Spurlock Museum | Summary Report

I. Interview and Initial Information

After meeting with Jennifer White and Jessica Followell initially, my understanding of the nature of the proposed project was:

> There is an existing backlog of material, including correspondence, event information, and photographs that document a history of museum events. Much of this collection of materials is relative to "The Guild," an organization of museum supporters that is no longer in operation. You essentially want to organize these materials in a manner that can be descriptive and historically accurate. A major hurdle of this goal is that much of the material is unidentified, particularly photographs with unknown subjects. This collection may or may not become a sort of unofficial archive of the museum's history.

II. Objectives and Learning Outcomes as Defined by Jennifer White

Description of the steps:

a) Identify images in DMC Collection that are most relevant to guild members.
b) Catalogue un-catalogued images that may be relevant to this project.
c) Identify the types of information that guild members might be able to provide in relation to the fields in the DMC.
d) Create a way to present images to guild members in a way that will be most conducive to encouraging their participation and to collecting data about the images.
e) Draft a letter that introduces the project and invites and encourages participation from guild members.
f) Work with guild members to implement data collection.
g) Enter the information into the DMC database records.
h) Write an evaluation of the project as well as critique the current system for management of the Museum's archival collection of images and recordings known as the Documentary Multimedia Collection.

Learning Outcomes:

a) Learn how the Spurlock Museum manages, stores, catalogues and documents its archival collection of images and recordings known as the Documentary Multimedia Collection.
b) Apply knowledge of archival and information management best practices to determine a means for contacting, sharing images from the Museum’s archives, collecting data about the images from a select group of individuals connected with the Museum, and capturing and preserving that information within the Museum’s documentation systems.
c) Reflect on the project to identify what worked well and what didn’t work well, and ways it could have been better. Reflect on how images are managed at the Spurlock, identify limitations within the current system, and provide recommendations for improvements.

III. Methodology to Achieve Project Steps

a) Working with the photographs and databases

The first step in the project was learning how to navigate the Spurlock databases. My permissions were set to allow me access to the Artifacts, People, and Digital Multimedia databases. Accessing the artifacts database was necessary as a stipulation of descriptive metadata within the Spurlock database is that whenever an artifact is present in a digital image, that information is recorded in the record. Access to the people database allowed me to view already identified museum Guild members so that I could identify them in DMC images, and also search DMC for portrait photos of Guild members to link to the People database.

Next we developed a series of both simple and complex database queries in an attempt to identify any records that were in some way associated with the Guild. Simple searches involved things like searching for the word "Guild" in the title field, or "Guild Member" in the people type field. Simple searches yielded the greatest number of results. But in an effort to compile as large a list as possible, the second search phase grew in complexity. An example of a complex search would be "Guild" *not* in title, but "Groundbreaking" in title, "Guild Member" in people type, but blank field for "People" description. By developing a series of both simple and complex searches, often building successive searches based on results of the previous ones, a total number of 152 images were identified as being good candidates for the project.

Before asking for the help of the Guild members, as much cross referencing as possible was performed based on the results of the database searching. The more I viewed the collection we created, the more intimately familiar I became with the people, places, and things in the collection. As time passed I was able to update many records based on things like what people were wearing, particular floral arrangements in the background, a particular auction item, and so on.

The key element that sparked this project for Spurlock was an envelope of 51 3x5, 4x6, and 5x7 photographic prints that were donated to the museum. The provenance of where these images came from remains a bit murky, but they are believed to have come from a prior Guild member. I cataloged, scanned, and filled in descriptive metadata fields for these 51 photos, using whatever information I had gleaned from images already existent in the Spurlock databases.

b) Types of information and image display for review

The fields I updated for the entire collection over time included: Cataloged Title, Incoming Numbers, Other Numbers, Collection, Format, Sequential Number, Visual Description, Date Image Taken, Artifacts, People, People Type, Country, Region/State, City/Settlement, Room, Building, Notes on Image, Digital Image File Type, Thematically Related Images, Name of Creator, Copyright Owner, Date Received, Source Status, Name of Source, Credit Line.

The fields determined to be the most likely that Guild members could help us identify were: Date Image Taken, People, People Type, Location, Room, Building, Name of Creator. We discovered that the Guild members who helped us had little recall for dates and creators, but they were tremendously helpful in identifying people, events (which often led to title changes), and locations.

One great challenge of the project was figuring out how to present images to the Guild members. Initially we though we could just group images and lay them out on a table, but as the database searches yielded more and more results, that scenario became untenable. We also considered sending members images electronically, but that presented two challenges: 1) we couldn't be certain of the technology proficiency of the members, and 2) the sheer number and subsequent file sizes of the images. Jennifer decided the best solution would be to utilize one of the museum's projectors, opening up the database on a laptop, and scrolling through images one by one with the Guild members. This solution proved to be remarkably effective.

c) Discovery and engagement of the Guild members

After reaching out to several Museum staff members, Kim Sheahan, the Museum's Assistant Director of Education, and Karen Powell Flesher, Business/Administrative Associate, proved to be invaluable resources. Karen provided me with a 2014 electronic directory of Guild member emails, and Kim advised me on which members would likely be helpful and willing to participate.

The initial members I reached out to were: Maureen Berry, Marguerite McGuire, Barb Peckham, Pola Triandis, Claire Skaperdas, Anna Merritt, and later, Joy Thornton-Walter and Anastasia (Stacy) Economy. Pola had moved to California, Marguerite was initially responsive but was unavailable at dates and times that were convenient for others, but she did give suggestions of who she thought could be most helpful. Maureen Berry did not participate but also offered suggestions. Barb Peckham's email address was invalid, and later I learned from Kim Sheahan that the last time she had contact with Barb she appeared to be in the early stages of dementia. Claire, Anna, Joy, and Stacy all participated in the project.

Email text I sent to prospective participants:

> Dear XXXX:
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> Greetings!
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> My name is Kelly and I am a practicum student working at the Spurlock Museum with Jennifer White in the Registration department. As a long time member of the Museum Guild, I'm contacting you today to see if I can enlist your help in a project I'm working on.
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> The Museum is in possession of images that we believe may be directly related to the history of the Museum Guild, along with many that are relative to the history of the Museum itself. It is our belief that due to your long association with the

Museum, you might be able to help us identify missing information, for example, dates, people, and events. Gathering this information would be extremely helpful in documenting the history of not only the Museum but the Guild itself, and all that organization helped to accomplish in the years it was active.

Would you be willing to come to the museum for a visit to look at some of these images and see if they might jog your memory? I'd like to plan a handful of meetings with you and several other Guild members that I'm also reaching out to. It is also possible that, if you are open to it, I could also send some images to you electronically. If traveling to the Museum is difficult for any reason, I could also try and make arrangements to come to you instead.

Think it over, and let me know what you decide. I thank you in advance for your time and participation. Thank you for your years of service to the Museum Guild.

d) Working with the Guild members and organization of images

Two sessions occurred, the first on April 3rd with Claire Skaperdas and Anna Merritt, and t second on May 1st with Joy Thornton-Walter and Stacy Economy. Since we wanted to make the experience as pleasurable as possible and feel less like a cumbersome task, we provided coffee and light refreshments in a secluded/private board room in the lower offices of the museum. Each session lasted approximately 3 hours, and the participants seem to have enjoyed their respective "trips down memory lane" as well as engaging with each other and Jennifer and myself, telling stories and engaging in what can only be described as nostalgic reflection.

The task of organizing images in a useful and efficient way was probably the most challenging aspect of this project. Equally challenging was a way for me to record their thoughts and the information we sought in an efficient manner, as it was hard to take notes, move at a reasonable pace, pay attention to them and also not feeling like I was interrupting all at the same time.

The way I organized images for the first meeting was to group the images into the following categories:

Claire: all images with Claire Skaperdas missing most, if not all, other fields of other information.
Group A: Known Auction Event lacking other details, such as year, people, or building location
Group B: Guild Hippo Auction, what IS the hippo auction? Event lacking one or more other details
Group C: Digital images from 2016 Guild President's Reception. Confirm that this was, in fact, what the event was, identify all unidentified people.
Group D: Identified as "Guild" in people metadata, but unconfirmed. Event or other details known but many not clarified for certain
Group E: Acquired, spawned the Identification project. Guild activity assumed, but very few details known.
Group F: Acquired, spawned the Identification project. Guild activity assumed, but very

few details known, unidentified people prominent in the photo.
Update: image can be updated if details of the other thematically related images have been acquired

This last category were the bulk of images that I knew could be updated based on information gleaned from other thematically related images, for example, if photographs were of the same groups of people on the same day, or images of what I knew were all the same event, such as a Guild auction in a particular year. The total number of images we reviewed with Claire and Anna was 77.

After some failure on my part to keep up with note taking while the members were talking (which I will discuss in greater detail in the next section), I adjusted my strategy for our second meeting with members.

The way I organized images for the second meeting was to group the images into the following categories:

Group G: only date and creator unknown, all other descriptive data verified
Group H: one or more unidentified people and date and creator unknown
Group I: one or more unidentified people, date and/or creator known
Group J: date, creator, and location unknown
Group K: part of groups H or I, but very large groups of people are shown or many people with their backs to the camera where it is unlikely to identify all.
Stacy: Stacy is in the image, but date, creator, and other people are unidentified
Stacy 2: Stacy is in the image, but date and creator ONLY are unknown
Joy: Joy is in the image, but date, creator, and other people are unidentified
Joy 2: Joy is in the image, but date and creator ONLY are unknown
Joy location: people known, but date, creator, and location unknown

Groups G and K were for my own reference, Group J was renamed as "Joy location" since there was only one item with that criteria. Groups H, I, and the Stacy and Joy created categories were the ones shown in our second meeting, totaling 71 images.

IV. Evaluation and Learning Outcomes

a) Evaluation

Overall, I would say this project was a terrific success. I feel that both the pre-existing database images and the 51 newly ingested images have far greater descriptive detail now then they did initially. Having done the project on a small scale (small in that we only met with four respondents and the collection size was relatively small), it could stand as a test case and be a model for future projects where engaging museum patrons and supporters is part of the identification process.

One of the things that I think made this project a success for me personally (and I hope for Jennifer White) is that it was innovative. Each step in the workflow called upon us to be creative in our approach, and encouraged me to "think outside of the box" in terms of how to best manage disparate sources if information, a skill I'm sure I will continue to

develop in my career as a librarian or archivist.

In terms of setback or things I could have done differently, there are three things I can address specifically. For the grouping of the images, although I made improvements to grouping categories between the first and second sessions, I still feel like I fell a bit short. My categories were often too broad or too narrow, albeit I was often constrained by the fact that, oftentimes, each image was unique in terms of the unidentified fields. That was one of the biggest challenges; the project would have been easy if categories were as simple as, "these are all the images that are missing only a date, these are all the images that are missing only people names," and so on. But by and large each image was missing more than one piece of information, and rarely were groups missing all the same pieces. The end result though, however inaccurate my methods were, is that now the majority of the images we started with *are* only missing date and creator information.

Secondly, I wish that I had had the time to develop some sort of a statistical analysis, whereby I was able to determine the percentage of information missing in the beginning and at the end. I would have liked to have had a quantifiable measure of something like, "these records had 35% of their descriptive data and now they are 89% completed." Although, as new images continued to be identified with each phase of the project, I'm not sure that would have been possible.

Lastly, my one big "fail" was my idea to update records in the database on the fly while we were meeting with the Guild members. That process miscarried for three reasons:
1. Since my initial groupings were so broad, oftentimes I got a bit confused about what information I had versus information I still needed, so I either didn't ask the right question, or they gave me information I already had. Sometimes that worked to my advantage if a name or location was in question and the Guild member confirmed something for me. But more often I just rushed ahead to the next slide, not really knowing if I had garnered something useful or not until later.
2. I had not factored in that with each database record update, I needed to make an administrative note detailing the nature of my changes. That alone would have made the process time consuming and a little boring for our participants.
3. There was no way for me to keep up with a casual conversation while editing the database, which requires concentration and paying attention to small details. It only took a few records for me to abandon my "on the fly" idea and start furiously scribbling notes on a legal pad instead. Even then, it was hard to keep up, and I am certain there were several details I missed in an effort to push on at a reasonable pace.

b) Learning outcomes

I believe that I have successfully satisfied the outcomes laid out in my Practicum contract at the beginning of the project. I feel that I have learned a great deal about how the Spurlock Museum manages, stores, catalogues and documents its archival collection of images. I also believe that I was able to successfully apply my own knowledge of archival best practices as they relate to capturing and preserving descriptive metadata. The only recommendations that I would make to the museum after completion of this project is that they 1. consider (and I'm sure they already do) either investigating methods or FileMaker Pro plugins or coding scripts that can be used to batch edit records, or 2.

consider migrating from FileMaker Pro to something more current in museum database management systems, such as Argus or CollectiveAccess.