



Seattle Area Archivists
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Winter 2010

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Winter Meeting

March 11, 2010
10:00-11:30

University of Washington Special Collections classroom in the
basement of Allen Library South

Discovering Viretta Denny, and how she kept growing on me--literally!

Nicolette Bromberg, Visual Materials Curator at UW Libraries,
Special Collections, will talk about her experiences when she
uncovered (and kept uncovering) a collection of photographs
by an early Seattle photographer.

Films, Football, and Raccoons

There were always rumors about the Intercollegiate Athletic Film Collection, that a treasure trove of films documenting the UW's athletic history was buried somewhere in Husky Stadium. In early 2009, Hannah Palin, Film Archives Specialist at the UW Libraries, Special Collections, met with representatives from the Intercollegiate Athletics Department to discuss a project to evaluate, inventory, and make recommendations for the care and storage of the department's films. At that meeting, Ms. Palin was taken to the fabled storage room in Husky Stadium, containing hundreds of boxes filled with thousands of films and videotapes. The rumors were all true. Ms. Palin will discuss the Intercollegiate Athletics Moving Image Project in detail and will touch on issues of preservation and access in regard to large moving image collections.

Note from the Chair

Looking out my window yesterday, I would have told you that spring was just around the corner, but today, well, the dreary, rainy Seattle weather is in full effect. Winter is still hanging on. That isn't necessarily bad news--in fact spring would signal that time is moving much too quickly. Instead, I am reluctantly thankful that winter is still here. There is still so much more to do before spring arrives! For one, our winter Seattle Area Archivists membership meeting is coming up. Plan to join us on March 11th in the Special Collections classroom at the University of Washington. Look for more details about the meeting [here](#).

Speaking of meetings, I hope you are all planning on participating in the Western Roundup 2010 meeting, a super-regional meeting of the Northwest Archivists, Society of California Archivists, Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists, and Conference of Inter-Mountain Archivists. This meeting will be held April 28th-May 1st at the Renaissance Seattle Hotel. For more information, please visit the conference [website](#). Also, note that the early-bird registration deadline of March 31st is quickly approaching so be sure to register in time to receive this reduced conference rate.

This transition from winter to spring also marks the midway point of the 2009-2010 membership year which seems like a good time to review what we've accomplished so far. Part of the steering committee's thrust this year has been to become more visible and relevant. In the last newsletter we shared information about our new website (www.seattleareaarchivists.org) that we had recently launched. I can report on its success to this point: in the past 8 months, we have posted 36 items and the site has had over 3,600 views with as many as 85 views in a single day.

We've also added a social networking presence on both Facebook and Twitter. Both of these networking tools help us connect with each other as well as those outside of our geographic area. Become a "fan" of saa on Facebook [here](#) and follow us on Twitter [here](#). There is still more to do, and we'd like to hear from you especially if you have ideas of ways to better serve our membership. Contact any member of the [steering committee](#) with ideas, or consider running for a steering committee position this spring!

Emily Dominick

Happenstance: A Conversation with Marvin Evans, Former Archivist at the Virginia State Library

By Leslie Schuyler

A few months ago a reference interview turned into a lengthy conversation with eighty-four-year-old Marvin Evans, the father of an alumnus who had contacted me about doing some research in the archives. Marvin and I met over lunch in the school cafeteria, and after finding out more about his project—a history he’s writing about his son Kent’s involvement in the Lakeside Programming Group (the precursor to the Microsoft Corporation)—I was intrigued by how much he knew about archives, so I asked him if he had done archival research before.

“Actually, I’m really an archivist masquerading as a Unitarian minister” was his reply. “I became an archivist by happenstance,” he began, and I settled in and listened. It was the summer of 1950. Marvin had graduated from college with a degree in political science. As with many of us, four years of college hadn’t given him a clear picture of what he wanted to do with his life. What eventually “came along” was an opening at the Virginia State Library, working with the archives collection there. The position presented itself at the right moment, just when Marvin had “run out of time, energy, and money.” Although he knew very little about archival materials, let alone the archives profession, he was thankful to have been offered a job working as one of four assistants to the State Archivist.

Marvin began his “apprenticeship” (as he

described it) with small, mundane tasks. His



City of Virginia Public Library, 1956

first assignment was to go through microfilmed court records for the Genealogical Society of Utah, making sure that film labels matched box contents. When I asked him if he found it interesting, he said “no, but I was an apprentice after all, and they have to carry the water buckets.” The ‘peasants’—as he jokingly referred to himself and his fellow novices—were also tasked with answering the mail. At that time, the bulk of reference requests came to the archives through the mail. Stacks of inquiries arrived every week, and these were divided between Marvin and his three colleagues. Eager at first to do a good job and impress his boss, he responded to requests as quickly as he could. Eventually, though, he learned that the more quickly he worked, the faster his pile of requests grew. So instead of focusing his energy entirely on reference, Marvin buried himself in the stacks in order to learn all he

could about the repository's holdings. In time, he became so knowledgeable about the collection that William J. Van Schreeven, then State Archivist, began turning research scholars and reference interviews over to Marvin. After three years, Marvin knew more about the state's archival holdings than Van Schreeven. He eventually shared this knowledge with the larger community by writing about the collection—roughly 11 million items at the time—in a published guide to American manuscript collections.



LS 1986 Marvin Evans (r) and Mary Hood Evans (l) Ayrault Shellhouse dedication, Lakeside School Archives.

I wanted to compare my experiences to Marvin's, so I asked him what kinds of users he and his colleagues spent the most time serving. Although scholars frequently did research in the archives, Marvin said that genealogists were by far the largest user group. I have heard a similar story from archivist friends who currently work in state or local agencies, so I asked Marvin if he and his colleagues ever tired of working with genealogists. He responded that genealogists comprised "the main life blood" of the archival assistants' workload, and for that they were all incredibly grateful. Then he smiled and said "one does not bite the hand that feeds it."

Marvin spoke glowingly about his time as an

archivist. He especially loved deciphering 17th century writings and language, and even created a kind of translation key to help him and others work with records from that time. When asked what he thought made a good archivist, Marvin talked about an archivist's ability to understand that language is not static, that it is constantly changing, and that when working with historical materials, "context is everything." He said that an archivist's "number one job is to transport him or herself into the time of the document," to know what was happening in the world at that time, and to take that into account when using historical materials for research and learning.

Marvin was so enthusiastic about the profession that I had to ask him why he eventually left it. "As I approached my 35th birthday," he said, "I knew I wasn't going to get anywhere in the archives world without a PhD." And so, after eleven years as an archivist, he moved on, bringing all of his newfound knowledge—in research, reference, writing, and management—with him. In thinking about our conversation, one main thing stood out to me. It was Marvin's emphasis on the importance of considering context when working with archival materials. We talked a lot about this in graduate school, and as a new archivist, I'm reminded of those discussions on a daily basis. Each time I come across orphaned photographs or records of unknown origin, or when I explain to students how to do archival research, I find myself returning to this very important issue of context. Although nearly fifty years have passed since Marvin was officially employed in the profession, he still identifies himself as an archivist. If (or when) I have to move on from the field, I'm sure I'll do the same. After all, this is the context in which I've grown as a professional, and, as my archivist friend Marvin said, context is everything.

The Blanche Payne Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection: Archives from a Museological Perspective

By Erin Whitney



Bridal Costume, Kumanovo, Macedonia
Water Color Plate from the Blanche Payne
Collection, University of Washington Libraries

In the summer of 2008, I briefly volunteered at the Henry Art Gallery, helping to handle and photograph costumes and textiles for its Digital Interactive Galleries project. At this time I had also been working with Nicolette Bromberg, the Visual Materials Curator in the Special Collections Division of University of Washington Libraries, processing and preserving photograph collections. I was

searching for a potential topic for a thesis project in the Museology Graduate Program at the University of Washington, and initially wanted to work with costume collections. Judy Sourakli, the Curator of Collections at the Henry Art Gallery, suggested taking a look at the Blanche Payne collections, which dealt with both costume and visual materials.

Blanche Payne (1897-1972) was a University of Washington faculty member in the Department of Home Economics, where she taught costume history and design from 1927-1966. In 1930 and 1936-1937, Payne traveled to Eastern Europe to research regional costume, spending the bulk of her time in the former Yugoslavia. During her trips, she attended festivals and ceremonies, visited people in their homes, and visited museums while creating pattern drawings from costumes in their collections. She also photographed people in regional dress and collected samples of costume. The culmination of her research was a manuscript on regional costume of the former Yugoslavia (which remains unpublished), illustrated with photographs, pattern drawings of costumes, and painted color plates.

Collections consisting of different material types are sometimes fractionalized, generally for reasons of preservation or collection scope. The issues of preservation versus access and intellectual preservation versus physical preservation are exemplified in the Blanche Payne Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection. After Blanche Payne's death, the Henry Art Gallery received her personal costume collections, and the University of Washington Libraries'

Special Collections Division received the materials that contributed to her manuscript.

The Blanche Payne Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection contains around 3,000 objects (including 1,660 photographs) depicting regional costume, the majority of which is from the former Yugoslavia. The Henry Art Gallery retains the costumes that Payne collected, and has made many of them available online through the collections search and Digital Interactive Galleries (DIG) project (see [here](#)).

My thesis project then ultimately sought to preserve, make accessible, and connect through digitization the Blanche Payne Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection held at the University of Washington Libraries' Special Collections, with its associated costume materials held at the Henry Art Gallery, in order to provide a context for understanding the collection as a whole. Processing the materials allowed them to be preserved, while intellectually arranging and integrating materials that had been held in different accessions in Special Collections provided access to the collection for researchers, educators, and students at the University of Washington. Putting the collections and finding aids online provided access to distance researchers.

Using a modified form of the Photo Processing Checklist we utilized in Special Collections, I created a processing plan for the Blanche Payne Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection, which included the following steps: gathering materials which would be included in the collection, preservation, arrangement and description, numbering, processing negatives, selecting images for digitization, and creating a finding aid. As part of processing the collection I completed tasks such as rehousing the objects into archival

sleeves and correctly sized acid-free and lignin-free boxes, creating a more intuitive intellectual arrangement for the collection, and creating a finding aid, which we hope to put online in the near future. The finding aid will be available by searching for the collection name [here](#).



Costumes of Konavle Region, Croatia
Photographs, Postcards, and Drawings
from the Blanche Payne Collection,
University of Washington Libraries

Making a digital connection between the Blanche Payne Yugoslav and Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection finding aid and the Henry Art Gallery's collections will require two optional steps: digitizing images for inclusion in the finding aid and creating a virtual link between materials. With the help of Diana Ryesky, a costume historian who has worked extensively with the Payne materials, I selected images representative of the different types of regional costume from the former Yugoslavia. In many cases there are costumes in the collection of the Henry Art Gallery from the same locality as the archival materials, and some of Payne's photographs can be linked to actual costumes. The ultimate goal of the project will be realized when images are put in a CONTENTdm

database through Digital Initiatives at the University of Washington Libraries, with links to relevant costume catalog records in the Henry Art Gallery's online collections in the metadata. Finally, there will be links on both the Libraries' and the Henry's websites which will point researchers to the corresponding information at both institutions.

While I am fascinated with working with both object and archival collections, investigating the objects themselves, and gathering information about them, collections are ultimately about people: the people who created them, who are affected by them, and who will use them. The end goal of processing a collection and making it accessible is trying to relate these materials back to your community and constituency. One of the recommendations I included in my thesis paper was to engage community groups, such as people interested in cultural heritage, with the collections at the University of Washington Libraries.

I suggested that a way to go about this was to create an exhibit in conjunction with a cultural festival such as [CroatiaFest](#). In October 2009, my colleague, Marina Mikhailchenko, and I worked with the Director and Curator of CroatiaFest to select images from the Blanche Payne Collection to exhibit in the art gallery at the Seattle Center House during the festival. Minimal text was used in the exhibition, so I also created a postcard that visitors could take with them, including information about the collection and how they could access the materials.

Processing the visual materials from the Blanche Payne Regional Costume Photograph and Drawing Collection was a great opportunity to utilize my experience with photograph collections and my Museological training, while tying into my interest in costume collections. Working on this project also provided a service to both the University of

Washington Libraries and the Henry Art Gallery, while working to make these objects accessible to users. Finally, an attempt was made to engage community members in the collection by displaying visual materials and providing information at a public cultural event.

HELP US CELEBRATE



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nationaalarchief/3118322786/>

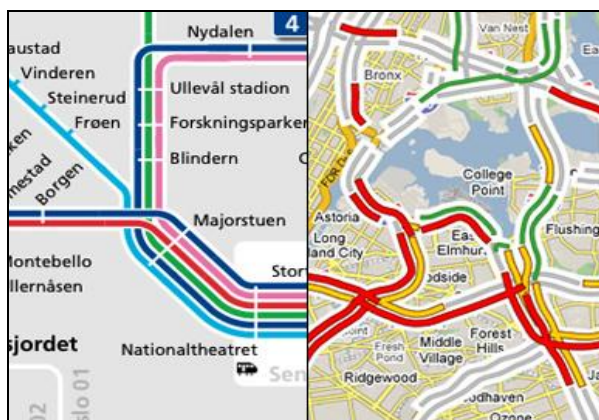
Seattle Area Archivists is celebrating its 25th Anniversary. Join the party. Please share any stories, reminiscences, anecdotes, or birthday wishes with our members. Whether you're a founding member or someone who just joined saa yesterday, let us know what saa has meant to you in your professional life. Let us know what regional archival organizations mean to the profession at large. Send submissions to Josh Zimmerman at zimmerj6@gmail.com

The Sophisticated Simplicity of Information Visualization

By Dorian Bowen

In the world of information the disparity between quality and quantity continues to grow. The more quantity overwhelms, the less precise the relationship between the data that is sought and the data that is retrieved. Enter information visualization. An emerging discipline delineated from human-computer interaction, computer science, graphic design, and psychology, it transposes abstract knowledge into a familiar visual landscape. It operates on the premise that once the human mind instantly acclimates itself to a large foundation of intrinsic data, it promptly allows for many additional levels of comprehension.

The map on the left is of the Metro in Oslo, Norway. It clearly demonstrates the different routes and their destinations, but it holds only a fraction of the relevant information the New York City real-time traffic map does on the right. Visual cues of red, yellow, and green have such strong unconscious meaning that even after adding the dimensions of geography and time to create a far more complex report, it ultimately feels more intuitive.



<http://www.visualcomplexity.com/vc/>

A particularly stunning incorporation of location, data classifications, and the time-sensitive fluctuation of their combined impact is Newsmap. With a user interface allowing the customization of fifteen countries, seven different areas of news (distinctly color-coded), and three different timeframes, Newsmap then uses size to convey the popularity of specific articles, while also providing source identification and quick-view preview panes.



<http://newsmap.jp/>

More often visualizations are static, such as the below excerpt of a visual adaptation of the periodic table. Imaginative and artistic, it facilitates memorization in a way that seems obvious in its effectiveness, yet is entirely original.



© Murray Robertson/visual elements 1998-99

After six years, I am beginning the process of transforming a personal research project, The Montgomery Experiment, into an online archive. Named for its subject, Robert Montgomery (best known as an actor, director, producer... or simply as Elizabeth's father), it is an experiment in part because of its incorporation of visualizations.

Consider the example below. This image contains a record of the twenty consecutive feature films in which Robert Montgomery starred from the years 1934 to 1941.

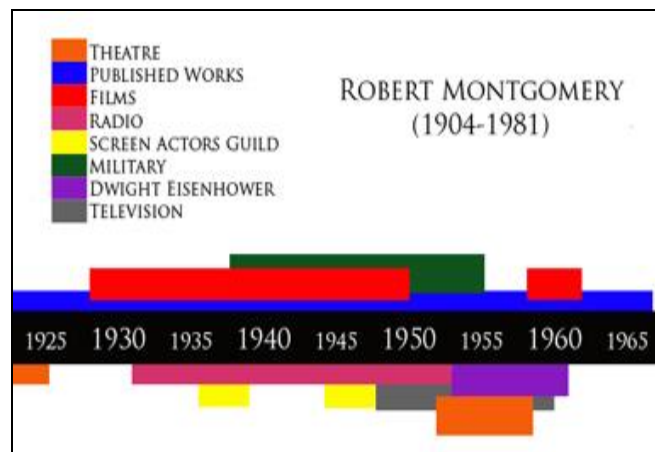


©2010 The Montgomery Experiment

One can locate this same list of titles on the Internet Movie Database, but there are two

additional levels of significance to this particular visualization. First, each color has a corresponding year. For example the three in yellow, *Biography of a Bachelor Girl*, *Vanessa: Her Love Story* and *No More Ladies*, were all released in 1935. Second is the combination of font and size. There is a progression from the marquee to the rounded san serif to the ornamental to the calligraphy, representing how well the movie, as an experience, has aged. (This is based on the technical and historical merit of the film, as well as the frequency with which it is referred to positively by modern audiences.)

A much broader demonstration is this timeline of professional endeavors. Almost instantaneously you have not only an understanding of chronology, but of comprehensiveness and simultaneity, perceptions far more difficult to achieve by reading text.



©2010 The Montgomery Experiment

Any archive with a website can harness information visualizations to represent their collections, engaging visitors (and potential benefactors) in a memorable way. Many Eyes (pictured below) is an unparalleled resource for creating and sharing graphs, charts, tag clouds, treemaps, wordles, scatterplots,

diagrams and more.



<http://manyeyes.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/>

Explore the world of visual representation. Absorbing enormous quantities of complex data has never been so instinctual, so artistic, or so very enjoyable.

IMPORTANT DATES

March 6	Pacific Northwest Historian’s Guild Annual Conference
March 11	Winter Membership Meeting
March 13	Oral History Workshop, MOHAI
March 16	Seattle Municipal Archives “Treasures in the Seattle Municipal Archives”
March 23	Seattle Municipal Archives “Making and Preserving Community”
April 17	Getting to the Source: Using Primary Sources in the Classroom
April 28 – May 1st	Northwest Archivists “Western Roundup” Super Regional Meeting – Seattle (Renaissance Seattle Hotel): Conference of Intermountain Archivists, Northwest Archivists, Society of California Archivists, and Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists
May	Spring Membership Meeting



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News Briefs

NARA

Staff News

Scott Roley recently accepted a position as a Senior Records Analyst at NARA, Pacific Alaska Region. He is a graduate of the Archives and Records Management program at Western Washington University. Most of his career was spent with NARA including eight years in Washington DC coordinating appraisal and disposition activities for the national records center program and a similar stint spent as supervisory archivist and deputy director at the Harry Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri. Scott returned to Washington State in 2007 and worked at Washington State Archives as regional archivist in Bellingham. His new position marks a return to the same building where his career began “too many years ago to contemplate.”

Events

Pacific Northwest Historian’s Guild Annual Conference, Seattle, March 6, 2010. NARA, Pacific Alaska Region is once again co-sponsoring the annual Historian’s Guild conference with MOHAI. The conference will explore the Pacific Northwest as a borderland and focus on the region’s geographic, political and cultural diversity. The conference program will be available [here](#).

American Society for Environmental History Annual Conference, Portland, March 10-14, 2010. Patty McNamee, NARA archivist, will join Anne Frantilla of the Seattle Municipal Archives in presenting at the upcoming ASEH meeting. Their presentation title is *The Pacific Northwest: Archives and Sources in Environmental*

History. Additional information is available [here](#).

National Council for History Education National Conference, San Diego, March 25-27, 2010. Carol Buswell will join NARA staff members from Boston and Philadelphia to present a session on immigration research. Additional information is available [here](#).

Oregon Council of Social Studies Spring Conference, Rainier, Oregon, April 10, 2010. Carol Buswell will present at the OCSS Spring Conference. The conference topic is *Journey on the Columbia River: Past, Present and Future*.

Brick Wall Workshop, National Archives, Seattle, the second Thursday of every month, 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM. Genealogists who have hit a “brick wall” in their research are invited to join NARA staff and volunteers once each month on a drop in basis to brainstorm solutions to their research problems.

Newly Received at NARA, Seattle - U. S. District Court case files from courts in Oregon and Washington have recently been accessioned. Records from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Response and Restoration, Seattle have also recently been transferred. The Oregon Historical Society transferred federal records they had received from federal agencies in Oregon over several decades including: U.S. Customs House, Astoria, Oregon, Correspondence and Arrival and Departure Logs, 1853-1903; Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, Range Study Photographs, 1927-1962; records from the U.S. Attorney, Portland, Oregon dating from the late 1890s

to the 1950s.

The Vera Project (Seattle)

In partnership with the [Zine Archives and Publishing Project](#) (ZAPP), the [Vera Project](#), an all-ages art and music venue located in the Seattle Center, has taken steps to locate and preserve its valuable archival materials which consist of digital photographs, audio files, and screen-printed posters. Last November Vera brought on Tom Heuser as the archival intern responsible for the project. Tom has been working diligently to develop an institutional archives and more importantly, to ensure that this program will continue beyond his six month internship.

Over the past four months, Tom researched archival preservation and descriptive best practices and interviewed key Vera staff members about their records and the processes involved in creating and using them. One of the project goals is the design of a logical and user-friendly database, which will allow staff (and eventually, the public) to search and access Vera materials. Tom has also redesigned both the physical and electronic storage spaces to ensure the safety of the material and efficiency of its retrieval. Because sustainability is such a major priority in this project, Tom will be producing an archival manual for those who will be carrying on his work. In addition to his time spent at Vera, Tom has worked at ZAPP learning its cataloging procedure and researching archival best practices for the preservation of its digital video collection. He is also the photographer for the ZAPP blog.

To stay tuned on Tom's progress with the Vera Project archives, follow his work on his [processing blog](#).



Map Drawer, Vera Project

Wellspring Family Services (Seattle)

Internship Opportunity

Here is your chance to set up an archive almost from scratch! Wellspring Family Services (formerly Family Services of King County) has recently relocated from our longtime Pioneer Square location, and we are looking for an **intern** to help organize a small agency archive at our new locale in the Rainier Valley. We have accumulated a wide variety of documents and other archival materials from 1892 to the present, and we need help identifying what we have, and setting up procedures for labeling, storage, retrieval, and display.

See [here](#) for more details