planned and held a metadata summit. What emerged was the metadata and monographic resources team (MMRT). The name reflected remnants of a role in cataloging while bringing new metadata responsibilities to the forefront. The resultant metadata team continues to assess and revise workflows and guidelines to ensure it is efficiently meeting user needs.

Background

Clemson University is organized into seven colleges with a strong STEM-based curriculum, and recently received Research 1 status from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The Libraries’ 29 faculty and 57 staff serve around 24,900 students and 1,605 faculty.ii The central library has an average gate count of 9,000 visits a day. The Libraries operates five locations: its central library, the Robert Muldrow Cooper Library; the Education Media Center,iii the Emery A. Gunnin Architecture Library; Special Collections & Archives (SC&A); and a remote storage facility. Prior to 2013, the Libraries was organized into eight units: acquisitions; administrative services; cataloging; interlibrary loan; office of library technology; reference; Gunnin Architecture Library; and Special Collections.

The two units pertinent to this case study were acquisitions and cataloging from which the metadata team emerged. Being separate units, acquisitions and cataloging employees’ offices were
compartmentalized in six areas on Cooper Library’s third floor. Each unit was broken down further into sections. The acquisitions unit had sections for monographs, electronic resources, and serials and bindery. The cataloging unit had a roughly parallel structure with sections for monographs and special formats, database maintenance and authority control, serials and government documents, and electronic resources and metadata. The special projects cataloger, section leader for electronic resources and metadata, had been cataloging archival collection-level records for inclusion in the library catalog. Naturally, he was the first to be assigned digital collections metadata for in-house special collections digital projects. This established a precedent for maintaining metadata for digital projects within the cataloging unit.

Though the Clemson Tigers have been on the athletic field since the 1890s, it can be said that the Libraries entered the “game” of digitization rather late. In 2007, the Libraries hired a digitization librarian who also served as the library technology unit head and it added a digital production librarian two years later. The digitization librarian obtained an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant in 2010 for what would become the Open Parks Network (OPN), a digital repository containing materials from over 20 national and South Carolina parks. However, both librarians resigned thereafter and the successor head of library technology and his staff carried the OPN grant forward. To handle the metadata load for this project, the unit head hired a staff-level metadata specialist who received assistance from student workers.

Between 2008 and 2011, the special projects cataloger led the production of metadata for six digital projects ranging from 85 to 1,664 images. He completed two of these projects, including the frequently viewed Carolina Textile Mills Collection of 366 images, with the help of two direct report assistants. Nevertheless, the time intensive management of electronic resources left little
time for metadata work. Despite these accomplishments, after 2011, the special projects cataloger received no additional metadata assignments.

Users expect to find primary source materials online and increasingly rely on digital resources in their research. To meet these demands, Special Collections needed to digitize more collections to publish online. With more digital collections comes an increased need for improved descriptive metadata. Describing these unique collections would be time intensive. The structure of the Libraries’ units, workflows, and cataloging load did not permit the cataloging unit to address this growing need.

Steps Toward Change

Planning Phase

In 2012, the Libraries commenced an eight-month library-wide planning process called the Future is Now. Formed by the Dean of Libraries, the task force was charged “to align Clemson University Libraries (CUL) strategic priorities with changing technologies and user needs.”\textsuperscript{vii} The task force comprised the Associate Dean as chair\textsuperscript{viii} with five staff and six faculty members who developed recommendations for collections, public/user services, technology/systems, technical services, communication/public relations/marketing, facilities/space, and library administrative activities. Task force members recommended that technical services “evaluate cataloging approaches with emphasis on metadata description, streamlined processing, and embrace ‘acceptable’ copy cataloging.”\textsuperscript{ix} They also noted that “the uniqueness of special collections resources and the increased need for discoverability require continuing efforts to catalog print, process archival work forms, and provide metadata for digitized collections.”\textsuperscript{x}

The task force recommended developing “team approaches where possible to draw upon expertise from both Acquisitions and Cataloging.”\textsuperscript{xi} Consistent with this recommendation, a
technical services consulting team evaluated the two technical services units in spring 2013. The consultants found areas of duplicate processes and multiple handling of materials, and their recommendation confirmed the Dean’s inclination to merge the acquisitions and cataloging units.

Unit Merger

TSCM formed in August 2013. Five teams, each headed by a librarian, were created within TSCM: standards and assessment; collection management; electronic resources; government documents and continuing resources; and metadata and monographic resources. TSCM had 6 faculty and 16 staff. The metadata and monographic resources team members came from the former monographs and special formats section, which followed a traditional format-specific cataloging workflow. The cataloging team that transferred to MMRT consisted of a librarian and two full-time technical assistants. The librarian cataloged special formats and original or complex copy for print monographs. One technical assistant copy-cataloged videodiscs and sound recordings, and the other assistant handled print monographs. No assistant had any metadata experience.

Although the new team had never engaged in any metadata work, the new name honored the importance placed on metadata in the Future is Now report. The naming also reflected the team’s shrinking work with monographs since materials budgets remained flat, and a shelf-ready processing plan with the Libraries’ primary book vendor was already in place. The organizational change created a new team, but physical arrangement did not reflect this change. As with the previous acquisition and cataloging units, the new TSCM unit remained dispersed across the third floor of Cooper Library.

Off-Campus Relocation

In August 2014, Libraries relocated TSCM (all teams but the government documents and continuing resources team) to a facility approximately nine miles from Cooper Library. Dubbed the
Library Depot, the facility already housed the Libraries’ digitization operations and high-density book and university records storage. The move was consistent with the Future is Now recommendation as it also freed up space for students, which is in high demand in many academic libraries. MMRT workspaces were purposefully situated in proximity to the digitization unit with the assumption that the two units would be working closely together.

TSCM members’ initial reaction to the move was mixed (though ample parking at the Library Depot was a real plus). Over time, TSCM faculty and staff grew to appreciate the calm atmosphere conducive to concentration when separated from the bustling Cooper Library. On the other hand, Cooper Library faculty and staff were concerned how the physical separation would affect communication. This is partially overcome with a once-daily courier service that transports mail and library materials. A shuttle also runs hourly between the Depot and campus. Efforts are also made to duplicate development activities at both the Library Depot and Cooper Library, and videoconferencing helps bridge the geographic divide. TSCM faculty and staff at the Library Depot must be intentional about their participation in library-related meetings, or other service and training opportunities that occur on campus.

A New Team Emerges

Initially, metadata projects were few and the team waited in anticipation of new digital collections. It was not yet defined how MMRT fit into previously established metadata workflows. Before relocating to the Library Depot, the team lead was assigned a 282-image trial project for OPN. But it turned out that metadata projects for MMRT would proceed from SC&A rather than OPN. This development was connected to the arrival of a new head of special collections in 2014. In the fall of 2015, the special collections unit delegated the first metadata project to the team. This entailed the Clemson University Historical Images (around 3,000 images described to date). The
team lead and the special formats copy-cataloger worked on the description. Involvement of the copy cataloger was part-time because she still had special formats materials in her workflow. In January 2016, this assistant retired, leaving the project in hiatus.

The team lead then enlisted the remaining assistant in the work, and at the same time a plan was set in motion about the vacant position—to simultaneously upgrade the classification and redefine it as primarily a metadata position, in contrast to the previous copy-cataloger role. The remaining assistant’s classification was upgraded to “library specialist” at about the same time, to achieve parity on the team. By June 2016, the newly hired library specialist was on board, the assistant’s position was upgraded, and the team now had three projects underway. In addition to the Clemson University Historic Images, work began on the Strom Thurmond papers. The Abe Davidson Collection (1,070 images) was added soon afterward.

**Getting on the Same Page**

When the first digital project began, the head of SC&A called a monthly meeting, which included the MMRT team lead, the head of digital scholarship, and the metadata manager (both from library technology’s digital projects division). These meetings convened to track progress on various digitization projects, and encompassed materials managed in the institutional repository as well as the digital objects described by MMRT. These meetings did not usually discuss the fine points of metadata for MMRT projects, but they were helpful from a broader standpoint. These meetings lasted until February 2017.

Early on, metadata generation and management for SC&A materials occurred within Excel spreadsheets. This technique caused issues when multiple users needed to edit the same record. The library technology unit had already adopted CollectiveAccess as the metadata management system for OPN collections. To allow for co-editing of record sets and conforming all digital projects to the
same system, MMRT began using CollectiveAccess for SC&A collections as well. As an open
source program, the library technology unit, with limited programming resources, was able to
customize CollectiveAccess to fit SC&A metadata needs.

With the Clemson historical images project reaching about 1,200 records completed, and the
two other projects starting to progress, SC&A expressed concern about the standards and best
practices being followed. MMRT had proceeded with the understanding of standards as were
structured by CollectiveAccess and guided by cataloging and authority work experience. OPN
metadata guidelines, written for a broad range of cultural institutions, were found to lack
recommendations for situations MMRT encountered. For example, from the team lead’s
perspective, the practice of transcribing annotations uncritically from the back of photographs with
little or no research was incompatible with robust metadata. This led the team lead to perceive that
SC&A and MMRT lacked a shared understanding of the intended audience and depth of metadata
for the projects. Were the projects extended finding aids, for local reference, or were they digital
exhibits? MMRT and TSCM took the broader view, considering digital projects intended for a
broader audience. SC&A sought to reduce the amount of time and research MMRT conducted.

Discussions between the team lead and SC&A led to an agreement that writing an
application profile and best practices would be a step toward shared common expectations. The
team lead also felt that documentation would objectify metadata discussions so that conversations
would rise above specific digital objects or the performance of a particular library specialist. The
application profile was drafted by the team lead, reviewed by the specialists, and transmitted to the
head of special collections and the digital projects manager in March 2017. The team lead adapted
the SCDL (South Carolina Digital Library) Metadata Schema & Guidelines, version 2016 used by
OPN. The application profile and best practices are available.\textsuperscript{xiii}
One might argue that such a document should be developed before completing a single metadata record. In this case, practical experience with metadata problems informed the application profile and best practices. In addition to an analysis of twenty-six metadata elements with definitions and input standards, the MMRT document endeavored to guide the user in the decision making process. It also provided examples of values to apply for both images and documents. After the completion of the application profile, digitization meetings were not held between March 2017 and May 2018. Not holding consistent meetings was detrimental to communication and collaboration between MMRT, SC&A, and library technology’s digital projects division.

**Transitioning Team Responsibilities**

**Cataloging**

By early 2017, with three metadata projects underway, it became evident that work on monographs copy cataloging drew valuable time away from metadata work. This was particularly true for the one MMRT library specialist still conducting monographs copy cataloging, as well as working approximately one day a week assisting with government documents at Cooper Library. Acting on the encouragement of the TSCM unit head, the MMRT team lead explored shifting the print monograph copy cataloging to the collection management team, which retained some of the functions of the former acquisitions unit, but also performed collection analysis, collection relocations, and management of gifts. This shift in workload proved effective because the collection management team enjoyed the advantage of recently hired specialists keen to learn new processes. While the collection management team already copy cataloged while using Library of Congress/Program for Cooperative Cataloging (LC/PCC) bibliographic copy, the two specialists needed a cycle of training to take up OCLC member created copy for print materials. To support
this transition, the MMRT team lead continued to review copy cataloging work and provide ongoing instruction on a case-by-case basis.

The next stage was to identify special formats materials that specialists could also copy catalog. Audiobooks on compact disc were targeted since they are expressions of the print resource. Videodiscs were also a candidate, but there were reservations about records without LC call numbers, which the Libraries requires for special formats. From a sample of 923 cataloged videodisc titles, the team lead found that twenty percent were documentary (nonfiction) titles that included an LC call number. The remaining eighty percent were dramatic films and television programs that might have contained LC call numbers in the original record. It was later decided to include these genre into the new videodisc cataloging workflow. Two specialists outside of MMRT trained to catalog these special formats.

At the end of this transition, MMRT specialists no longer cataloged print monographs and work with government documents discontinued. Reflecting this change in responsibilities, their performance goals no longer included cataloging, other than other duties as assigned. A shift in mentality occurred at this time as well. MMRT staff began to refer to themselves as metadata specialists rather than library specialists. The team lead’s cataloging role with audiobooks and videodiscs was noticeably reduced. As part of the agreement with the collection management team, the team lead continues to train on and review print materials and supports cataloging high-priority items.

*Metadata Training Gaps*

Cataloging responsibilities may have shifted to another team, but the background and experience of MMRT members was still cataloging-centric. The team lead had twenty-two years of cataloging experience with ten years concentration in special formats, seven years of Name
Authority Cooperative experience, and three years with Resource Description and Access. The incumbent MMRT specialist had about twenty years of copy cataloging experience. The new specialist arrived with skills more aligned to metadata work. She held a bachelor’s degree and a certificate in library and information science technology and had served an internship with an archive. The team lead’s metadata training was about a decade old. He had attended two metadata workshops presented under the auspices of the California Digital Library, and after joining Clemson, completed a two-day course, “Metadata Standards and Applications” (in the Cataloging for the 21st Century series) in 2006. Upon taking over metadata responsibilities, MMRT members needed updated metadata training.

**Metadata Summit**

Metadata at Clemson had been in existence for about a decade. During that time, problems were encountered, in part due to the number of units with shared metadata responsibilities. This formed the basis for holding a Metadata Summit. The Summit, convened by the TSCM unit head and the library technology unit head, and conducted with an external facilitator, included fifteen members drawn from the information & research services unit, the library technology unit, SC&A, and TSCM. From TSCM, the unit head and all members of MMRT attended, as well as librarians from two other teams (standards and assessment, and government documents and continuing resources). The purpose for the three hour Summit was: “To bring together the different teams across the Libraries that contribute to or produce metadata and foster an open discussion about current practices, challenges, and communication channels. To discuss strategies for facing those challenges and creating new opportunities.”

The Summit schedule included an overview of purpose and agenda, introductions, and ground rules. The first session was a summary of ongoing metadata projects and a metadata
exercise. All participants received a brief metadata input form and an image, which they had not seen beforehand. The idea was to provide all participants with the experience of confronting an unfamiliar image with no previous coaching or standards. The intention of the exercise was to stimulate insight into the complexity of the activity from the metadata creator’s standpoint.

The fifteen participants were presorted into three groups of five, and in the first of two breakout sessions, each group considered a different metadata scenario. In the first session, each group concentrated on identifying the challenges involved with its assigned scenario. The second session focused on finding solutions to the challenges pinpointed in the first session. In both sessions, groups reported to all participants, so the insights of each group could be appreciated. A wrap-up discussion concluded the Summit.

A post Summit summary noted several problems that surfaced during the discussions. Some of these problems reflected MMRT’s previous concerns:

- Current staffing levels were not adequate for the increasing metadata needs
- Metadata operations needed a source of leadership
- Communication between metadata providers and practitioners had not been effective

The summary also suggested actions to address these problems included:

- Improve communication within and across teams and units
- Provide access to better and more in-depth training
- Target metadata and technology professionals for future hires
- Bring in a consultant to identify areas of need and provide solutions
- Charter a metadata steering committee and working group
MMRT had great interest in the formation of the steering committee and the separate metadata practitioners working group. The steering committee was envisioned to “guide the development of standard procedures and to break down the communication and workflow silos between different metadata groups and providers. The committee would designate project-specific working groups to provide critical direction to new projects and to review practices of past and current projects … The membership would include Libraries leadership, metadata practitioners, and metadata providers.” The metadata practitioners working group would include those who created metadata, and it would “provide a forum for open communication about standards, workflows, procedures, and training opportunities.” xv

**Post Summit Outcomes**

The Metadata Summit led the MMRT team lead to expect changes in project management. All projects, proposed and active, should each have cross unit working groups that clearly define expectations for metadata, workflow, and time to completion. A common understanding of the metadata cultures in each unit and clear collection management priorities would enhance the Libraries’ common purpose in digital projects. However, some of MMRT’s expectations were not immediately fulfilled. One hope was to form the steering committee and the metadata practitioners working group. The steering committee proposal never moved past the library leadership team’s approval stage. The practitioners working group, comprising MMRT and the OPN specialist, submitted a proposal for its charge to the leadership team, but was also not acted on. This was likely due to turnover in the Dean of Libraries position.

Despite setbacks, TSCM fulfilled several Summit recommendations. All three MMRT members received basic metadata training. They completed the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services web course, Fundamentals of Metadata. The recommendation, “target
metadata and technology professionals for future hires” became the springboard for a search for the Libraries’ first metadata librarian. To fulfill this, TSCM’s unit head applied for and received permission to reclassify a vacant staff position to a faculty position. In late 2017 and January 2018, the unit head and the team lead drafted a position posting. Interviews took place in May 2018. The all-day interview schedule included the customary general faculty and unit interviews based on a battery of prepared questions. However, MMRT, upon a suggestion from one of the specialists, decided to gauge how candidates thought about metadata problems. They devised a divergent approach inspired by the Summit experience. Each candidate was presented with an image from the Clemson University Historic Images collection and asked to “think out loud” about what metadata elements would be required, and when the associated metadata was provided, to comment on the quality and possible improvements needed.

The new metadata librarian for digital collections was appointed effective August 2018. She is responsible for creating, enriching, and maintaining metadata for SC&A digital resources to support their discovery and accessibility. To accomplish this, she works collaboratively with MMRT, the library technology unit, and SC&A to develop and implement metadata standards, policies, and workflows. She quality controls and remediates current and legacy metadata and helps MMRT maintain awareness of current trends with metadata standards and digital library development.

On the initiative of the digital projects manager, meetings resumed between MMRT, SC&A, and the digital group in May 2018. Three groups now meet once a month. The digital projects collaboration group includes the unit head of SC&A, the digital projects manager, and the MMRT librarians. The Clemson University Historical Images working group includes the same members, plus the SC&A staff member responsible for processing the photographs, and the library specialists.
The Thurmond Papers working group includes the unit head of SC&A, the digital projects manager, the archivist for political collections, and the MMRT team. Meetings alternate between the Library Depot and the Special Collections facility. The team lead did not initially expect the specialists to attend the campus meetings, but both specialists are motivated and attend whenever possible. Minutes taken at the meetings include action items, which are reviewed at the next meeting. Any revisions to documentation are noted and a process has begun to integrate changes into the existing application profile and best practices.

**Improved Workflows**

MMRT and SC&A needed to better define how complete to make metadata records. With MMRT’s cataloging background and SC&A’s archival background, they had different presuppositions as to how detailed an object should be described. As a result, there was frequent and unreconciled discussion about the proper use of certain metadata elements. For example, what was the description field supposed to contain? Should it include original notes found on the back of photos, added archivist’s notes, as well as notes made by metadata specialists? How would that mix of information be understood by the searcher? It also became evident that there were redundancies in descriptive work between SC&A and MMRT. Previously, MMRT created titles and descriptions. SC&A already created descriptions of the physical items prior to sending the materials to the digitization lab. SC&A and MMRT mutually agreed to test a new workflow in which SC&A provided select metadata fields and MMRT then concentrated on quality control and access points.

A new workflow assigned special collections staff, who were already processing the materials, to enter titles, dates, and descriptions into an Excel spreadsheet which is ingested into CollectiveAccess. This change achieved many benefits: SC&A is curating what collections materials are digitized, which MMRT had difficulty doing; it reduced the number of fields MMRT
needed to complete; it allowed SC&A to define the detail of description; and allowed MMRT to concentrate on enriching the records with controlled access points, including local subject headings. "Better Together"xvi

Changing technologies and user needs prompted Clemson University Libraries to rethink its strategies. The emergence of digital collections at the Libraries meant staff and faculty needed to transition their focus toward providing quality metadata for researchers to discover the University’s unique and invaluable historical resources. Many steps were taken to solve this gap in service, and the newly formed metadata and monographic resources team continues to develop so it may provide the best service possible to the Clemson community.

As we look back on the “road taken” from cataloging team to metadata team, what did we learn? Approaching library transitions as opportunities for new collaborations is key to success. The TSCM unit merger and relocation were important because the two events contributed to the formulation of purpose and identity for MMRT. The transition of cataloging and metadata responsibilities to separate teams provided the resources necessary to build a sustainable metadata program. The formation of a digital projects collaboration working group and sub-groups for each digital project allowed members of different units and teams to work closely together to achieve common goals. This also helped all collaborators bridge the cultural gap that existed between metadata from archival (such as more product, less process), cataloging, and technology viewpoints. In this regard, the addition of the metadata librarian was critical to forming a collaborative future in which the effective staging of new digital projects, the updating of documentation, and the evaluation of metadata can thrive.

The metadata team’s purpose could only be achieved by shedding the cataloging role as much as possible, but they found that letting go of customary activities was not as difficult as
learning new skills. It was easier to transition cataloging responsibilities to another team than learn how to produce metadata in a collaborative environment. This was a steeper climb than expected. The cataloging-is-metadata mantra was a bit misleading in this case. Extensive cataloging skills did not transfer as easily to digital collections metadata work. While skills such as subject analysis and access point selection and creation are the core of both activities, the catalog-turned-metadata team required training to help in the transition. The team will need more than one-time training as it continues to seek new learning opportunities to improve their metadata proficiency and efficiency.

Documenting metadata standards and guidelines provided a successful avenue to define digital project goals and work toward consistent metadata practices. This was a step in the right direction for getting everyone on the same page, but MMRT found that defining standards (such as in the application profile) did not equate to shared understanding and implementation. What is the essential factor for achieving shared goals? It would be trite to say, “better communication,” for in the words of Lee Richardson, “communication is not the totality of collaboration.” Richardson also points out that we cannot assume one department understands the workflows of another department. Collaboration is more than documents, meetings, or working in a shared space. It is the process of discovering mutually developed solutions while traveling the same road together.

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i The title references the famous poem by Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken. The poem is a reflection on choices made in an ambiguous environment. In this context, the authors of this chapter intend to show how decisions, however arrived at, triggered a wave of later decisions and consequences. How we deal positively with those consequences is the important matter, hence, the “road taken.”

ii Student (2018 data) and Faculty (2017 data) totals from Clemson University Interactive Factbook, https://www.clemson.edu/institutional-effectiveness/oir/factbook/.

iii At that time, the Education Media Center was called the Tillman Media Center.

iv For an overview of the formation and collaborations of the Digital Initiatives unit (now part of Library Technology) see Emily Gore and Mandy Mastrovita, “Collaborative-Centered

v https://openparksnetwork.org/.

vi https://digitalcollections.clemson.edu/explore/collections/textile-mills/.


x Transforming, p. 14.


xii The Libraries uses a staff classification with ranks of Library Assistant and Library Specialist. Specialist positions are defined for more complex tasks with a broader range of decision making in contrast to library assistant positions in which only specifications are applied.


xv “Meeting Summary."

xvi The team lead credits Ivey Glendon for this felicitous phrase and her influential explanation of how project groups were formed at University of Virginia library. See: Ivey Glendon, “Better Together: Cataloging and Metadata Librarians, Archivists, and New Understandings for Description and Discovery” (Presentation delivered at Association of Library Collections & Technical Services Cataloging Norms Interest Group, American Library Association Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, June 24, 2017).