

# A Collaborative Approach to Newspaper Preservation

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## INTRODUCTION

When we first proposed this column in January 2020, we had no idea how much the world would change between then and the July deadline. While we have collaborated for many years on a variety of projects, the value of our collaboration has never proven itself more than in this COVID-19 reality: collaboration leverages the strengths and resources of partners to form something stronger than each. In this world of COVID-19, the collaboration between the Denton Public Library (DPL) and the University of North Texas Libraries (UNT) has allowed us to build open, online access to the first 16 years of the *Denton Record-Chronicle* (DRC).

This newspaper is the city's daily newspaper of record, and the collaboration between DPL and UNT resulted in free, worldwide research access, via The Portal to Texas History. The project was funded by a \$24,820.00 grant through the IMLS Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), awarded from September 2019 to August 2020 by the Texas State Libraries and Archives Commission (TSLAC) as part of their TexTreasures program, to digitize 24,000 newspaper pages. This project has also resulted in a follow-up collaboration to build open access to further years of this daily newspaper title, through a 2021 TexTreasures award to digitize an additional 24,000 newspaper pages. The real question, though, is what recipe made this a successful collaboration.

## BACKGROUND

The *DRC* has been the community newspaper in Denton for over 100 years. Due to the sheer amount of material, digitizing a daily newspaper with such an extensive publication run is a long-term project that requires a lot of planning, time, and funding. Since the DPL's inception in 1937, the library has endeavored to collect items related to Denton and Texas history. With community support, the library has developed a well-rounded collection of local history, Texana, and genealogical materials, all of which are housed in the Special Collections Research Area at the Emily Fowler Central Library. These materials support research, projects, and exhibits.

One major research resource is the archival collection of local newspapers, mainly the *DRC*, maintained on 752 rolls of microfilm containing issues from 1908 to 2018. Before this project, access to these newspapers was only available in the Special Collections Research Area, through microfilm readers or paid subscription services. In addition, although steps had been taken to preserve the film, many of the rolls show wear from years of use, while others have developed vinegar syndrome and soon will no longer be a usable resource. In 2018, UNT obtained publisher permission to make the *DRC* run freely accessible on The Portal to Texas History.

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Laura had been exploring different avenues to digitize this microfilm and make them freely available to the public when Ana contacted her with information about the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), which awards annual grants supported by Library Services & Technology Act funds, through the Institute of Museum & Library Services. LSTA funding is annually provided to all fifty states through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the state library determines how this funding is expended.

In Texas, LSTA funding is provided through a number of grant programs including TexTreasures, a competitive grant program for any Texas library. As described by TSLAC, the “TexTreasures grant is designed to help libraries make their special collections more accessible for the people of Texas and beyond. Activities considered for possible funding include digitization, microfilming, and cataloging.” Libraries can apply to fund the same type of project up to three years in a row, and the *DRC* project applied for \$24,820.00 in 2019 to digitize 24,000 newspaper pages, representing the earliest years of microfilm available at the Denton Public Library. To create a viable grant application DPL partnered with the Texas Digital Newspaper Program (TDNP), available through UNT’s Portal to Texas History, and decided to start first by digitizing as many early years of microfilm as grant funding could cover.

TDNP is the largest single-state, open access, digital newspaper preservation repository in the U.S., hosting just under 8 million newspaper pages at the time of this writing. In late 2018, UNT received permission from the owner of the *DRC* to include the newspaper run in the TDNP collection, which represented a very exciting opportunity for city and county researchers, as well as for the DPL. As thanks to the publisher for granting permission, UNT built access to the 2014 to 2018 PDF ePrint editions, which the TDNP preserves as a service to Texas Press Association-member publishers. After this, UNT contacted the DPL to discuss applying for grant funding. Once Laura learned that the DPL had received the 2019 award, she prepared the local planning steps necessary to collaborate with the university.

### **THE PROJECT BECOMES REAL**

The *Denton Record-Chronicle* Digitization Project Grant contract and resolution for adoption went before the Denton City Council on October 8, 2019. The City of Denton issued a press release that day, and the *DRC* also published an article announcing the project. Over the next few days the *DRC* article appeared across social media, including the City of Denton’s social media accounts, as well as through library-associated email newsletters. After the first newspapers became available on the Portal, both DPL and UNT prepared blog posts about the project, which have also appeared on social media. These blog posts fulfilled publicity requirements specified by the grant, even while offering training to researchers in how to work with the online newspaper collection.

One major convenience to this collaboration is that both organizations are in the same city. Transfer of materials was arranged by email and accomplished by a trip across town. We completed the digitization process in batches, with the first 10 microfilm rolls going to UNT on October 10, 2019, and UNT uploading the first 854 issues in December 2019. The newspapers from the first microfilm set represented 1908-1916. DPL transferred the last set of microfilm in April 2020, with dates ranging from 1917 through September 1924, shortly after which UNT completed and uploaded the grant-funded count of 24,000 newspaper pages. The estimated year given in the grant proposal that the scans would have gone through was 1938, but the page count on this newspaper proved to be much, much higher than originally estimated, and as a result, the funding only covered up to September 1924. DPL and UNT will continue their partnership by

digitizing further years of the *DRC*, through a variety of methods. As we were in the midst of preparing this column the TSLAC contacted Laura to inform her that DPL had received a second grant award, in the amount of \$24,820.00 to digitize 24,000 additional newspaper pages, which will move the newspapers through 1954.

As of July 23, 2020, the *Denton Record-Chronicle* Collection on the Portal to Texas History hosts 6,168 items and has been used 16,397 times. This includes 1,743 items that are PDF ePrint editions of the paper from 2014 to 2018, which UNT uploaded for long-term preservation and access. UNT uploads ePrint editions without a charge, and digitally preserves these through an agreement with the Texas Press Association; these PDFs were not a part of the funded grant, but they do enhance access to the collection and helped to build community interest in seeing earlier years available on the Portal. The usage of the collection skyrocketed after the early editions became available. January 2020 saw the highest number with the collection uses at 3105.

Once this project is complete, it will include over 200,000 newspaper pages. Neither DPL nor UNT has the ability to tackle this project on their own, but through collaboration, it is possible.

### RECIPE FOR YOUR OWN COLLABORATION SUCCESS

These are planning recommendations as you prepare for your own collaboration, drawn from what we've learned as we worked on this project together.

- 1. Communicate Early and Often:** Communicating needs enables partners to identify each other's strengths. Each partner will bring their strengths to the project, which in this case included actual archival materials from DPL and technological expertise on the UNT side. In addition, be prepared to communicate with local groups who need to endorse or sign off on the project, including possibly the city council, the historical commission, or the city manager.
- 2. Partner to Write the Grant:** Partnering in preparing the grant achieves two goals: first, it enables partners to develop a communication flow that will move forward throughout the collaboration; second, it ensures that partners know what each can realistically accomplish within the grant timeline. In this case, Laura wrote most of the grant application herself, but she had very specific questions that Ana had to answer, and she needed key elements from UNT, including project budget, technological infrastructure, and a commitment letter. Communicating early and partner on the grant application process ensured that there were no unexpected surprises that were within the control of either partner.
- 3. Work Together to Explain Your Partnership:** With a grant of this size, we always spoke in advance to ensure we weren't over-promising when newspapers would appear online. This also gave both Laura and Ana lead-time for promoting the project: Laura would share the years of the physical microfilm before sending them over, and Ana would walk Laura through the years that would get uploaded in a given month. This allowed them to plan publicity, training, and outreach efforts based on the dates of newspapers going online. In addition, Laura regularly communicated with Ana prior to submitting grant reports, and this was critical in preventing miscommunication going to the funding agency.
- 4. Pad Enough Time for the Unexpected:** Of course, we had no way of knowing a pandemic would occur when we began this project, and what saved us was that we'd started planning as soon as we learned about receiving the grant, rather than as soon as the grant started, which was in September 2019. Planning two months in advance put us two months ahead of schedule, and we were able to start exchanging materials as soon as the grant period

started. This gave us a few weeks of lead time so we successfully completed the project by the end of April 2020, at which point the microfilm page count had been scanned and UNT staff could remote in to complete the digitization processes. Extra time is only a benefit. If the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred, we still might have had to address technological or film deterioration problems, and we could resolve these earlier rather than later because we had given ourselves a few extra weeks of lead time.

- 5. Don't be Afraid to Explain Changes to Your Granting Agency:** If your project changes due to unforeseen circumstances, for example in our project the uploaded total of pages reached 24,000 before we digitized the entire planned date range. UNT charges a per-page digitization fee, and these newspaper issues proved to contain more pages than expected. Laura contacted the representative at TSLAC to explain the situation and offer an alternative approach to cover the digitization of the remaining years. The important thing is to keep the granting agency informed of any changes, delays, or hiccups in the project.

We are both proud of having completed this project three months before the end of the grant period, but we know that without solid communication, planning, or flexibility, the COVID-19 pandemic would have made the situation extremely difficult if not impossible. Leveraging the Portal's technical infrastructure and TDNP's newspaper expertise with the volume of material and collection expertise provided by the DPL has given us a model for success we plan to capitalize on in future projects. Best of all, in the world of COVID-19, our patrons can access these newspapers from the comfort of their own couches, without even taking off their pajamas!