WORKING NOTES AS AN ARCHIVAL CHALLENGE

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Society of California Archivists AGM 2013
April 13, 2013
Working Notes as an Archival Challenge

I. Introduction to “Editorial Practices and the Web”: Project rationale, progress, and status

II. Use case & http://editorsnotes.org/

III. Archiving editors’ working notes

IV. Potential for archivists’ working notes

V. Questions & discussion
Problems of Documentary Editions

• Requires specialized expertise for many years.

• Funding is difficult.

• Much of the editors’ research not included because inconclusive or marginally relevant to the publication.

• Limitations of the printed edition: Costly. Limit on number of pages, so editors’ notes reduced. Small editions bought by libraries. Not widely available.

• Relatively isolated work.

• Working notes and unpublished notes discarded.

  The return on investment far less that it could be.
Editorial Practices and the Web: Objectives

1. Increased return on investment by making editors’ notes promptly and more fully available through Web publication;

2. Gain in efficiency through collaborative, shared access to working notes among related projects; and

3. More effective interoperability with archival finding aids, library pathfinders, and other scholarly infrastructure as all become more closely associated in digital environment.
A Case Study: A Digital Remedy

Save as .html! Make editors’ notes available in full as early as possible on a webpage regardless of what happens in the eventual published edition. Immediately available. Indexed by Google, etc.
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Published on the Web
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Published on the Web

More a change in work practice than a technical challenge.
Editorial Practices and the Web: Phase 1 Agenda

- Increase use of digital notes
- Create shared website for working notes: editorsnotes.org
- Make editors’ working notes openly available
- Extend to library special collection curators’ notes also
Editorial Practices and the Web: Phase 2 Agenda

- Introduce digital humanities tools.
- Extend to archivists’ working notes. (To follow).
- Projects end, scholarship doesn’t. “Hibernating archive.”
  - Archival processing of editors’ notes when project ends.
  - Work practices preprocess for archival deposit.
  - Predispose for later continued scholarship.
EXAMPLE USE CASE
Documentary editing

- Editors prepare collections of documents: letters, articles, diaries, essays, etc.

- Printed volumes provide context for better understanding subjects’ experiences and general milieu through footnotes, images, chronologies, articles
Documentary editing: workflow

1) Gather documents
2) Contextualize select items
3) Publish final product
4) Repeat as funding allows
Case study: Emma Goldman Papers
Dear Sir

I am in receipt of your note of the 18th inst. and in reply would like to say this. I do not know whether Czolgosz was an Anarchist, nor have I the right to say that he was not. I have not known him sufficiently to be acquainted with his political views. In fact no one has, including Mr. Isaac and Mr. Shilling, and if they have expressed opinions either for or against his being an Anarchist they have done an injustice to the young man, who died such a brave death, as you and you, dear Sir will be guilty of the same offence if you attempt to prove that Czolgosz was not an Anarchist. No one can with certainty say, that the man was an Anarchist, since he was but little known, and since he has never proved made a public statement to that effect. Still less can one prove that he was not one; there is nothing in his act by which one can deny him the right of being an Anarchist. It is true, the Philosophy of Anarchy does not teach Invasion, but it does teach self defence, and Czolgosz’s act was an act of self defence and nothing else. You may question this, since Czolgosz was not personally attacked by McKinley, quite true, but Czolgosz belonged to the Oppressed, to the Exploited and Disinherited Millions, who lead a life of darkness and despair owing to those, of whom McKinley was one, therefore he was personally attacked by the ex-President, or rather he was one of the Victims of the McKinley regime and those McKinley catered to. The act of Czolgosz may have been impractical or impopurtune, I will not argue this point now, but I insist it had nothing unanarchistic about it, since, as I said before Anarchism claims the right of Defence against Invasion and Aggression of every shape and form and no one, who has his eyes open will and can deny that those in Power are the Invaders, and McKinley certainly was one of them. I send you with this, 2 Articles

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1. Leon Czolgosz, who assassinated President McKinley at the world’s fair in Buffalo in September 1901, was judged sane before his trial by three psychiatrists for the prosecution and two psychiatrists for the defense. Later, Johns Hopkins medical school psychiatrist Walter Honig termed Czolgosz as “mentally unstable,” based strictly on the assassin’s personal history, in a 1902 article published in the American Journal of Insanity.

2. Cleveland anarchist Emil Schilling had been Czolgosz’s first contact in the anarchist movement in May 1901, lending him reading materials and answering his questions. According to Schilling, they were estranged even before Czolgosz’s arrival in Chicago. Abe Isaak, editor of Free Society, introduced Czolgosz to EG in Chicago; Isaak found Czolgosz’s behavior suspicious.
Case study: Emma Goldman Papers
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Documentary editing: Problems

• Published volumes & necessary work are expensive

• Lack of space for all footnotes

• Much of research done is either glossed over in footnotes or not included at all
  • Fact checking
  • Falsification or dead ends
  • Tangential biographical details

• Preservation & legacy
How do projects take notes?

Patrick—

Lenin:

Had any of his family members beside his brother, been imprisoned?
What was the book he had written on ‘political economy’ that was used in Russian Universities?

New York (Evening?) Post, September 1918 editorial on IWW verdict for the huge IWW trial in Chicago.
How do projects take notes?

- Sources consulted, notes taken based on findings
- Notes stored in a Word documents? Yellow notebook? Email?
- Negative conclusion reached to question, but no one will ever know

Lenin, Vladimir Ilich [V.I. Ulyanov] (1870–1924) Russian revolutionary leader and founder of the Bolshevik party, a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party formed in 1903. Lenin grew up east of Moscow in the city of Simbirsk in a relatively wealthy family. When he was a teenager, his brother was executed for his role in plotting to kill Tsar Alexander III. While studying to become a lawyer, Lenin began his involvement in radical and Marxist circles in the late 1880s and 1890s. By the last years of the nineteenth century, he was a prolific writer and published many newspapers and articles encouraging revolution in Russia. To avoid being punished for his activities by the Tsarist police, Lenin spent much of the decades preceding the 1917 Russian revolution in exile in London, Paris, Geneva, Zurich, and other European cities, working with other émigrés to encourage revolution in Russia. After the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917, Lenin planned his trip back to Russia, arriving in Petrograd in April. His return was controversial because his train from Switzerland was allowed to pass through Germany, one of Russia’s enemies in World War I. This fact led many to believe that Lenin was
Editors’ Notes

- [http://editorsnotes.org/](http://editorsnotes.org/)
- Finding a safe place for the “debris” of research
- Improving return on investment for documentary editing projects
- Central focus on changing work practices of editors and researchers rather than digitizing what already exists
Editors’ Notes: Design principles

1) Minimal amount of “friction” for researchers

2) Flexibility for different work habits

3) Consistency in data models

4) Existing technology wherever possible

5) Adherence to web standards
Data model
Documents

- Zotero for document metadata (http://zotero.org/)
  - Ability to describe a wide range of documents
  - Read/write API
  - Citeproc-js for generation of citations and bibliographic references

- High quality, zoomable scans with http://zoom.it/

- Transcripts in HTML with interface to annotate passages of text
Topics

• Primary method of indexing items
• Classified by type
• Interface for clustering/merging
• Experimenting with structured data
Notes

• Most difficult part of the project
• Notes are messy, purposefully
• How to model something so chaotic & idiosyncratic?
• Goals: Easy to use; flexible but consistent
Notes

- Description
- Status
  - Open, closed, hibernating
- Assigned users
- Sections
  - Citation with optional commentary
  - Plain text
  - Future: Maps? Timelines? Chronologies?
Demonstration with Lenin example
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free text</th>
<th>Structured blocks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implicit people, places, events</td>
<td>Explicit linkable entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filing cabinets</td>
<td>Open access</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits of our approach

• Connections linking topics are freed from the minds of editors & researchers and indexed for anyone to see

• Standardized records of work can easily be revisited from within a project or from outside

• New way of seeing the outer edges of humanities research

• Evidence of intense, often messy, scholarship behind concise, clean footnotes
Technology

- **Django** Python web framework
- **PostgreSQL** database
- **South** for database migrations
- **Haystack** for full-text searching
- **Zotero** for document description
- **Open Refine** (prev. Google Refine) for duplicate detection
- **Bootstrap** & **jQuery** for frontend development
ARCHIVING WORKING NOTES
Editorial Practices and the Web: Phase 2 Agenda

- Introduce digital humanities tools.
- Extend to archivists’ working notes. (To follow).
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POTENTIAL FOR
ARCHIVISTS’ WORKING NOTES
Archivists’ Working Notes

Initial Observations

- Documentary editors notes’ differ from archivists’ notes
  - Bibliographic citations vs. archival description
  - Scholarly editions vs. finding aids and catalog entries
  - Intensive research vs. scope and content creation
  - Item level vs. series level
Archivists’ Working Notes

Initial Observations

- Shared benefits
  - Greater exposure of collection items
  - Increased access to materials
  - Digital humanities tools
  - Repository collaboration
  - Complements finding aids, guides, and pathfinders
Archivists’ Working Notes

Initial Observations

- Shared benefits
  - Notes captured, not lost
  - Immediate availability of notes
- Dual purpose tool
  - Internal working notes for archivists
  - External resource for researchers
Archivists’ Working Notes

Points of note capture

- Appraisal
- Accessioning
- Processing
- Reference
- Exhibit/curatorial
- Website
- Research guide/finding aids
Archivists’ Working Notes

Criteria for an archivists’ note?

- A “wow” item
- Selected processing notes
- Reference notes
- Historical significance
- Related collections
- Archivist’s choice
- Researchers’ notes
Archivists’ Working Notes

Challenges to archival practice integration

- More Product, Less Process (MPLP) workflow
  - Ease of entry and note-taking
- Duplication of efforts
- Draft notes online /quality control
- Opportunity costs and workload addition
- Resources, staffing, and funding
- Public expectations
Thank You

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation  Emma Goldman Papers, Berkeley
Coleman Fung Foundation    Stanton-Anthon Papers, Rutgers
                         Margaret Sanger Papers, NYU
                         California State Archives

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Project information: http://ecai.org/mellon2010/
Project site: http://editorsnotes.org/