

Lesbian Herstory Archives Digital Archive Creation Project Final Report

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INFO665: Projects in Digital Archives

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Section 1: Introduction, Achievements, and Work Completed

For our contribution to the Projects in Digital Archives ongoing project, our team, consisting of Elliott Hadwin, Beth Rudig, and Jeffrey Greggs, was tasked with the audiovisual digitization of a box of unorganized tapes from the Lesbian Herstory Archives. These materials were not cataloged or documented in LHA's system and they did not have deeds of gift or donor agreements from any of the creators featured in the tapes. Our team therefore made the decision during appraisal to digitize the entirety of the materials, since the collection was only one box, and the content was a relative mystery to us. The collection consists of ten ¼-inch open-reel audio tapes, two Sony Video-8 video tapes, one Fuji Betacam video tape, and two ½-inch reel-to-reel EIAJ Type 1 videotapes, with materials dating from the mid-1970s to 1995.



½ inch reel-to-reel EIAJ Type 1 videotape

We could not digitize the EIAJ Type 1 video ourselves due to equipment limitations, so we sent these tapes out to George Blood, a trusted archival digitization service recommended by Professor Anthony Cocciole. George Blood's team cleaned, digitized, and delivered us the files for those tapes, which was a process and learning experience with challenges in and of itself, elaborated on later in this report. In order to digitize the remainder of the collection, we followed best practices gleaned from readings assigned to us this semester and mastered the operation of various hardware and software including BlackMagic video capture, Audacity, a Sony Video-8 camcorder, Pioneer reel-to-reel tape decks, and a Betacam player.



Elliot inserting tape into the Pioneer reel-to-reel player

After the physical digitization of the video and audio tapes was completed, our team's next step was to create derivative and fair use versions of our master files. We completed these file conversions and clips in accordance with best practices and stored all of our resulting files in

the class Google Drive, linked to a Google Sheet displaying our master, derivative, and fair use files with accompanying metadata. We created fair use clips of the files because of the lack of copyright information we were given, as the materials did not have donor forms or documentation of copyright transfer.

Finally, we collaborated with the Curatorial team and created clips of high interest moments in the audio files featuring poet Judy Grahn for a digital exhibition their team completed for the Omeka website. This entailed Beth and Elliot editing small clips from the Judy Grahn audio tapes for use in the digital exhibition “Voices of the Women’s Press Collective”. Our experience was positive throughout the project, and we were successful in achieving our desired outcome in that by the end of semester we digitized every tape in the collection, including the outsourcing of two open reel video tapes, created master and derivative files, and finally collaborated with and assisted the other class groups in making these materials accessible to the public through the [Herstories Omeka website](#). The finished digitized collection encompasses approximately 2 hours of audio, and 3 hours and 25 minutes of video.

Section 2: Challenges

The audiovisual digitization team faced several challenges, some minor and some more troublesome. Ultimately, we were able to negotiate each obstacle successfully, or at least in a way that did not harm our goals or the materials we digitized. The first challenge—perhaps setback is the more accurate term—arose during our first digitizing session. We thought we could speed up the process if we let audio reels record during class time, thereby doubling our output for the day. We did not consider the fact that there may be deterioration to the tapes. So, to our unpleasant surprise, we discovered the tape Jeffrey was digitizing had been broken and snapped by continuous spooling on the reel-to-reel deck once the tape ended. There were many small pieces of tape lying fragmented on the machine and the floor around. Fortunately, the destroyed tape was at the very end of the reel and did not contain any content – the recording was acceptable.

Another early challenge was posed to us by a lack of hardware. We wanted to connect a Sony Digital Handycam to the Black Magic machine in order to digitize the Sony Video 8 tapes. Convinced that we had all the right equipment, we futzed around with cables for nearly the entire group work period of class one afternoon. Finally, Professor Cocciole realized that we didn't, in fact, have the correct audio jack. He was able to locate one on Amazon, and we were able to resume recording successfully the subsequent week once it arrived. Another dispiriting, if ultimately trivial, let-down occurred when the jack finally arrived. We had recorded most of an hour's length of tape when we realized the computer we were recording on didn't have sufficient storage space for the video. The solution, of course, was easy. Make space on the hard drive and re-record. But we probably could have used our time more efficiently.



It's cables all the way down: The Video8 digitization setup

Perhaps the biggest challenge we faced throughout the semester was the part that didn't—couldn't—take place in-house. We had two ½" reel-to-reel EIAJ Type 1 videotapes, but no means of playback. Professor Cocciole suggested we reach out to George Blood, LP, an A/V preservation service, that he suspected possessed the required equipment. Initial communications were promising, and plans were made for a staff member to pick up the tapes while on a swing through Manhattan. Unfortunately, the pick-up did not go as planned. Although the driver alerted Jeffrey that he was in the area of the Pratt Manhattan Center, he never actually went in to get the

tapes from reception. We were able to ship the tapes to George Blood, and we got our digitized files right at the Thanksgiving week deadline we had set, so everything worked out in the end. However, we never did find out exactly why the driver failed to pick up the tapes, and that underscores a running problem with communication on their side. There were a number of times where cc's were left off email responses, or there was a delay in response, or even a week or two of radio silence. George Blood is unquestionably a professional outfit; the issues that arose are simply a reminder that introducing more variables to a project often leads to unforeseen difficulties.

We hit one final little snag while making fair use copies (themselves made necessary by the general uncleanness on copyright/lack of donor forms/lack of info, which was more of a problem for the curatorial team). Although all three of us had used QuickTime to trim other fair-use copies from mezzanine copies, something about the encryption of the George Blood-digitized Alix Dobkin video prevented us from employing this method. We all experimented with a number of other programs with no success, until Elliot was finally able to make the cut using Adobe Premiere.

Section 3: Discussion of Decisions Made

For the open reel audio tapes, our group used a reel-to-reel audio player connected to a Blackmagic UltraStudio 4K converter. Using Audacity, we captured the audio to the archival best practices recommendations for preservation reformatting analog audio: 96 kHz sampling rate and a 24-bit depth (Cocciolo, 2017, Fig. 7-5). Then, from Audacity we exported the audio to a master file in the WAV format and uploaded the master files to Google Drive so all the project groups could have easy access to the file. Later, we downloaded copies of the master files to convert to MP3 format access copies, then created fair use clips and clips for exhibition from the MP3 files. The fair use clips were created for all the audio files because the copyright determination was unclear, so we chose to create derivative clips that were 10% of the total duration.

We decided to outsource the digitization of the open reel video because we lacked the equipment to play or convert this format. The company we used for the digitization (George Blood) was chosen based on reputation within the field. The main choice associated with this process was giving George Blood the file names we wanted him to use on the digital files, and for those we kept the file names in line with the rest of our file naming conventions. The two other types of video formats in this collection (Sony Video 8 and Fuji Betacam SP) were also digitized using a Blackmagic UltraStudio 4K converter. The Betacam format was fed into the Blackmagic converter using a Betacam player, and the Sony Video 8 used a digital camcorder for playback. Using the Blackmagic software, we captured the video using the recommended best practices for digitizing analog video: 10-bit uncompressed YUV video. From there, we exported the video from the Blackmagic software in a .MOV wrapper. The .MOV file format was kept as the preservation master files, and after uploading the files to Google Drive, we used

copies to create .MP4 derivative files for access copies. Those access copies were later used to make fair use copies clipped to 10% of the total duration. For the file naming conventions, our group used the unique identifier assigned by the Lesbian Herstory Archives, wherever possible. The exception to this was T75_5_3, tape 3 of the DOB Ladder Workshop, which had some flaws the first time we digitized it, so the final file name has “corrected” appended to it. For the media without an LHA assigned identifier, we created the file names from the titles on the tape box itself.

Section 4: Conclusions and Future Directions

While the analog media itself has been successfully digitized, there is still further work that could be done with these materials to maintain them and improve access. Although not directly related to the process of digitizing the analog materials, the undetermined copyright status of the materials affected the access and derivative copies we made from the digital files. Although fair use access copies are a good temporary solution, knowing the copyright status of the materials could make these materials more widely accessible online in the long term. The copyright status of some of these materials is still undetermined, and might be particularly complicated for the tapes with nested rights (i.e. poetry readings at the LHA). However, because the copyright holder has been determined for the majority of the materials, with more time it might be possible to get in contact with the holder and obtain use permissions. Currently, the Omeka site includes fair use clips for undetermined copyright materials, ideally in the future the entire collection will be accessible in full digitally, instead of only having the option of accessing the materials in person. Additionally, if all the materials have copyright firmly held with Lesbian Herstory Archives, they can also utilize these materials in exhibitions, events, and other applications more freely and without concern.

We undertook this project in a class on digital preservation, so perhaps the most basic question we have for the future of the material we digitized is “How will these files be maintained/preserved?” A first step in this direction would be to follow the 1-2-3 rule. For ideal digital preservation, there should be three copies of the project stored on two different media, with one copy offsite. Currently, the files are stored only offsite in the cloud, on Google Drive. Some of the video files are very large, but they will fit on an external hard drive. Lesbian Herstory Archives will most likely want to have the files stored on a hard drive for onsite access

and storage. There may be some space problems storing the video on a local host, as we ran into some problems with keeping files on the local hard drives of the computers we were using during the digitization process due to file size. Another direction to consider would be creating a digital preservation plan for long term storage, utilizing tools such as checksums for the masters in order to perform future fixity checks that guarantee the authenticity of the file. Given our efforts, that's something we'd like to preserve.

Appendix A: Screenshot of Google Sheet Inventory Spreadsheet

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	Title	LHA Catalog Number	Digitized File Name	Format	Date	Run Time (hh:mm:ss)	Derivative Files	Fair Use clips for website	Notes	Photo			
2	Alix Dobkin at [Lesbian ...]	Tape 1	AlixDobkin76_1.mov	Sony Open Reel Video Tape	2/7/76	0:32:52	AlixDobkin76_1.mp4	AlixDobkin76_1_fair_use.mp4	Title illegible	N/A			
3	Alix Dobkin at [Lesbian ...]	Tape 2	AlixDobkin76_2.mov	Sony Open Reel Video Tape	2/7/76	0:33:00	AlixDobkin76_2.mp4		Title illegible	N/A			
4	DOB - Ladder Workshop												
5	Wendy Hayes												
6	Lesbian History Exploration												
7	DOB - Ladder Workshop	Tape 1	T75 5/1	T75_5_1.WAV				T75_5_1.mp3	T75_5_1_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TpRmUjBq3aMSU
8	Wendy Hayes												
9	Lesbian History Exploration	Tape 2	T75 5/2	T75_5_2.WAV				T75_5_2.mp3	T75_5_2_fair_use.mp3	Has permission note on the back			https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mY4RVVDzd8Efn5
10	DOB - Ladder Workshop												
11	Wendy Hayes												
12	Lesbian History Exploration	Tape 3	T75 5/3	T75_5_3-corrected.WAV									https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RKuppHJjDfGHa
13	Women's Press Collective												
14	Workshop	Tape 1	T75 5/4	T75_5_4.WAV				T75_5_4.mp3	T75_5_4_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NrpRaDHyTvkOa
15	Women's Press Collective												
16	Workshop	Tape 2	T75 5/5	T75_5_5.WAV				T75_5_5.mp3	T75_5_5_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QFxueB2Wrv1Xv9t
17	Women's Press Collective												
18	Workshop	Tape 3	T75 5/6	T75_5_6.WAV				T75_5_6.mp3	T75_5_6_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/12TQ0DM1JNdpArY
19	Women's Press Collective												
20	Workshop	Tape 4	T75 5/7	T75_5_7.WAV				T75_5_7.mp3	T75_5_7_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/17eA7msmq1efnv
21	Women's Press Collective												
22	Tails Out	Tape 5	T75 5/8	T75_5_8.WAV				T75_5_8.mp3	T75_5_8_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/18Fw3G2TELBx9
23	Judy Grahn												
24	Tails Out	Tape 3	T75 5/11	T75_5_11.WAV				T75_5_11.mp3	T75_5_11_fair_use.mp3	Note on back says "we do not have Judy's permission. You can write her c/o the Women's Press Collective"			
25	Sidney Abbott at LHA	Tape 1 of 2		1995-05-19-sidney-abbott-001.mov	Sony Video 8	5/1995	0:15:10	1995-05-19-sidney-abbott-001.mp4	T75_5_11_fair_use.mp3				https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TpRmUjBq3aMSU
26	Sidney Abbott at LHA	Tape 2 of 2		1995-05-19-sidney-abbott-002.mov	Sony Video 8	5/1995	0:46:45	1995-05-19-sidney-abbott-002.mp4	1995-05-19-sidney-abbott-001_excerpt.mp4				https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G1vfuJqfVdJN2dJ
27	Sidney Abbott at LHA												https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yCdQbI-570RYD
28	Berkshire Conf / Panel Discussion												
29	Martin Lyon, Gittings, Lois Johnson												
30	Stills & Cleo Glenn Snapshots	Tape 2 of 2	MV-22 & MV-41	MV-22MV-41	Fuji Betacam SP	June 1987	0:27:57	MV-22MV-41_1.mp4	MV-22MV-41_1_excerpt.mp4	LHA / DOB Video Project - confirmed LHA holds copyright Berkshire Conf runs 13:00 and Snapshots runs 14:00			https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TwuOvdDDxocCsndg

References

Cocciolo, A. (2017a). Analog Video Collections. In *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists).

Cocciolo, A. (2017b). Audio Collections. In *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists).