

Users' Group Meeting
March 19, 2010
National Archives
College Park, MD

Diane Dimkoff, Director of the National Archives' (NARA) Customer Services Division (NWCC) announced changes to the quarterly Users' Group meeting, which she had asked Marie Melchiori to form over five years ago. In order to accommodate users' needs, NARA will be holding monthly meetings, alternating the sites between Archives 1 and 2. She will provide an agenda prior to each meeting; users wishing to add agenda items should contact her or Marie Melchiori. Next meeting dates are on the last page of these notes.

Agenda Item #1 - Digitization

Jim Hastings provided background on NARA's digitization efforts, noting that the digitization strategy and current digitization partnership agreements and other pertinent information on this project are located at <http://archives.gov/digitization/>. NARA will place more information online as it becomes available.

Hastings stated that NARA has:

- Limited internal resources for digitizing analog material
 - Focused on materials that are in the treasure vault, our most fragile materials, and audio-visual materials that are on obsolete hardware
- Entered into partnerships with 3 organizations to digitize records - Ancestry.com, Footnote.com, and Familysearch.org.
 - Digitizing microfilm and original documents
 - 60% of our microfilm is now available on ancestry.com or footnote.com.

Q: When will digitized records from the partners be available on Archives.gov? When and how will the records be made available?

A: The agreements stipulate that after five years both the digitized images and the associated descriptive metadata may be used by NARA with no restrictions. Mary Rephlo is keeping track of the status of items being digitized under our partnership agreements. We are looking into our capacity and what options we might want to exercise at that point. We will know more in a few months.

Archival Research Catalog (ARC) adds a link from our series description to the digitized images at Ancestry.com and Footnote.com when 100% of the records in a series are digitized.

Q: Can a page be set up to show what has been digitized under these partnerships?

A: Yes, we are preparing a single list of all NARA records digitized by our partners. *Rephlo post-meeting note:* The list will be on the <http://archives.gov/digitization/> page, with links to it from three other pages: research tools, research news, and genealogy. Partners will send updated information for the page on a monthly basis.

Q: Is there some way that the partners who put up records be made to use NARA's descriptions?

A: *(NARA staff member Mary Rephlo responded)* This question may relate to a legacy issue. The databases that Ancestry.com creates often combine information from multiple microfilm publications. Prior to the partnership with NARA, Ancestry didn't necessarily capture information on which publication was the source of a specific record image. That has been a problem for NARA, for researchers, and, I understand, for Ancestry.com too.

Are there problems with newer materials? Please let us know. This is where very experienced researchers can really help us.

Q: There was a problem with Southern Claims records – Items were forced into states and counties since they weren't all indexed.

A:

Please provide specifics to Mary Rephlo. (Mary.Rephlo@NARA.GOV)

(Hastings) Sixty percent of the microfilm has been digitized; one percent of the original records have been digitized. Microfilm is much easier to digitize than original records. Microfilm and microfilm publications are being digitized – We have 15 cameras, each digitizing 1,000 images/day – 15,000 images/day divided into 9 billion images/records – It will take awhile to do all of our holdings! And not everything is scanner worthy. But, the records which are heavily used as well as those that are fragile need to be done. We have between 500,000 and 600,000 people look at our on-line records every day (6,000 in person every year).

Q: Does that 600,000 include partner sites?

A: Yes.

Q: Do the partners track who visits NARA records on their sites?

A: (Hastings) Yes, we asked them to track that. Mary Rephlo will talk about our procedures regarding quality control and assurance. If you see a problem on a site, let us know which records and the specific problem. Or you can go to the A-1 research room and tell Rebecca Crawford. She will let Mary know, who in turn will let partners know.

Q: If someone off site (not at the NARA facilities) sees a problem, how should that problem be reported? Is there a NARA point of contact?

A: Mary Rephlo is the main point of contact.

Rephlo stated that the digitization agreement outlines responsibilities of both partner and NARA. NARA does follow-up on quality assurance. There are four points of Quality control (QC):

1. image quality (QC responsibility: partner)
2. metadata ((QC responsibility: partner)
3. content – (QC responsibility: NARA) In this step, the digitized images receive a page-by-page review against the original records to find and identify information which might have been left out, such as stamps or annotations on the back of a document. We do a

5% sampling, maybe more for a new operator. Any skipped pages must be imaged and inserted into the images folder at the correct location.

4. Transfer of images - (QC responsibility: NARA) Images come back to NARA and go to the ARC staff, who ensure that we have received the required metadata and that the images and metadata are both included and links are provided to match them to each other..

Q: On the first two points – do you have input into that? – Are those the partners’ problems only?

A: (Rephlo) Partners do the QC on images and metadata. However, we’ve worked with them to verify that there are places on each partner website where additional input and even corrections can be made by users. Anyone can give this feedback, no matter where they are or their status .

Q: Where does NARA interact?

A: If we know of a problem, we will get involved. We can see partner QC reports of their image and metadata checks, and we provide records if re-imaging is necessary.

Partners do a 100% check.

Q: Would you like us to go to you, rather than on the ancestry, etc site?

A: We definitely want you to come to us when the archival hierarchy is affected. *(See below for further on this.)*

Q: Why do you do grayscale?

A: (Hastings) Black and white is the reference standard for almost all records. If a partner is digitizing color photographs, for example, we require color digitization.

Q: But grayscale is sufficient?

A: We’ve had only one complaint so far. One partner will give us color, if we request it.

Q: Then, why not get color?

A: We are working on that. We’re responsible for access and are considering this question. *Rephlo post-meeting note:* I have verified since the meeting that color images require three times the amount of storage as grayscale images of the same page. In addition, because of the larger files, saving and transferring time increases with color images. Those factors must be considered as we study the issue.

Q: The storage of digital images is less than storage of textual records.

A: Yes, but it’s a different kind of storage.

Q: As an example of information being lost on the digital copies: I was working with Civil War pensions on Footnote.com and I looked for an image online; I had a hard copy. I contacted Footnote.com and they discovered that they had skipped a whole roll of the

index. This poses a lot of possibilities of this happening again. A 5% quality control check may not catch that. What can be done to prevent that?

A: (Hastings) We are working as fast as we can to keep up with the microfilm being digitized. We are very careful with original records. Right now, we don't have in place a great QC check for microfilm. Let us know; we'll come up with procedures. We'll talk to Footnote.com to ask how every roll gets done. *Rephlo post-meeting note:* Please provide the information on the missing roll, so I can follow up.

Q: Could there be a more formal way to get feedback? There are thousands of people using these online records.

A: Yes, we need to work on it.

Q: I used to be a quality assurance person. We can't rely on companies. It's not in their best interest to tell you they missed something.

A: (Hastings) Human error abounds; people fail to code pages properly, miss rolls, or miss documents. It just happens. We will look into that.

Q: You say that grayscale copies are acceptable as reference copies. But, the new generation of researchers who are using the online copy as their total research copy. For historians/scholars, important information is left out. Why are you reactive and not proactive? If they want to do grayscale ok; but give NARA a color image that has a shelf life of more than one year. National Geographic has magazines on CD, but the resolution is so bad; it's worthless. And, there is no time to redo it. NARA doesn't have time to redo it either. Trying to say NARA has to have high standards -- you can't do over and over. 300 dpi....

A: (Hastings) Thank you. I'll respond as I have when you have brought it up before. We think color is fine, but not worth going back and doing the same records again. In grayscale to see if we can change that, but another thing is that we did not dispose of records when reformatted. We have the capability of producing high resolution copy, for a fee, for anyone (even for microfilmed records). We are not keeping anyone from having a color copy. Concerning the grey copies – we are not going back to do 300,000,000 pages. We will talk to them; but no one is being cut off from high resolution color copies.

Q: How do people know what problems with NARA records images are on a website?

A: People contact us. Not on website – hadn't thought of that. We can ask the partners and ARC to do that.

Q: Should we go to you?

A: (Hastings) We need to come up with a way to get the feedback.

Q: If there is a partner website problem, should we go there?

A: (Rephlo) Yes; there are methods provided there – For Footnote's website, go to the bottom right, to the feedback button. It will ask you if you want to report an image problem or another issue. The similar link on Ancestry is in the top right corner. Footnote has a social networking annotation and comment feature in the actual image viewer. If you see a name that is

incorrect, you can annotate it. The next person searching will find the corrected name. You can do the same in Ancestry on the link in the top right corner mentioned above. Our research staff can make changes in case someone doesn't have a personal computer account to do this.

In the partnership agreements, we require that records be presented in an archival context, with references to, for example, series, subseries, folder, and such (depending on the records). Because of the hierarchical structure requirement for images to appear in the archival context, we ask you to come to us with these types of corrections. We will work directly with partners to have these problems corrected.. This will help in browsing by series. An example would be ship passenger lists, which are arranged at NARA by port, then year, and then ship's name. If the year of arrival is incorrect, the ship will not be found in its correct archival context. There is a current example of that, and Ancestry.com is making the change.

Agenda Item #2 - Master Location Register (MLR) (Jim Hastings)

Over the past 10 years, there were security reasons why the MLR wasn't public. Now, there is an archival reason. We move records all the time; so, people having outdated information from the MLR, would be using the wrong location for the records requests. We aren't convinced why you can't have a copy. So we have decided to allow researchers to have copies from the MLR. But, this is important for all of you experienced researchers – please don't use the location on your lists at home. The records are constantly moving and the locations may not be valid.

Q: Is there a consistent procedure on copying finding aids?

A: You can copy them.

Agenda Item #3 – Track Record Collection (Ann Cummings)

There are three ways to accession records:

1st - Annual Move – The records center send notices in October and the agencies have three months to sign off on their willingness to transfer records to NARA custody. The transfers begin in January. Each accession sheet captures all information on the records (when it is shelved, box #, # of boxes.) Staff look at all 20,000 boxes, going back to the Holdings Maintenance System (HMS), which is taking the place of the MLR. THE MLR goes by group; the HMS has information for each box. Within 8 months, staff has created an accession dossier; updated HMS; and placed records on shelves. All transaction #s are in there. If you have any of the numbers, we can track it.

Q: There are problems with inventorying records coming in, is that going to be in ARC? Can it be in paper form in research room? Archivists don't know it in the research room.

A: Go into ARC; it should give you all of the information . But, there is not enough space in Room 200 to keep all printouts of all information.

Q: In Atlanta, there are 1,000 boxes of RG 234 that no one knows the location of – they disappeared. Would the records center accession number show up on the ARC query?

A: If the series is described in ARC, yes.

Q: Under hierarchy?

A: No. Look under the variant control number. If series is not in ARC, ask in the finding aids room.

Q: When records are declassified and moved out, you don't know where they are/it's a crap shoot. They are moved and don't show up for years in the MLR. Can something be done?

A: We are not putting anything in the MLR. All information goes into HMS. We will have the new location.

Q: The problem is there is no description; we have to keep submitting requests. It is no longer here.

A: There has to be an ID number in MLR or HMS. Someone in the finding aids room can assist you in looking it up.

Q: Are you looking into bar- coding boxes?

A: Yes; we are trying to barcode shelves and in discussion about actual boxes. We are hopeful.

Q: Is there any way to keep the old list?

A: There should be a concordance from the old one; again, in HMS, you should see that.

2nd - Quarterly transfers from Records Center. – The accessions are handled much like the annual move – records go into the HMS. We note the accessions box by box.

3rd – Direct transfers from agencies – NARA receives a “direct offer” from the agencies on the SF 258. A box list is required and is submitted with the SF 258. We sign off for legal custody. A specialist matches the records with the paperwork (an eye match). This accessioning process is done within 90 days after receiving boxes.

Q: The XC and C files from the Civil War are still a part of the Veterans' Administration; do you have any idea when they will come to NARA?

A: We are in the process of negotiating for massive amount of materials.

Q: Where will they go - DC or in St. Louis?

A: Contact me. (Ann.Cummings@NARA.GOV)

Q: Are you updating ARC or HMS?

A: Both – ARC contains series titles and descriptions. There are other elements in HMS. The ARC ID# is always in HMS.

Q: There is no access to HMS; we have to go through archivist.

A: True; we're working on that. This is the first year of the HMS and it is a learning experience for you and for us. Locations are always changing. We aren't changing the MLR at A2 – you

may use the MLR titles; but look at the actual location when you get here.

Agenda Item #4 - Equipment and maintenance issues (Diane Dimkoff)

Users were reminded to try out the test equipment at Archives 1 and offer their assessment. We will be adding more public access PCs.

Q: Why aren't you using the digital machines to copy microfilm? They were on the 4th floor in Microfilm, but were taken away. This makes no sense.

A: That doesn't make sense; we will look into it.

Q: Are there any other new things to try out? Other than the 2 at A2 and another one coming?

A: The third machine is here. The Scan Pro is going back on Monday, March 22nd. It is getting the best review so far.

Q: Is there a time line?

A: No; not for when we are buying this equipment, but we'll ask. No other construction has happened to the Archives 1 building, except the wall in the Microfilm Reading Room. No more remodeling will be done until after the Genealogy Fair. We'll ask John Bartle; but nothing has been ordered yet.

Q: Any news on getting a digitized copy of serial set?

A: Nothing yet.

Q: Are there plans to put printers on all of the public access pcs?

A: Is that an issue?

Q: On a busy day, we need a couple more printers. Will we be using the same printers/scanners?

A: No; it will all be new equipment.

Agenda Item #5 - Status of installing wireless internet access at A1 – Wi-Fi

(Diane Dimkoff) NARA's IT office has a project manager for wireless internet. Staff has mapped both buildings, including the public spaces in both buildings. Although there is no contractor or completion date yet (cost estimates of \$2-3 Million), NARA is closer than it's ever been on this undertaking.

Q: How long - months?

A: No, not months. Sharon Thibodeau stated that the infrastructure has been funded. There will be additional funding for some of our regional sites. Although the work is moving forward, no funds have been applied or purchase made yet in this project.

Agenda Item #6 - New Business

Before new business, Diane Dimkoff presented Marie Melchiori with a gift for all of her tireless efforts in organizing and providing minutes of the user group meetings over the past five years.

We will be planning the user group meeting agenda for the upcoming months. Do you have any burning issues for next month?

Q: Record pull times?

A: We will update the list from when the hours were cut.

Q: Green bags and keys?

A: Diane Dimkoff wrote to the security offices at both buildings.

- Archives 1 – Dave Adams put a second green bag key at the A1 security desk to help speed up the exit process.
- Archives 2 – There is one key in each lane at the entrance/exit area with each key available for either lane; however, under this contract, there is only one officer available at this time of day.

Q: Officers told me they do not have an extra key at A2; secondly, we went through this, with one guard being overwhelmed with 20 people in line. Another guard arrived at 4:45; one guard checked bags, and the other one checked computers.

A: So, there was a backup at the line. We'll look into it.

Q: Could the Navy manuals and War Department books be scanned? The War Department book is falling apart.

A: Staff member Rebecca Crawford noted that they have been scanned and are online.

Q: Could you send notice to users' group?

A: Yes.

One additional item – Diane Dimkoff announced the Sixth Annual Genealogy Fair will be held on April 14-15. The two-day fair is free. To volunteer to work at the fair, please contact Nancy Fortna.

Agenda Item #7 - Meeting Schedule

April 23, 2010 – A1, Room G-24

May 21, 2010 – A2, Room TBD

June 25, 2010 – A1, Room G-24

The meeting was adjourned.