Library Lab final report

Social Tagging for Archival Collections

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The purpose of this project was to explore the use of social tagging in order to make the information in archival collections at Harvard more easily discoverable. We originally planned to experiment with social tagging on the records of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee at the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, but it quickly became apparent that it was not necessary to confine the project to those collections. This project was applied to all the archival finding aids at Harvard that are currently in OASIS, as well as digitized items available through the PDS system, and photographs in VIA.

The problem we wanted to address is the fact that these collections contain information on a wide variety of subjects that are not easily discoverable. For example, collection bMS 16036, which is entitled "Director, Child and Youth Projects. Records, 1947-1961" (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div16036) has a folder in bMS 16036/3 (1) entitled: **Displaced persons. -M-.** The correspondence in this folder is arranged according to the name of the correspondent, and this folder contains correspondence filed under the name of Sarah McCombs. In her correspondence, Ms. McCombs discusses a displaced person named Andor Nemeth, who she is trying to help. There are fourteen documents pertaining to him and his family (sequence 5-18) in this folder, but this would not be known unless someone happened to find it while paging through the folder. Examples like this abound throughout the collections.

If a researcher was working with one of these collections and discovered information like this, we thought it would be helpful to the researcher, the library staff, and other potential researchers to be able to tag this kind of information.

Accomplishments

We worked with Anita Patel, a developer from the Berkman Center. To accomplish the task of allowing users to socially tag finding aids, she created a stand-alone web application and javascript bookmarklet (Tagging Archives). The bookmarklet can be obtained directly from the Tagging Archives application or from a link which has been placed in OASIS. When a user wishes to tag a particular finding aid or digital item they will bring up the bookmarklet, which will automatically pull in the item's title and URN (persistent link). The user will have the ability to enter in a comma-separated list of tags and any additional notes they wish to provide. The bookmarklet can be used on any finding aid or any digital item retrieved from PDS or VIA. Once a user tags the items, they are stored within a database in the newly created Tagging Archives application. From here, the items may be searched by the tags or keywords within the notes. The search can be performed on the Tagging Archives application or from a link on the OASIS search result page. If a user searches a keyword on OASIS then clicks the "Find Tagged Items" link, the keywords searched in OASIS will be passed to the Tagging Archives application to retrieve the tagged items that match.

Challenges
- Currently, there is a long development queue for OASIS, therefore building an integrated tool was not feasible. We opted to create a standalone application and javascript bookmarklet that could be linked from within OASIS.
- HOLLIS development/updates is currently on hold, therefore the Tagging Archives applications only works for OASIS finding aids.
- Ease and consistency of use among different browsers was a challenge. For example, IE does not allow for dragging of javascript links (bookmarklets) to the favorites toolbar where Firefox, Chrome and Safari do.
- The application works as proposed for specific digital items in PDS and VIA. However, OASIS does not contain persistent identifier information for each of the non-digital items listed on a finding aid, so therefore it is not possible to allow user tagging for individual non-digital items. And sending a user back to that specific item in the list is not possible either. The short-term work around for this is to have the user explain which item(s) they are tagging and referring to in the notes field.

Next steps
The next steps for this project will be to make the application live and promote its use. From here we can get a sense of the adoption rate of the tool, ease and frequency of tagging and usefulness of the tagged items and notes. A major part of the next steps will be to gather feedback from the community and make the necessary changes to ensure users are getting the most out of the tool.

Confirmation that we deposited code
Waiting for instructions, but currently Tagging Archives is an open source application and the source code can be found here: https://github.com/berkmancenter/tagging_archives

Budget spent

A list of any publicity we did
(at this point, we have not publicized it, because the application is not yet live)

A list of presentations
Lightning Round, July 26, 2012
Library Lab Showcase on November 14, 2012