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**Putnam County
Museum**

DIGITAL PRESERVATION PROPOSAL

For Review and Implementation by Board and Staff, December 2018

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Preservation Proposal**
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

- Scope and Management
- Staff Perceptions
- Hopeful Collecting and Potential Futures

Next Steps

- Questions of Transcripts and Audio Files
- Digital Scans
- File Fixity Checks

Digital Preservation Policy

- Purpose
- Mandate and Scope
- Standards
- Policy Practices
- Roles and Responsibilities

Executive Summary

The Putnam County Museum is faced with many of the same challenges as other small community cultural heritage institutions; they have a small staff and a rotating group of volunteers. I was one of those volunteers for about sixteen months from 2016-2017. However, this institution is faced with the additional challenge of having a several-years backlog of digital preservation issues. The main challenges are addressed in the Introduction section immediately below. The most pressing challenge that I addressed in this plan regards the scanning and saving process of physical materials, mostly photographs and newspaper clippings. As of the start of this process, shortly after being scanned, these digital objects are functionally unusable, while still being important and valuable to the institution and community.

I make several suggestions for rectifying the many digital preservation challenges leading up to the final preservation policy. I also suggest that the board and staff review this policy every few years to compensate for the evolving challenges and technology. For instance, I suggest using services such as Internet Archive and Wikimedia Commons because they are free services, fairly easy to use, and provide adequate server space for the institution's needs. These attributes may not always exist for the institution, and should therefore be reviewed as needed.

I ground my recommendations in both "best practices" for digital preservation and the recommendations put forth through the National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA)'s "Levels of Digital Preservation" document. This ensures that there the policy is both applicable to the organization and is based in the dominating theory of digital preservation.

Putnam County Museum Introduction to Digital Holdings

Putnam County Museum, History and Today

The Putnam County Museum, located in Greencastle, Indiana, was founded in 2003 with the mission to “collect, preserve, and interpret the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the county” (putnamcountymuseum.org). The museum was developed out of the need for the local historical society to have a safe steward for the artifacts they had collected. After a debate over the likely permanent location of the building, it is currently housed in a converted box store on the main highway through town. Today, the museum is run by an executive team of four officers, a board of seven members, an executive director, and an executive assistant. As it is a non-profit entity with few staff, the museum relies on a steady stream of volunteers from the surrounding communities, including the local liberal arts college.

Digital Records Today

Scope and Management

To build any and all of their collections, the museum relies on gift donations from those associated with the community. Their history also provides for a wide range of technologies, as their holdings include those collected by the historical society and those collected by the museum over fifteen years. Because of this, the museum holds a wide variety of digital materials. The majority of the physical digital holdings at the museum include: voice recordings on wire, reel to reel tapes, cassette tapes, 8mm film reels, home videos on VHS and transferred to CD, transparent slides, and mp3 audio recordings. Additionally, there are scans of other physical objects in mostly PDF and JPEG formats. Currently, the original forms of digital material are assigned accession numbers, preserved, and paperwork is secured to record the provenance of the object and its condition. These numbers are then entered into the museum’s database, Past Perfect. The object is stored on a shelf, in a drawer, or in a box. The scans are stored on an external drive devoted to scans. While the object is accessioned into Past Perfect, the scans are not accessioned at all. If these scans are not used shortly after creation, there is a likelihood

that these will be nearly impossible to find. The scanner on site gives files a scanned-on date as a title; if the timeframe of the scanning is unsure, it can take a significant amount of time to locate. There is a recognition that there needs to be a practice in place to more quickly and thoroughly handle these files. Additionally, there are fewer scans than what the staff would like to have.

Staff Perceptions

Staff has, and continues to, struggled with the ideal workload and the limits of a small staff and heavy reliance on volunteers. Ideally, the museum would be able to better ensure that their digital holdings are accessible to interested parties. Several years ago, staff attempted to train volunteers to transcribe some of their vulnerable digital records. However, as is common amongst volunteer-reliant organizations, those volunteers who had the most time to give to the museum were the same volunteers who were computer-hesitant.

This contributes to a near-standstill of progress with their digital content. They do not share their digital content with other local organizations or social media. Despite efforts to transcribe audio recordings, the majority of their digital objects have not been transcribed. Additionally, due to the wide array of media types, there is often no reliable playback on site; if someone wanted to access the records, they may have to find a way to access the content on their own. Further, nothing is currently backed up to another form of media.

Hopeful Collecting and Potential Futures

There are two points of hope and bright spots for the museum's potential. There have been movements to transcribe these materials. Staff applied for a grant to afford a transcription service - it was unfortunately denied. There have been some sporadic successes with training volunteers (mostly college students) to transcribe material a few hours a week. However, as college students tend to do, their schedules vary with their course load. Their proximity to a college allows that there is a steady flow of computer-ready volunteers.

Staff is also considering the moves that they would hopefully take to expand their digital holdings. As the local populations continue to age, they would like to obtain more oral histories. But transcriptions are also on their radar, to increase usability of these records. There may be a switch in policy to consider the transcript as the accessioned item, while the original media is a back-up.

Putnam County Museum Next Steps

The Putnam County Museum, located in Greencastle, Indiana, was founded in 2003 with the mission to “collect, preserve, and interpret the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the county” (putnamcountymuseum.org). The museum was developed out of the need for the local historical society to have a safe steward for the artifacts they had collected. After a debate over the likely permanent location of the building, it is currently housed in a converted box store on the main highway through town. Today, the museum is run by an executive team of four officers, a board of seven members, an executive director, and an executive assistant. As it is a non-profit entity with few staff, the museum relies on a steady stream of volunteers from the surrounding communities, including the local liberal arts college. (Full disclosure: I was a routine volunteer working with collections and outreach for the museum for a year and a half, from early 2016-mid 2017.) Collections of note for digital preservation include extensive digital scans, oral histories, and A/V materials.

The next steps for this organization are in two parts, because there are two parts to the problem: solutions moving forward, and corrections of existing materials.

Mentions of “level #” refer to the NDSA Levels of Digital Preservation.

Questions of Transcripts and Audio Files

Staff is encouraged to view transcripts as additives to the object, as is the standard practice for audio files. They add value to the audio recordings. This thought process will allow focus on oral histories and other AV materials to be on maintaining the original materials. Staff should work on “getting their ducks in a row” with the physical materials. Materials that are in readable formats (such as disks or thumb drives) should be checked for usability and transferred as soon as possible to a new medium.

Process for migration would begin with documenting and cataloging **thoroughly** every A/V material. This can be a PastPerfect report. Information must include a title, format, and physical location in the museum. This report would fulfill a level 2 requirement.

Next, staff should identify those formats which may be obsolete or no longer usable for accessibility. This list can be organized in a high, medium, and low necessity based on content. This list would fulfill level 3. Finally (and working on level 4), staff should use that list to begin file migrations. I recommend that they begin with those deemed of highest importance, while also factoring in questions of equipment availability and financial costs. Assuming there is a way to listen to the recordings, there are several ways to migrate these files. If files can be saved to a electronic drive, they should be. Staff is encouraged to utilize StoryCorps in the future. StoryCorps has a phone app that can record audio and will archive the recording at the Library of Congress's American Folk Life Center. If audio can be played, but not saved to an electronic drive, staff may look into playing the recording while using StoryCorps (note: this has not been tested, and staff should play back the StoryCorps recording as soon as possible to check viability).

Because there can be information (both content and context) on the physical material, photo documentation should always occur prior to migrating the content.

Digital Scans

Staff is encouraged to focus first on systems they can put in place moving forward before correcting and changing past practices. This is especially true with the current systems for saving and accessing scans. Before working to fix any existing problems with scans, staff is encouraged to enact a new set of practices. From this point forward, upon scanning, all files should be renamed by the scanner. I suggest the name represent the image content to make it easier to locate in the future. On the drives, these files should be easily findable. I suggest a directory hierarchy that mimics the structure of the physical collections. For example, if there is a scanned newspaper article, there would be a folder for newspaper scans, and then a breakdown by year ranges, newspaper titles, content, etc. The titles should be easily understood by everyone (no scanner names or dates) for maximum efficiency.

Next, scans should be preserved. To maximize the level-meeting, staff is encouraged to store their scans on a remote server. There are several options for this. The first two

options, Internet Archive or Wikimedia Commons, are free to use and access. They would also open the image to become open access files. (*Note: audio files can also be uploaded to both Wikimedia Commons and Internet Archive.*) Another free option is to access the Indiana hub for the Digital Public Library of America. All three options offer a free alternative to hosting your digital files in one location with similar disaster risks. If money is not a question, staff may look into Omeka.net. The \$35 per year hosting service should be sufficient for the museum's needs. Omeka would allow for staff/volunteers to create online exhibits for their collections that can be referenced on the website and on social media.

Once this is a practice, staff should work to rename, organize, and save externally the scans done prior to this practice. Would staff be able to train a volunteer or intern to do this for a few hours a week? Implementing this practice to already existing files will make future research questions, exhibits, and social media promotions of the collections easier to implement and fulfill.

File Integrity Checks

Staff is encouraged to utilize fixity check systems. AV Preserve has a free system that will email an administrator the results. Fixity checks ensure that when directories and files are altered, there is some check on what that was. As files degrade, or as more people have access to the same system, the likelihood that something will alter is increased. A fixity check will run a program to check that files and directories are the same from check to check. For an institution of Putnam County Museum's size, a fixity check would likely only need to be done about every 6-12 months. This helps ensure that digital preservation efforts last beyond these implementations.

Putnam County Museum Digital Preservation Policy

Purpose

This policy aims to implement and maintain digital preservation practices for the Putnam County Museum in Greencastle, Indiana. While this policy focuses on digital files and formats, it may also apply to digitization practices. This policy is expressly for the use of staff and volunteers at the Putnam County Museum, and does not apply broadly to all county institutions. Policy should be revisited every 3-5 years, with input from the board, to address any new concerns or new opportunities. This policy is not meant to discourage grant applications, but to provide practices to work towards full preservation using any current resources.

Mandate and Scope

According to the museum website, the organization's mission is to "collect, preserve, and interpret the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the county" (putnamcountymuseum.org). The organization has been a proactive collector in the county, and must focus on preserving the material, both physically and digitally. This policy addresses digital preservation issues by:

- a. Creating a file naming system to make files more accessible to researchers, the public, and staff.
- b. Ensure file fixity over time to preserve digital files.
- c. Create systems for removing environmental risks of files and drives.
- d. Ensure that a-c are manageable and affordable for an organization of its size.

Standards

This policy will refer to current modes of digital preservation, including National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA)'s "Levels of Digital Preservation" and prioritizations of physical and digital copies of similar/the same material.

Policy Practices

Oral Histories

Standard practice when dealing with oral histories is to treat the original format as the artifact. Recordings should be checked regularly for listen-ability, and transferred to new - and different - formats. Different formats have different life cycles, and therefore having content saved on different formats will increase the likelihood that the file survives.

Existing oral histories that can be accessed digitally will be uploaded to the Internet Archive for longer-term preservation. Future oral histories will be taken via the StoryCorps app, which automatically archives the audio with the Library of Congress.

Scanned Images

Scanned images need to be as (or more) findable than the original document.

Immediately upon scanning images on-site, staff/volunteers will:

- a. Locate and rename file with identifying information (i.e. “Red Cross Group Photo 1974”)
- b. Digitally placed in file hierarchy mimicking makeup of existing systems (i.e. “Scanned Photos/Newspapers/1950-1970).
- c. Be added to a “master list” of scanned images kept in multiple locations, per NDSA Levels of Preservation (i.e. printed copy on site replaced every quarter, digitally on the hard drive, saved digitally on a cloud-based system).
- d. Uploaded to an external, free service to preserve images (i.e. Internet Archive or Wikimedia Commons).

File Fixity

At least twice a year, staff/volunteers will create and maintain a “master list” of digital files, both digitized files and born-digital. As long as Putnam County Museum uses PastPerfect software, this can be completed (for collections data) via reports within the system. Otherwise, there should be a list created of non-collections digital files. Moving forward, file fixity checks will be completed at least once a year, at the end or beginning

of the fiscal year, via AVPreserve. After the checks, staff will search for the locations of discrepancies between the two versions.

Roles and Responsibilities

Because staff is low at Putnam County Museum, much of the work will need to be done by volunteers. Staff will be responsible for recognizing volunteers most suited to this type of work and train them on the systems and practices above. Staff will also make this policy readily available to any volunteer who may interact with or manipulate digital files. Volunteers untrained in these practices should be discouraged from working with digital materials until training to ensure both security and consistency.