Amanda Goodman

Digital Archives

November 17, 2010

The Northwest Digital Archives (NWDA) located at

http://nwda.wsulibs.wsu.edu/index.shtml is a consortium comprised of twenty-nine archives,

libraries, and museums. The Northwest states represented include "Washington, Oregon, Idaho,

Montana, and Alaska" (Northwest Digital Archives 2010). This review covers the digital archives

as it appeared on November 17, 2010 and includes information about the audience, navigation and

usability of the NWDA.

Information about the finding aids located on the website is easily accessible for the average

user. The website describes their audience in broad terms which includes researchers, K-12

educators, students, cultural heritage professionals, legalists and environmentalists, genealogists and

internal users from each member's parent institutions (Northwest Digital Archives 2010). The

archive was created to provide "enhanced access to archival collections" (Northwest Digital

Archives 2010). Users can look at primary source in materials as diverse as written documents like

correspondences, diaries, as well as artwork which includes sketchbooks and photographs.

Upon entering the digital archives, the first thing the user is greeted with is a large search

box. Users are even offered help with "what will I find?" as well as the ability to click for more

search options. On the top of the page are five items in the navigation menu: Home, Search, About,

Contact Us, Member Tools. Clicking on "Search" in the top menu brings you to a screen where the

archives can search by: keyword, browse by NWDA category, material types (Architectural

Drawings, Artifacts, Diaries, etc.) and browse by NWDA repository (Northwest Digital Archives

2010). Under the keyword search, you can click on advanced search options which uses Boolean to

look at all or specific portions of the finding aids. Content search under advanced keyword search

can be specified to look at any part of the finding aid, collection title, collection description, biography/history note, subject, folder or item title, NWDA category, or NWDA material type (Northwest Digital Archives 2010). On the main search page, in the NWDA Category, you use drop down menu on the left to pick the broad topic and then the right drop down menu will change to reflect more specific areas in response to the chosen overarching category.

The usability of the site is friendly and inviting as the top navigation is distinguished by color and the search boxes are clearly labeled. The front pages are colorful with a slideshow of photos which then do not appear on finding aids as a distraction. However, when I keyword searched, I could not discern why finding aids were returned in that particular order. One helpful feature is if you click "View Search Terms in Document," keywords that matched in that finding aid are sorted out in clickable links (Northwest Digital Archives 2010). By clicking on the link, the user is taken directly to that keyword in the finding aid. A table of contents runs down the left side of each finding aid with a keyword search function. These features make the digital archives easy to search for researchers.

NWDA is a highly accessible digital archives with a friendly, easy-to-use interface that is inviting to explore for novices but also powerful search tools for seasoned professionals. Only some primary source materials are available via the website, but the detailed finding aids helps eliminate wasting time when the repository is visited. Other interest features includes allowing users to print or email finding aids which allows a researcher to work offline. Technical aspects of the website are explained in detail under the Member Tools section with specific guidelines for the write up of finding aids (Orbis Cascade Alliance 2010). The only thing missing is a contact form in order to contact someone who is directly involved in maintaining the website. Otherwise, this is a beautiful tool for researchers.

Bibliography

Northwest Digital Archives. *Advanced Search.* 2010. http://nwda-db.wsulibs.wsu.edu/nwda-search/Advanced.aspx (accessed November 17, 2010).

—. *Guide to the Clare Turlay Newberry Papers 1910-1969.* 2010. http://nwda-db.wsulibs.wsu.edu/nwda-search/context.aspx?doc=OrUAx_681.xml&t=k&q=cat&p=0 (accessed November 17, 2010).

—. *Northwest Digital Archives--purpose and objectives.* 2010. http://nwda.wsulibs.wsu.edu/purposeandobjectives.shtml (accessed November 17, 2010).

—. *Search.* 2010. http://nwda-db.wsulibs.wsu.edu/nwda-search/ (accessed November 17, 2010).

Orbis Cascade Alliance. *Northwest Digital Archives Tools.* July 21, 2010. http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/northwest-digital-archives-tools (accessed November 17, 2010).