Got Metadata in Your Future? Lessons Learned from Describing a Unique Image Collection

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Got Metadata in Your Future?

Lessons Learned from Describing a Unique Image Collection

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Clemson University Libraries

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What is metadata?

“Any data used to aid in the identification, description and location of networked electronic resources” (International Federation of Library Associations)

There are types of metadata-- descriptive, administrative, and structural being a commonly-mentioned triad.

Our discussion focuses on descriptive metadata
Why is metadata important?

Metadata permits one to organize and subsequently search a complex and extensive collection of objects.

It helps people accomplish tasks.

Researchers can find what they are looking for.

Institutions preserve and understand identity and memory.
What we will cover today

The Metadata Team and Clemson’s Historical Images Collection

Virtual Tours of Digital Collections and CollectiveAccess

Strategies for Image Descriptions

Local Heading Controlled Vocabulary

Leveraging Expertise and Documentation

Challenges and Future Directions
Introducing the *Metadata* and Monographic Resources Team

Scott Dutkiewicz, team lead; Cataloger/becoming a metadata librarian

Jessica Serrao, Metadata Librarian for Digital Collections

Charlotte Grubbs, Metadata Specialist

Janice Prater, Metadata Specialist
Introducing the Clemson University Historical Images

AKA “Series 100”

Link to collection:
https://digitalcollections.clemson.edu/explore/collections/ua100/

“spans from 1893-2008 and contains photographs, negatives, slides, postcards, and other media documenting the history and development of Clemson University”

2800 items online. 3400 objects are in the metadata queue.
Virtual tour: Clemson Digital Collections

https://digitalcollections.clemson.edu/
Virtual tour: CollectiveAccess
Strategies

How Clemson describes photographs
Strategies to describe buildings

Ask questions!

**History**
Do you recognize and know the name of the building? When was the photo taken? Has the name changed over time? Where is the building on a map?

Do you know the type and use of the building? Has use changed over time?

**Vocabulary**
Is the structure in the Library of Congress Name Authority File?

Are you using a generic heading across the collection? (LCSH: College buildings)

Is the building listed in Geonames?
Buildings--advanced considerations

Depending on purpose of the collection, additional information may be desired:

**Entities**
- Architect
- Builder/contractor
- Donor

**Dates**
- Groundbreaking
- Construction/renovation/demolition
- Dedication/opening

**Other**
- Architectural style
- Alternate names for building
- If a dwelling, current or former owners/occupants
Clemson House was already in Name Authority File!

Clemson House (Clemson, S.C.)

Type of building = Dormitories--South Carolina (thanks to NAF)

Building is in Geonames!

Working title: Clemson House

BUT this is an aerial view, which is not typical
Metadata for “Clemson House”

Title: Aerial view of Clemson House, 1978

Date created: 1978

Topics: Clemson House (Clemson, S.C.)
Dormitories
College buildings

Medium: Aerial photographs

GeoNames: Clemson House, Pickens, South Carolina, United States, 34.68126, -82.834, SC, 11237661 [34.68126, -82.834]
BUT! Something dramatic happened on December 3, 2018
Aerial view of Clemson House

On Monday, December 4, every image of Clemson House needed revision.

Why? Building no longer existed (and there are many others).

How do we collocate such buildings?

LCSH has a term for that: “Lost architecture”

Metadata for buildings, ideally, keeps up with the current architectural situation!
Strategies to describe people in photographs

★ Keep formatting consistent across collection(s).
★ Focus on describing the known and not the unknown.
★ Do not use question marks (?) as placeholders for unidentified persons. Instead use “unidentified.”
★ For large groups with many known names, follow below formatting:
  ○ Left to right -
  ○ Back row left to right -
  ○ Standing left to right -
★ For large groups with few known names, follow parenthetical formatting:
  ○ President James Barker (third from right) with students
  ○ Peter Jones (seated center)
★ For small groups with most or all people identified, follow parenthetical formatting or list with directionals:
  ○ John Smith (left) with Jane Doe
  ○ Fred Lee (standing left), Olive Lee (seated), and Joe Johnson (standing right)
  ○ On back: Left to right - A. B. Smith, T. L. Jones, John Hughes
Strategies to describe people

TITLE
Group portrait of the Big Five cadets at the fair, 1913

DESCRIPTION

LOCAL SUBJECTS
Shannon, Charles John
Bigby, Walter A. (Walter Ashbury), 1894-1973
Bailey, Monroe Boyce, 1894-1976
Spratt, Tom
White, Warren Thomas, 1895-1973

LC SUBJECT HEADING
Military cadets
Strategies to describe people

TITLE
Group portrait of the Big Five cadets at the fair, 1913

DESCRIPTION

LOCAL SUBJECTS
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LC SUBJECT HEADING
Military cadets

On back: From left to right; "Tim" Shannon; "Walt" Begley [illegible]; "Judge" Bailey; "Major" Sjrat [illegible]; "Lafa" White [illegible]; The "Big Five" at the "Fair" 1913
Local subject headings

- Standardized descriptive access points unique to your collection(s).
- Used when subject is not in the Library of Congress Authorities (LCNAF or LCSH)
- Establishing guidelines for the creation of local headings at the beginning of your project will save you headaches down the road!
Managing local headings in CollectiveAccess

Successfully utilizing local subject headings requires managing a **Controlled Vocabulary**, an organized list of terms and phrases used to index content and/or retrieve content through browsing and searching.
Anatomy of a local heading record

Preferred labels

Item name (singular)
Wylie, William Harry, 1888-1931

Item name (plural)
Wylie, William Harry, 1888-1931

Description
First identified as 100_003247. Full name and place of birth taken from Clemson College Annual 1907. Birth and death dates taken from Find a Grave, via Ancestry: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/169122268.

Subject description, including original image and additional identification sources.

Identifier
Unique identifier
scleucl_hn_0000914

⚠ Changing this value may break parts of the system configuration
Subject identification resources

**Institutional resources:** Collections unique to your institution, including records, databases and digital collections.

*Ex. TAPS, The Tiger, Board of Trustees minutes, maps, and other university publications.*
Subject identification resources, cont’d

**External resources:** Collections and research databases available to the public.

*Ex. Ancestry, National Archives, census information.*
Leveraging expertise across the Libraries

- Metadata isn’t solo work! What other library or university departments may be able to contribute metadata for your digital collection(s)?

- Metadata workflows will require different people and teams with different areas of expertise to collaborate, from the archivist working with the original document or image, to the digitization specialist, to the metadata practitioner and the library web developer.
Metadata documentation: Write it down and follow it

Supports your work and communicates across units

Project charter: Set the expectations, resources and timeline for the project for all stakeholders.

Metadata Application Profile: Guides metadata providers with field by field instructions and vocabularies. A place to record decisions.
Challenges We Still Face

Access Points

SUBJECT HEADINGS
Selecting appropriate terms

ENTITIES
Messy data!
Guidelines for creation

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO
Challenges We Still Face

Lack of Original Description

DERIVING TITLES
Formulating based on photo content, not on context
Relying on Special Collections & Archives expertise

AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS
Challenges We Still Face

Metadata Revisions

PROCESS
- Manual
- Multiple steps
- Multiple humans
Future directions

Usability Testing  Linked Data  Crowdsourcing
Questions

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Resources

Clemson Libraries Digital Project Charter template

Clemson Libraries Metadata Application Profile

Clemson Digital Collections
https://digitalcollections.clemson.edu/

CollectiveAccess
https://www.collectiveaccess.org/