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Abstract

The South Carolina State Library (SCSL) hosted a unique crowdsourcing event to gain descriptive metadata for parts of their photographic collection from the 1960s through the 1990s. This event was the Metadata Crowdsourcing Retiree Tea, and was held April 15, 2015 for retirees of the SCSL. Attendees came together to provide information for 175 selected photographs while enjoying refreshments. Metadata collected included title, date, and description. Following the event, photographs were scanned and metadata was recorded. The photographs will be included in current and new digital collections in the South Carolina Digital Library.

Keywords

crowdsourcing, metadata



FEATURED ARTICLE

Put the Kettle On: Crowdsourcing with a Cup of Tea

By Jessica Dame

The South Carolina State Library (SCSL) has a modest photograph collection of librarians, library buildings, and library events around the state from the 1930s to present. Currently there are six SCSL collections in the South Carolina Digital Library (SCDL) including the South Carolina Children's Library Services Collection, the South Carolina Library Buildings Collection, and the South Carolina Bookmobiles Collection. Some of the SCSL photographs in SCDL included data on the back of the photographs or accompanying notes which assisted in metadata creation. However, as is common for many collections across institutions, most of the photographs do not include data and are not organized or labeled in a helpful way. Digitizing the collection is the goal, along with providing detailed metadata that would make the photographs findable and most useful.

In Jeff Howe's book *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, he points out what began at the genesis of the open source movement, crowdsourcing came from realizing labor can be organized more efficiently in the context of community (2009). Howe goes on to say the best person for a job is the one who most wants to do that job, while the best people to evaluate their performance are peers (2009). He sums this up by saying everyone takes part in improving a final product out of the pleasure of helping each other create something beautiful and useful by the group (Howe, 2009).

Crowdsourcing has been used by libraries to include communities in the process of adding information to records, spotting errors, verifying information, adding user created content, and transcribing (Holley, 2010). These are all beneficial, and there are countless other ways to use crowdsourcing. However, as Eddie Woodard points out in his article *Metadata for*

Image Collections Inverse Proportions: The Quantity vs. Quality Conundrum, the push for digitization can put pressure on libraries to make digital objects available before quality metadata has been applied (2014). The more detailed and descriptive the metadata, the longer each record takes to complete and process, while less detailed descriptions take less time to create, and the records can be ingested more quickly (Woodard, 2014). Often, large collections of items are digitized and put online for participants to transcribe, tag, and add information. This is a faster process for making the objects available, but does not ensure quality or controlled metadata for findability and use. As with any endeavor, each library must decide what works for their collections, workflows, and community.

For the SCSL, crowdsourcing descriptive metadata from retirees was always the intent, but placing the digitized photographs on a platform online for retirees to visit was not. An advantage the SCSL had regarding the photograph collection is that many of those who are in the photographs, or have knowledge of the events and people, are current (and local) retirees. The SCSL retirees are an active group who meet quarterly for lunch in Columbia, allowing the digitization staff to bring them together and crowdsource metadata at the SCSL. Inviting retirees to come back to the library to share their knowledge was a nice way to involve them in preserving the SCSL's and the state's library history.

To make the experience more enjoyable and novel, the theme of afternoon tea was chosen. Retirees were invited to tea on April 15, 2015 in the afternoon to help identify people, places, and events in 175 selected photographs from the SCSL's photograph collection while enjoying refreshments.



Carol Winberry, Libby Law, Deborah Hotchkiss and Brenda Boyd are discussing who is who in photographs at the Metadata Crowdsourcing Tea.

Preparation

Initial planning for the event began with questions. What photographs would be used? How many? How would we collect the metadata? These questions provided a starting point in identifying the goal for the event: to gather as much descriptive metadata as possible for photographs we would like to digitize and make accessible, while engaging with retirees who have an interest in the future of the SCSL's digital collections.

Working with co-workers who are in touch with retirees, we were able to pinpoint the date the group intended to luncheon in the spring. We set the date for the event to follow their lunch so everyone was already in the area. Also with the aid of co-workers, we were able to put together a mailing list for all the active retirees. With two important steps down, we were then able to decide on invitations, catering, selecting the photographs, and creating a system for collecting metadata.

Invitations were handmade, for a personal touch, with a small budget and readily available materials at the library such as stock paper. Invitations were mailed to retirees a month in advance of the event with an RSVP date of April

3, 2015. Small desserts were catered by a local bakery, while fruit, flowers, and tea were purchased the day of the event at a local grocery store. Items such as table cloths, utensils, tea fixings, and hot water kettles were already available at the SCSL. Tea cups were acquired through thrift store purchases or loaned by SCSL staff.

With the aid of interns, 175 photographs were chosen and assembled. Each photo was placed in an archival polyester sleeve and numbered on the back with a sticky note. Each sleeve was accompanied by a sheet of paper with corresponding numbers. This system was chosen instead of digitizing ahead of time and projecting the images because of the room set-up and because we wanted to avoid a situation in which attendees would have to raise their hands or shout out information as a group. By passing the photographs around to each person, they would be able to closely look at them and write down any information on the paper provided in an orderly fashion. This also would ensure no information would be missed.



Iretta Wise and Bobbi Adkins are looking through photographs at the Metadata Crowdsourcing Tea.

Tea Time

The day of the event, retirees entered the room ready to share as much information as possible. The photographs were divided between the tables and each

sleeve was passed around from person to person and table to table. Attendees rushed over to one another to confer with past colleagues on a face or event. They wrote down names, job titles, event names, and dates. This process took about two hours, and concluded with a tour of the remodeled library.

Passing the actual photographs around alongside food and drink was an initial concern. However, due to the group, space and time constraints, it was decided sharing the photographs would work best. Retirees, being former librarians, naturally understood the need to be orderly and mindful around the photographs, and no accidents ensued. Ample

Following the event, interns scanned each photograph into TIFF and JPEG files according to best practices and recorded the metadata collected into an Excel spreadsheet using Dublin Core standards. The completed collection will be submitted for inclusion in the SCDL.



table space ensured there was more than enough space for sharing the photographs alongside food and drinks without crowding and spilling. Additionally, refreshments were set up on separate tables, and as the sleeves of photographs made their rounds, they were stacked on their own table free of food and drink.

A welcomed surprise was the donated items brought in by the attendees. Donated items included in our digital collections included photographs, South Carolina Library Association publications, and an invitation and guestbook from a retiree's retirement party.

Estellene Walter's 25th Employment Anniversary. 1971.
Courtesy of the South Carolina State Library.

Conclusion

An in-person crowdsource event could be replicated by anyone who needs to gain information about a collection. The crowdsource group could consist of staff, retirees, a specific group from the community, or volunteers. If seeking volunteers from the community, there can be a sign-up ahead of time to control the size of the group. A date can be selected that works for staff and attendees, and held in-house to cut costs. How you choose to invite guests depends on the guests and

theme for the event. For a formal or themed gathering, mailed invitations are a nice touch that can be created in-house with your institution's materials or outsourced if the budget allows. For guests that are easily reached electronically, e-invites are the simplest route. If serving refreshments, photographs could be scanned ahead of time and projected for attendees to look at as a group, refreshments could be served before or after, they could be served in a separate room, or it is always an option to not serve any refreshments at all. This, too, would depend on budget, guests, and meeting room protocols.

As for the items to be addressed, pre-selection is crucial, as is deciding on a course of action for obtaining the metadata. This could be similar to our system that was based on numbering, or if viewing items as a group, one person could record metadata as it is given. Crowdsourcing could work for all kinds of items. Photographs or artworks would be easily done in larger groups. However, for items such as text, objects, documents, film/audio, and textiles, it may be best to hold the event in a more intimate setting.

The event was a success for the attendees and the SCSL. Attendees enjoyed the opportunity to gather together and contribute to a future project of the SCSL. As for the library, we gained detailed information for each photograph and could then provide much more metadata for our collections and patrons than we could have otherwise provided. This event was also a learning opportunity for the digitization staff on crowdsourcing, event planning, and project planning. Crowdsourcing was successful in a controlled, in-person, environment. With a limited number of photographs, the amount of information did not get out of control and each metadata set could be touched, thus providing a level of control.

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