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The South Carolina Digital Library (SCDL): What is it and where is it going?

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Abstract

Kate Boyd, Heather Gilbert, and Chris Vinson give updates and information on the South Carolina Digital Library project (SCDL).

Keywords

South Carolina Digital Library (SCDL), digital collections

The South Carolina Digital Library (SCDL): What is it and where is it going?

By Kate Boyd, Heather Gilbert, and Chris Vinson

Over ten years ago, a number of librarians, archivists, and other information professionals gathered at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to discuss the idea of a shared digital collections portal that would be inclusive of all cultural institutions in South Carolina. This group envisioned a "one-stop shop" for digitized, archival content—a searchable, publicly accessible web resource that permitted researchers, students, educators, and any member of the general public to discover materials relevant to their research and interests in one location. They envisioned this project with regional associations, services, and support, a way to share the burden of providing a statewide platform without actually having robust, statewide funding. At the time, they derived their inspiration from the Colorado State Digital Library, the first of its kind in the country. Today, nearly all states participate in a type of statewide or regional repository of digitized collections, each funded and managed differently[1].

This idea eventually germinated into the South Carolina Digital Library[2] (SCDL). SCDL is a freely accessible, centralized search portal that links digitized primary resources from over fifty institutions around the state[3]. SCDL provides access to over a hundred thousand images, digitized by its partner-institutions, sourced from the irreplaceable primary source materials that are housed in their unique repositories. SCDL also serves as the South Carolina Service Hub for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), a partnership that makes these collections available to a national audience.

Funding Past & Present

The University of South Carolina (USC), Clemson University, College of Charleston, Georgetown County Public Library, and the South Carolina State Library (SCSL) have provided the majority of funding for the South Carolina Digital Library. SCDL is also supported by countless other people and institutions. Librarians, archivists, and curators across the state have given their time and energy over the years to attend educational workshops and meetings on and best practices, to ensure consistency across the project. Without the assistance and help of these information professionals, SCDL would not have grown into the resource it is today.

The SCSL and the Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries (PASCAL), a statewide academic library consortium, have been key supporters of SCDL since its inception. Early on, PASCAL hosted a series of meetings for interested parties to discuss the standards and best practices required for a project of this nature. PASCAL also investigated software options for a statewide digital repository. The State Library has

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[1] Library of Congress State Digital Resources Web Guide - https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/statememory/ and http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2013/09/71-digital-portals-to-state-history/

[2] South Carolina Digital Library, accessed August 24, 2015. http://scmemory.org

[3] SCDL Partners, accessed August 24, 2015. http://scmemory.org/about/sponsors-partners/

consistently awarded SCDL modest Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) sub-grants to support digitization projects. PASCAL managed these LSTA grants until 2010, at which point USC assumed this responsibility. Although the amount of LSTA funding has varied over the years, it has in the past allowed USC and College of Charleston to each maintain a part-time staff person committed to assisting external institutions with digital projects. LSTA funding was also applied towards the purchase of digitization equipment, such as flatbed scanners, for institutions in need. In 2012, PASCAL funded eight member libraries to work with the Internet Archive on digital projects destined for SCDL, adding new partners and over 40,000 pages of new content to the digital library.

In addition to PASCAL and LSTA, there have been other opportunities for outside funding. In 2009, the College of Charleston received funding from the Dorothy and Gaylord Donnelley Foundation to create the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL). This three-year grant allowed LCDL to expand their partnerships in the lowcountry and to implement a robust digital asset management system that served as a regional repository for SCDL. In 2013, the DPLA awarded SCDL sub-grants from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Arcadia Foundation to digitize and describe a variety of archival materials held by partners across the state.

Clemson, USC, and College of Charleston were the first institutions in the state to commit staff, infrastructure, and space in order to build digitization programs. Each institution hired full time digital librarians, purchased digital asset management systems, and created online digital collections. Since all three institutions were following national standards, it wasn't

hard to envision connecting their repositories to create a statewide resource. They also decided to assist others by becoming regional scanning centers for the state. South Carolina is already divided into generally accepted geographic regions, with one of the three institutions residing in each area. Clemson became the scanning center for institutions in the Upstate, USC hosts the scanning center in the Midlands, and College of Charleston assists those in the Lowcountry and PeeDee regions.[4] Thus, in 2007, SCDL was officially established when the content management systems at USC, Clemson, and College of Charleston were linked and collaboration with other institutions began.

Administration, Management & Organization

SCDL operates on a decentralized administrative structure and is currently managed by three regional directors: Kate Boyd, Digital Initiatives Librarian at USC; Chris Vinson, Head of Library Technology at Clemson University; and Heather Gilbert, Head of Digital Scholarship and Services at College of Charleston. Tyler Mobley, Digital Services Librarian at College of Charleston, serves as the Web Developer and Harvest Manager for SCDL. Emily Gore, Director for Content at DPLA, previously served as Head of Digital Initiatives and Information Technology at Clemson University and managed the Upstate region. John White, now Dean of Libraries at College of Charleston, originally served as the regional director for the Lowcountry region, at which time he founded the Lowcountry Digital Library. White, Gore, and Boyd had already worked with several different departments within their respective institutions, so extending their management to encompass additional off campus partnerships, all following the same standards and guidelines,

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[4] See Scanning Regions and Coordinators at
http://scmemory.org/for-contributors/

was a relatively simple process. The current administration—Vinson, Gilbert, and Boyd—each spend about 20 percent of their time annually on SCDL. They meet consistently and continually, both virtually and in-person, to exercise unified management of the project.

Historically, other agencies in the state have also participated in the management of the project. The South Carolina State Archives and PASCAL each assisted greatly in the beginning to facilitate start up conversations; however, as time progressed, both institutions focused on other more pressing issues and support for SCDL was largely shifted to Clemson, USC, and College of Charleston. In 2014, the South Carolina State Library formed the "South Carolina Digital Council," which recently evolved into an advisory board for SCDL. PASCAL and the State Archives are also members of this newly formed board, which brings additional support to the overall administration of SCDL. Both PASCAL and the State Library make a conscious effort to communicate and work with SCDL whenever possible.

Over the years, archivists, librarians, and curators at cultural institutions throughout the state have been invited to meetings, presentations and working groups for SCDL. Many archivists from a variety of institutions, such as Deborah Bloom and Margaret Dunlap at Richland Library, Liz Anderson at Chester County Historical Society, Julie Warren at Georgetown Public Library, and Grace Cordial at Beaufort Public Library have contributed their valuable time to meet and discuss standards and best practices for digital projects, ensuring that institutions across the state are working together. SCDL formed working groups in 2007 and then again in 2010. The first two attempts to implement working

groups proved difficult to sustain long term. SCDL re-instituted working groups in 2015, establishing groups for Metadata, Policy, and Publicity. In the interest of increased transparency, each group will have its members listed on the SCDL website along with their group charge. Now that more institutions have invested in the project and there is a broader network of digitization and metadata professionals in the state, SCDL administration believes that these new working groups have an excellent chance of continuing.

In 2013 SCDL became one of the six initial Service Hubs for DPLA, bringing South Carolina cultural heritage material to the national stage. As a result, it is important for SCDL partners to stay abreast of DPLA's efforts and goals involving policies, new initiatives, and metadata standards. At the time of this writing, DPLA currently has 17 Service hubs and 16 Content hubs with over 11 million records. DPLA administration is currently working on copyright and image use guidelines that will inform SCDL metadata and make it easier for users to understand what images are available for re-use. DPLA is also actively searching for new revenue streams to support its organization, creating software and new services to license to institutions, and looking into different materials to harvest such as newspaper and institutional repository content.[5]

Technology Past & Present

SCDL's technology stack has always included a website, a discovery layer, and an OAI harvester or similar search and indexing system. SCDL administration regularly evaluates the technology infrastructure to accommodate new technical and user needs. PASCAL originally maintained the infrastructure and managed SCDL servers, but

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[5] See DPLA updates at http://dp.la/info/news/

that responsibility has since shifted to College of Charleston. SCDL currently has a website that provides access to institution and collection level descriptions, a faceted discovery layer that provides access to harvested partner repository content at the item level, and an OAI-PMH harvester which harvests SCDL partner repositories into SCDL's discovery layer.

The first SCDL website was created by then University of South Carolina MLIS student Christopher Vinson, and hosted on a PASCAL supported server. Vinson built a custom PHP website with a simple user interface, allowing librarians to add collections easily and users to browse the collections by format, institution, and county. Vinson implemented OCLC's CONTENTdm Multi-Site Server, which, while not a true harvester, allowed users to search across multiple CONTENTdm installations. At the time, all of the major repositories in South Carolina were built in CONTENTdm and the Multi-Site Server was an excellent product for SCDL's needs. USC staff maintained the Multi-Site Server and Clemson, USC, and Charleston shared the costs. OCLC discontinued support for this product in 2012. The multisite served its purpose well initially, but as SCDL collections grew and non-CONTENTdm repositories proliferated, it became obvious that a new solution would need to be implemented.

Another University of South Carolina MLIS student, Tyler Mobley, updated the design of the initial SCDL website. Mobley left SCDL and was hired in 2011 as the Digital Services Librarian for the College of Charleston. After Mobley's move, SCDL administration decided that the College of Charleston Libraries would take the lead in supporting SCDL's technology

infrastructure. In 2013, Mobley installed the Public Knowledge Project's Open Harvester Systems (PKP) as a replacement for OCLC's CONTENTdm Multi-Site Server. While this opened up the opportunity to harvest more repositories, PKP was slow and limited the number of records the site could process in a search.

In 2014, Mobley made further significant upgrades to the infrastructure and now the project is stable, scalable and sustainable. Mobley moved the original website into the content management system Wordpress, making the process of updating the website simple while increasing the stability of the code base. Mobley replaced the PKP harvester with an Apache Solr[6]/Blacklight[7] powered discovery layer and harvester. The result is a clean, easy to use resource that features highly improved, faceted searching. Mobley continues to manage SCDL's technology infrastructure at the College of Charleston.

How Institutions Contribute to SCDL

Since there are many different levels of technological abilities represented among cultural heritage institution employees across the state, SCDL tries to remain flexible in its requirements for contributors. SCDL has a publicly available collection development policy[8] for reference prior to the start of a digitization project. SCDL also strongly recommends that archival collections be processed prior to digitization. Institutions new to SCDL should contact their SCDL regional scanning center to find out how to have their materials harvested into SCDL. These regional scanning centers can provide institutions with information on the variety of ways SCDL can

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[6] Apache Solr, accessed on August 24, 2015. http://lucene.apache.org/solr/

[7] Project Blacklight, accessed on August 24, 2015. http://projectblacklight.org/

[8] SCDL Collection Policy, accessed on August 24, 2015. http://scmemory.org/for-contributors/4489-2/

help with scanning, metadata, repository assistance, and front-end web access to your materials. After discussing potential digital projects with the SCDL scanning center in your area, institutions can then make an informed decision on the best way to complete their digital project. Before beginning any digitization project, there are a few considerations an institution should take into account:

1. Equipment: If an institution has digitization equipment, it may be more convenient to digitize materials in-house. SCDL provides scanning guidelines online and SCDL staff are always willing to host training sessions at an SCDL scanning center or at an outside institution. If an institution does not own any digitization equipment, it may be more cost effective to send materials to an SCDL regional scanning center for digitization.

2. Metadata: Determining how much metadata is appropriate for institutional staff to create in-house is key to any project. Holding institutions know their collections better than anyone else, so it is best that they create as much metadata as possible before handing it off to a scanning center for completion. SCDL provides metadata guidelines online and SCDL staff are always willing to host training sessions at an SCDL scanning center or at an outside institution.

3. Content Hosting: If an institution has a repository that is OAI-PMH compatible and can be harvested by SCDL, then they can host their own digital collections and have those collections harvested into SCDL. Please review the SCDL Repository guidelines available

online for details. If an institution does not have its own OAI-PMH compliant repository, they can still participate in SCDL. SCDL can host digitization projects free of charge in one of the three regional repositories.

4. Linking & Promotion: Different institutions promote their digital collections in a variety of ways. SCDL provides a Press Kit for guidance. Each institution should create a plan to promote their new digital project and link to SCDL from their institutional website. This is important if you want your constituents to easily discover local materials.

Beaufort County Library, University of South Carolina Lancaster, and Greenville County Public Library System were among the first institutions to make use of SCDL's digitization services in 2007-08. Each institution utilized SCDL's services in different ways. The College of Charleston scanned Beaufort County Library's materials but Beaufort created its own metadata. The completed project was then hosted in the SCDL Lowcountry regional repository (Lowcountry Digital Library) and Beaufort provided access to the project from its institutional website. USC Columbia worked with USC Lancaster to scan materials, create a portion of metadata, and host the collection in the SCDL Midlands regional repository. The Greenville County Public Library System scanned and created metadata for its digital project in-house, but hosted the collection in the SCDL Upstate regional repository. As these examples demonstrate, SCDL's digitization services can be used modularly to support a myriad of institutional needs for all types of digitization projects.

A number of institutions learned the ins and outs of digitization from working with SCDL's

regional scanning centers and have reached a point where they now develop and add digital collections to SCDL without

Where SCDL is going

The digital library landscape has shifted significantly in the decade since the birth of SCDL. As any sustainable project must do, SCDL has evolved in order to adapt to those changes in technologies, standards, and expectations. It has grown from a kernel of an idea into a robust digital resource recognized on the national level. SCDL now includes over fifty cultural heritage institutions from across the state, bringing hundreds of collections into one searchable, freely accessible website.

However, funding for SCDL remains low and the project is primarily supported through the volunteer efforts of information and cultural heritage professionals across the state. There is also a growing number of staff supporting it across the state. It behooves all cultural heritage professionals across the state to work together to manage the costs and promote the special collections in our institutions to all South Carolina citizens. SCDL is a fantastic resource that provides K-12, college students, educators cultural heritage professionals, genealogists, scholars, and anyone interested in South Carolina's shared histories with access to digitized primary sources. SCDL has weathered change, embraced new technologies, and provided free access to these digital resources for over ten years. With our continued collective efforts, SCDL can and will be maintained into the future as a shared, sustainable resource of online digital collections, freely accessible to all.
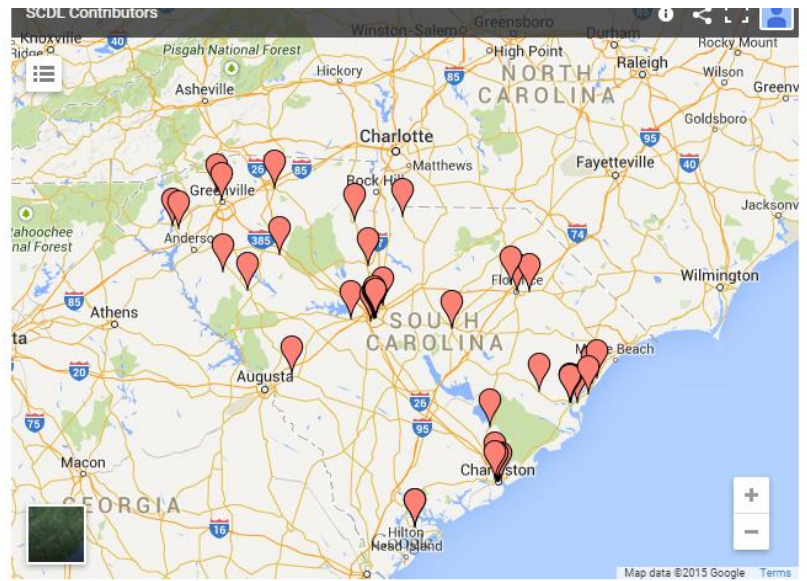

Figure 1. SCDL has over fifty partner institutions from across the state. View the details of each institution on the SCDL website on the Sponsors and Partners page. http://scmemory.org/about/sponsors-partners/

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