The Specimen Case and the Garden: Preserving Complex Digital Objects, Sustaining Digital Projects
https://digitalhumanities.osu.edu/

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Our Place in
The Digital Preservation Landscape

JISC Project Report:
Digitisation Programme: Preservation Study April 2009

The National Archives
Case Studies in Digital Preservation

The Digital Divide:
Assessing Organisations’ Preparations for Digital Preservation

Digital Research:
Survey of Digital Preservation Practices in Canada

A Guide to Distributed Digital Preservation
A Faculty Perspective
Something Old, Something New, Everything Borrowed . . .

Innovation Often Requires
an Ad Hoc Network of Distributed
Assets, Infrastructures, Services, and Service Providers

Scanning
Manuscript Materials

Book and Paper
Conservation

(Cataloging)

On-Demand
Image Manipulation

XML Publishing

Dynamic Web
Hosting

(Preservation)

Rich Media
Streaming

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The Specimen Case and the Garden
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Fragile Vessels

- Multimodal
- Distributed
- Recomposable (e.g., XML, XSLT)
- Dynamic
- Experimental
- Collaborative
- Artisanal
- Evolving
“How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?”

- The thousand natural shocks that bits are heir to
- Changes in backend software
- Changes in backend hardware
- Technological obsolescence (e.g., support for file formats)
- Changes in policy/mission
- Institutional reorganization
- Changes in support and/or project personnel
  - Graduation, Moves, Retirement, Shuffling Off This Mortal Coil
Library perspective

• Our mission: supporting faculty research and teaching
• Our strategy: collect and preserve, mainly purchased and licensed resources (monographs, databases, special collections, etc.)

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Library perspective

• Our methodology: standards and standardization
• Our limitation: few resources to create or support production environments for unique projects
Library perspective

OUR ASSETS:

• expertise in description and preservation
• usually some sort of digital preservation environment (repository)

• the upshot: we can often work with you to add a preservation component to your project, or to add some institutional support to ongoing production environments
The Reliable Witnesses Project

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The Specimen Case and the Garden
The Reliable Witnesses Project
September 2008–December 2009

- **Spring ‘08**: Funded by NEH and IMLS as a Level II Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant
- **Fall ‘08**: Ulman “embedded” in OSU Library; Interviewed faculty, library professionals, and IT professionals
- **Fall ‘08-Winter ‘09**: Consulted with colleagues from other institutions
- **November ‘09**: Submit report to NEH
  [https://digitalhumanities.osu.edu/](https://digitalhumanities.osu.edu/)
- **Ongoing**: Analyze local case studies projects
- **Ongoing**: Develop preservation and sustainability tools and workflows
The Specimen Case and The Garden

Two-pronged approach to *preservation* and *sustainability*:

- **Specimen case** - Create a 'dead' (lower functionality) archival version of a project. Preserves all the 'pieces' along with detailed description about how they fit together. Allows access to individual files, or future recreation of entire project.

- **Garden** - Transfer ownership of a project to the institution so it can outlast the involvement of the creator; sustain original production environment as long as desireable and possible; manage modifications.
The Specimen Case: Preserving Complex Digital Objects

• Asked Louie to describe his project as **files** (JPG, TEI, XSLT, etc.), **systems** (software, hardware, etc.), and **semantic components** (journal text, contextual essays, maps, etc.)

• He created
  ✷ a File Manifest,
  ✷ a Content Manifest, and
  ✷ a Semantic Map

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- Translated Louie’s descriptions into a high-level METS document
- **METS** is a Library of Congress XML standard used to describe complex digital objects for preservation and delivery
- Includes descriptive, administrative, preservation, and structural metadata
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The Specimen Case: Preserving Complex Digital Objects

- Created an archival ‘bundle’ with
  - All project files
  - The METS document
  - A static HTML index page
- Archived it in our DSpace repository
The Specimen Case: Preserving Complex Digital Objects

Archival version of Samuel Sullivan Cox's 'Journal of a Tour to Europe' (1851)

The production version of this electronic text edition can be accessed [here](#).

Recorded in a leather-bound notebook now held in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at The Ohio State University, Samuel Sullivan Cox's "Journal of a Tour to Europe" (1851)

Description

Click [here](#) for a Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard (METS) XML document describing the electronic text edition and contextual materials.

Page Images

Use the links below to access JPEG scanned page images of the original journal manuscript.

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The Garden:
Sustaining Digital Projects’ Production Environments

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The Digital Humanities Network: It Takes a University
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• **CONNECT** faculty, students, librarians, and IT professionals who are creating or supporting digital humanities projects;

• **SUPPORT** their efforts by helping them develop robust, sustainable projects; and

• **CURATE** a set of completed projects that meet specific criteria, sustaining them beyond the involvement of their original creators.
Thanks again to the National Endowment for the Humanities, The Institute of Museum and Library Services, and our home departments of The Ohio State University for their generous support of this project.