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A Home for Lucille Vinyard's Lifework in Humboldt State University Library's Special Collections

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Introduction

The Library Special Collections are distinguished from the rest of a library's holdings because they require particular care with regard to access and preservation. These collections may be rare books, manuscripts or any other type of unique item. The Humboldt Room at Humboldt State

University (HSU) specializes in acquiring and maintaining special collections relating to the regional, cultural, and natural resources, Indigenous peoples, primary industries, and the history of Humboldt State University (library.humboldt.edu). The Lucille Vinyard collection covers these topics in depth and serves as an ideal reference for students and researchers.

The Lucille Vinyard Collection

Lucille Vinyard (1918-2015) was a leading activist whose work influenced dynamic changes in Humboldt County and the surrounding areas. As an agent of change, she helped to re-imagine what was possible for our nation, the United States Department of Interior and the National Park Service. Lucille initially helped with the establishment of Redwood National Park (RNP) in 1968. She additionally led the charge for the expansion of RNP to protect Redwood Creek watershed and the Park's inclusion with California State Parks in the years that followed. Her remarkable character helped to bring greater awareness to many environmental concerns. Her actions also helped to inspire other young activists' passions. The collection came about as Lucille Vinyard collected materials throughout her life, documenting local activism projects and special interest groups in great detail. In 2016, the HSU Library Scholar Internship began digitizing this work to provide online access to the collection through the Omeka Digital Exhibit Platform. The Lucille Vinyard collection can be accessed at vinyard.omeka.net. The collection's value lies both in its size and the arrangement of files. The collection includes countless newspaper articles, daily journal entries, letters, photographs, legal documents and historical publications. Lucille was meticulous at note taking on subjects and themes within her work. These details reflect significant events in conservational engagement throughout the North Coast area. HSU maintained the handwritten notes and other markers (geographical, temporal and thematic) indicated by Lucille within the collection. The time period of the files ranges throughout her lifetime, with the majority of her work falling between the 1960s to the early 2000s.

Digitalization of a Legacy

Efficient Processing to Creative Design

Processing refers to the acquisition, inventory, and description of a collection. For the Lucille Vinyard Collection, the process began with acquisition of paperwork and the physical movement of the work from the original location of Lucille's home to the Humboldt State University campus located in Arcata, California. The rest of the processing was tedious and time consuming, and involved a detailed inventory at five tiered levels of collection organization. These are the repository, collection, series, file, and item levels. The broadest level of organization is the repository, which is the total holdings of an institution. In the case of Humboldt State University, this is the Library Special Collections. Within the repository, the collection level of organization binds all of the materials in the Lucille Vinyard Collection.

Each individual, report, letter, and map is an item which must be described and documented. In reality, deciding what level to process a collection is more related to constraints of funding and physical space. For example, the decision to process the Lucille Vinyard Collection to a series level was based on the size of the collection, in conjunction with the goal of providing a detailed research guide and making the collection speedily available.

In a collection, a series is a group of files and/or documents that are maintained as a unit. The files within a series may be arranged alphabetically, chronologically, numerically, or by subject. Lucille Vinyard had multiple methods of organization. She had many files in series by subject and also kept chronological files relating to her administrative work as Secretary for the Sierra Club North Coast Chapter.

The Memory of Place: Provenance and Original Order

Although a digital collection is presented in a virtual space, preserving a fully contextual narrative requires attention to the physical spaces occupied by the collection. Provenance refers to the practice of keeping the collections of different creators separate. In theory, the organization of a collection will be similar to how the creator originally kept it. Keeping the collection in original order is easier said than done. Lucille Vinyard kept many organized files, but there were also miscellaneous documents in piles waiting to be filed. In a digital archive, the location information may be available, but the order may change depending on the user influenced search terms and sorting preferences.

A Digital Exhibit Platform Named Omeka

Omeka is a free, open source web-publishing platform used to display digital exhibits. The site works as a functional database to store information about the physical items in a collection. These database items can be curated into rotating exhibits and shared with anyone on the web.

Transforming Physical Archives into Digital Form

Digitizing an archive requires the physical object to be scanned into a virtual format. Although the process of scanning an object from the Lucille Vinyard Collection was straightforward, it was a time consuming process. Without a complete collection inventory, the team of interns had no way of estimating how many items would be available to scan. As an example of best practices, an intern who was enthusiastic about scanning would write down operational instructions specific to the scanner to help identify the best settings for future reference. Next, to prepare the digital space of the item, interns would change the dpi, color, and reflective quality settings on the scanner. One advantageous aspect to prep-work we found in our digitization process of the Lucille Vinyard Collection was the ability to preview and scan every item as a JPEG or TIFF. In doing so, our team was able to define how the item would appear on the screens of digital scholars and online researchers, and how the item could be identified (e.g. title, keyword, description of research item).

After the digitization preparations were developed, our team extended most of their time and efforts toward scanning items. Luckily, as with many enriching and repetitive activities, the more experience an individual/group has with a job, the faster they will excel toward finishing that job. For example, the activity of scanning one 12-month journal, handwritten by Lucille Vinyard, equated to eighteen hours of scanning and prep-work. The journal scanning process eventually decreased to four hours of work. Furthermore, scanning methods and equipment depend heavily on the shape and vulnerability of the object. Photos and documents use a standard scanner. Slides need a slide holder to prevent direct heat and warping and require the removal of the lid cover of the scanner to allow light to show through. Throughout this process, time and care was required for the works being made digital.

Metadata is Information About Information

Because air and light cannot pass through virtual items, the items must be enveloped in words and information, so that a collection can seem authentic and desirable. Metadata is descriptive information about exhibit items. Our intern team crafted standardized terms and phrases for nearly every item that Lucille researched, with the goal of anchoring her research with data so that the collection may be searchable with ease. For example, the digital exhibit platform Omeka.net has a fillable metadata menu which appears alongside every digitized item. A highly collaborative element in our digitization process was the creation of a metadata application profile. Our team developed a comprehensive information profile over the course of three 2-hour meetings.

Access for a Public Audience

In order to gain insight, our team networked with local persons to develop a working knowledge behind Lucille as human and compiled her research into the platform on Omeka.net. Next, we published the myriad of materials on the web so that local researchers, and those at a distance, could interact with this powerful collection.

One focus our team developed alongside our collection management was how researchers might use the collection in their exploration. We found that researchers' interests help decide what items should be featured in exhibits, and what layout may be most user-friendly.

A Gift for the World Community*Preservation and Efficiency: The Benefits of Digitizing an Archive*

The digitization of physical archives is now an essential tool for the preservation of archival information. In the past, accessing archival materials meant long hours of travel and many hours searching through an archive. Having a collection inventory available allows researchers to search through potential useful items. It may also allow them to better plan their physical trip to see and handle the collection accordingly in-person.

Repeated use of archival materials exposes them to elements and fatigue. Having a digital copy of research items means less wear and tear on the physical objects, making the artifact available to use in research for an extended time. In the event of a disaster where physical materials are destroyed, there might be a chance that a digital copy can be used to recover and reconstruct some aspect of the physical information and the object itself.

The Lucille Vinyard Collection is published on Omeka.net and the World Wide Web. It is integral that the collection be used and view count be increased. With this work now published on Omeka, publicizing it is important so that others know the research is accessible online. There are many ways to publicize an online collection. Social media is a great way to make works known. Adding a link to the Omeka site from other supportive research domains is encouraged. Furthermore, any professors to whom the work is relevant to the Lucille Vinyard collection, should be notified. All are welcomed to utilize this very special collection, finally home at HSU.



Photo of Lucille Vinyard at Tree Planting for Humboldt Redwoods State Park

February 15, 1976

Image Credit: Humboldt State University Special Collections

About the Authors

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