Enhancing Access to Primary Sources through Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration and the Digital Humanities: The Stephen L. and Enid Stover Papers

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Description

Dr. Stephen L. Stover retired from Kansas State University's Department of Geography in 1989. The Stephen L. and Enid Stover Papers, officially donated in 2014 to the Morse Department of Special Collections at Kansas State University Libraries, document the history of the Stover family. Included in these Papers is a series of 35-millimeter slides that document Stephen L. Stover's travels domestically and internationally. Consisting of approximately 16,600 well-preserved slides, the series spans over 50 years (1956-2009). The series features a wide range of images, with particularly strong foci on the physical and cultural landscapes of New Zealand and Oceania during the late 1960s; Manhattan and the Flint Hills region of Kansas; the American West and Midwest (particularly Kansas and Wisconsin); Europe; agricultural landscapes; Canadian provinces Ontario and Manitoba during the 1960s; and the Stover family at school, at home, and at play.

A cross-disciplinary and collaborative approach to the Stephen L. and Enid Stover Papers aims to make the collection available to researchers and the public using elements from the digital humanities. For the Stover slide series, the goal of Special Collections is to have a digital version for improved access and not for preservation initially. Inventorying, organizing, describing, and digitizing the slide series is a collaborative process between subject specialists in geography, family members, and the university archivist. The slide series showcases the way cross-disciplinary perspectives and contributions during the process of describing materials enhance public access to said materials. Additionally, the creation of digital versions of the slides provides a rich resource for further work by digital humanities scholars to apply these sources in new ways, making them more valuable as a data source for future research.

This paper is divided into three primary sections. The first section illustrates how the Stephen L. and Enid Stover Papers and the collaborative work being done on the slide series fit within the greater field of digital humanities. In doing so, we discuss our working definitions of digital humanities and cross-disciplinary collaboration. The second section discusses the specifics of the archival process. It examines the way that collaboration between the Stover family, the university archives in the Morse Department of Special Collections, and representatives of K-State academic departments improves understanding of the context of the slides, and how increased awareness of their context can facilitate their application in research. The third section illustrates potential cross-disciplinary uses of the Papers, with in-depth explorations on the ways that researchers within geography and anthropology might make use of the slide series. The third section closes with a final discussion of "downstream" uses. Future researchers' differences in geography, distance in time, access to advances in technology, and experience of the ebbs and flows of generational knowledge means that their access to the Papers through the means digital humanities ensures that its research value will have a life far beyond the scope of current potential applications.

Disciplines
Digital Humanities

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Introduction

> When I have neglected to pursue a topic, I trust that the interested reader will launch his/her own research for an answer. . . . (Stover 8)

The above extract from Dr. Stephen L. Stover's 2012 memoir foreshadowed the enquiring spirit behind a significant exercise in collaborative archival work at Kansas State University that started in 2013. Like his memoir, his photographs have the potential to elicit questions and offer answers, even if he neglected to pursue the topic on a particular photograph in question—and the role of archives is to facilitate this process. Dr. Stover, associate professor emeritus of geography, retired in 1989 after twenty-five years of teaching and research at Kansas State University. The Stephen L. and Enid Stover papers, officially donated in 2014 to the Richard L. D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections at Kansas State University Libraries (hereinafter "Department"), document the history of the Stover family. The collection includes over 16,000 35-millimeter slides depicting Dr. Stover's travels domestically and internationally. These well-preserved slides span from 1956 to 2009, and feature a wide range of images, with particularly strong foci on New Zealand and Oceania during the late 1960s, Manhattan and the Flint Hills region of Kansas, the American West and Midwest (particularly Kansas and Wisconsin), Europe, agricultural landscapes, Canadian provinces Ontario and Manitoba during the 1960s, and the Stover family at school, at home, and at play.

A cross-disciplinary and collaborative approach to the Stover papers (hereinafter "Papers") aims to make the collection available to researchers and the public using elements from the digital humanities. For the slides, the goal has been to provide digital versions for improved access, not for preservation. Processing the slides is a collaborative effort among Dr. Stover, subject specialists in geography, family members, and the university archivist. The series showcases how cross-disciplinary perspectives and contributions during the description process enhance public access to the materials. Additionally, the digitization of the slides provides a rich resource for further digital humanities research as scholars apply these sources in new ways.

This paper is divided into three primary sections. The first section illustrates how this project fits within the greater field of digital humanities and includes definitions of digital humanities and interdisciplinary collaboration. The second section describes the archival process, including an examination of how a collaborative description method improves contextual understanding

and how this increased awareness can facilitate application in research. The third section explores potential cross-disciplinary uses of the Papers, analyzing how researchers within geography and anthropology might use the slides. This section closes by examining potential uses. For example, differences in geography, distance in time, access to technological advances, and experience with the ebbs and flows of generational knowledge will affect how future researchers use and analyze digital and analog versions of the Papers. Such developments will generate uses that go far beyond the scope of current potential applications.

Section 1: Digital Humanities and the Stephen L. and Enid Stover Papers

In a 2011 paper David Berry articulates the changing nature of contemporary research:

Few dispute that digital technology is fundamentally changing the way in which we engage in the research process. . . . [R]esearch is increasingly being meditated through digital technology. [This mediation changes] what it means to undertake research, affecting both the epistemologies and ontologies that underlie a research programme. . . . Whilst some decry the loss of the skills and techniques of older research traditions, others have warmly embraced what have come to be called the digital humanities (1).

While scholars argue about a precise definition of digital humanities research (Spiro, Gold), Kirschenbaum wryly notes that the definition on Wikipedia suffices:

The digital humanities, also known as humanities computing, is a field of study, research, teaching, and invention concerned with the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities. It is methodological by nature and interdisciplinary in scope. It involves investigation, analysis, synthesis, and presentation of information in electric form. It studies how these media affect the disciplines in which they are used, and what these studies have to contribute to our knowledge of computing (4).

Gold writes that while this far-reaching definition caused a rapid rise in scholars calling themselves digital humanists, the community has experienced a somewhat exclusionary development (Gold x). Some contend digital humanists pursue traditional humanist research using digital toolkits (Fitzpatrick), while others argue they seek to fundamentally shape and change the way such research occurs in academia (Gold). Schnapp, Pressner, and Lunenfeld highlight the methodological aspect of digital humanities, stating it is not a cohesive field of study, but rather "an array of converging practices . . . that facilitate the formation of knowledge production, exchange, and dissemination" at varying spatial scales (1). Similarly, Spiro suggests that what binds the digital humanities together is not a field of study, but rather a set of values; chief among these is a desire to collaborate across disciplines in experimental and transparent ways through a digital medium (17). Schnapp, Pressner, and Lunenfeld's definition of the field and Spiro's insights about its values and practices highlight the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration and for flexibility in digital humanities scholarship. A brief

overview of what digital humanities research practitioners *do* helps define what the digital humanities *are* and how work being done on the Papers fits into digital humanities scholarship.

The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0 describes the development of the field in two broad waves of research. The first wave largely involved quantitative methodologies; scholars used digital toolkits to perform word searches, counts, and text sorting at a scale and speed far beyond manual possibilities (Burdick et al. 123). This research trend relied on the power of digital databases to improve searching and retrieval (Schnapp, Pressner, and Lunenfeld 2). By the mid-1980s, computer use became ubiquitous in research, causing the development of standard protocols, including the application of digital toolkits (Burdick et al. 123).

Another development during this first wave of digital humanities was the increased quantity of research publications in digital form. Using digital media to disseminate and exchange information changed how scholars approached research. In this sense, nearly all contemporary scholarship incorporates some work in the digital humanities (Berry 1), and Christine Borgman notes that access to and use of scholarly digital repositories has become more common than traditional methods of retrieval, especially in the sciences (12).

The second wave of research in the sphere of digital humanities took on qualitative attributes, and is "interpretative, experiential, emotive, and generative" (Schnapp, Pressner, and Lunenfeld 2). This development is where digital access to the Papers finds its *raison d'être*.

The Papers project aims to enhance access to the collection. In doing so, it fits many criteria central to definitions of digital humanities. Like the explanation in *The Digital Humanities Manifesto*, the project does not focus on a specific field, but instead exemplifies one possible convergence facilitating knowledge production, exchange, and dissemination through digital media. The collaboration on the slides also represents the values that digital humanists promote. During archival description, knowledge is shared and recorded in electronic form. Furthermore, having the slides digitally available allows for their enhanced access and dissemination. In this sense, archival description is an example of research that falls under the umbrella of digital humanities. It diverges, however, from the field because it does not seek to answer traditional humanities questions. Instead, the goal is to open the materials to scholars in all disciplines to answer their own research goals. Current efforts to increase access to the slides should plant seeds for future research that will yield a rich scholarly harvest in the years to come.

Section 2: Making Connections and the Archival Process

Acquisition and Funding the Project

In late 2012, the Department received a copy of Dr. Stover's memoir, *Home Sweet Homes: A Selection*, from him and his daughter, Sue. During that visit, the university archivist asked if Dr. Stover had other research materials related to his time on the faculty at Kansas State University. Further conversations revealed the slides described above, as well as journals,

slides, and poetry from him and his late wife, Enid. Because the archives includes selected faculty papers in addition to the university's historical records, the archivist wanted to examine the slides' contents to determine their research value and their fit within the archives' collecting scope.

Concurrent to the discussions between the archivist and the Stovers was an idea developing in archival circles called participatory archives (Shilton and Srinivasan; Huvila; Theimer; blogloc). The underlying concepts behind this theory include an increased transparency in archival practice coupled with greater collaborative efforts to improve access to materials. One example is the Center for Primary Research and Training at UCLA (UCLA Library Special Collections). For over a decade, the center has hired graduate students in various subjects to arrange and describe collections connected with their field of study. It has been a win-win relationship for the department and the students, with the former receiving improved description thanks to the students' knowledge of the topics and the latter gaining experience with the archival process, which enhances their understanding of primary source navigation as they continue their studies. After learning about the center, the Department discussed how to adapt that model locally.

The Papers became a use case to test this adaptation. Their eclectic nature presented a unique opportunity to foster interdisciplinary collaboration to improve the description of and access to primary sources. To better understand the scope of the project, the archivist arranged a meeting with Dr. Stover, his daughter Merrily, and geography graduate student Ian Howard. Howard's role was to be the subject specialist and assess the research value of the slides from a geographer's perspective.

After learning the materials would benefit researchers, the Department developed strategies to fund a graduate student assistant position for this project. It resulted in a collaboration between the Stover family and the Department. The family gave $8,000 toward funding a geography graduate student who would describe the materials while organizing them, interview Dr. Stover to enhance the description, and begin digitizing slides. The goal is to have the descriptions and images openly accessible online with very limited exceptions, pairing each slide with an accompanying description enhanced by annotations from interviews.

Expanding descriptions by interviewing records creators may sound logical, yet it is not standard practice in many archival repositories. One significant reason for this gap is that the quantity of records being acquired compels archival staff to create very basic descriptions in order to minimize the backlog of unprocessed collections. As a result, descriptions often lack the detail the Papers are receiving. Also, archivists have to balance time spent describing materials with other job duties they have. With the emergence in recent years of a more participatory culture, though, the profession has begun developing models that alter traditional description practices.

One great asset of this modified description model is harnessing the expertise of the subject specialist and the collection donor. In the Department's use case, their combined experience

improves knowledge about the content and establishes a broader context. Any researchers that access these materials will recognize the value of these enhancements as they analyze the primary sources with an accurate understanding behind their creation.

Funding the graduate student position has been an imperative part of this project, as have investments in supplies and time. The financial generosity of Dr. Stover and his family has more easily allowed the archives to purchase appropriate storage boxes that will minimize deterioration and made possible the dedication of a student assistant position to this project.

Additionally, this project would not be possible if it hinged on the archivist's time alone. Since it started two years ago, the student assistants have worked approximately 350 hours. Their dedication has helped accomplish some of the project's goals. The slide inventory is done, the annotations are about 30% completed, and about 25% have been digitized. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. Scanning must carry on, interview sessions will continue as long as Dr. Stover is able, and linking the scans with descriptions has not started. Furthermore, the materials beyond the slides have yet to be described and organized, though their contents will further enrich the research value of the Papers.

The Archival Process

Ian Howard became the first subject specialist on the Papers project, working with Dr. Stover on the slide series until his 2014 graduation. As Howard neared graduation, he encouraged another geography graduate student, Rob Briwa, to apply as his successor on the project. Briwa was hired in March 2014.

Most days were filled with inventorying, organizing, or scanning slides. In the archives, the subject specialist arranged slides by Dr. Stover's numerical order, viewed them, and inventoried them with captions into a word processing document. Figure 1 is an excerpt from the document illustrating data entry during the description phase.

Slide Number	Date	Description	Photographer	Notes
645	1961	Eric Anderson and Phil Stover. Tent colony, Lake Mendota. Madison, Wisc.	SLS	Eric is the eldest son of Red and Doris Anderson. The same age as Phil. The kayak was a German World War II Folbot. Canvas on light wood frame. So it could be collapsed down (although hard to do). Unfortunately, the boat was in the garage at 341 N. 15th in Manhattan, when the garage burned down in 1968.

Figure 1: Sample Entry in the Word Processing Document Illustrating the Description Phase. *"Slide Number" indicates the number Dr. Stover wrote on the slide; "Date" denotes the date on the slide or from Dr. Stover; "Description" refers to captions written on the slide; "Photographer" is who took the photograph; "Notes" are annotations from interviews with Dr. Stover.*

Using publicly-accessible slide scanners in the Information Technology Assistance Center at Hale Library,[1] the subject specialist scanned slides as JPEG files at a resolution of 200 dpi with an output size of ten inches on the long side of the image, naming resulting files with the inventory's slide number. The archivist decided to scan at a lower resolution primarily because the original items are in good condition and can be scanned at higher resolutions when patrons request them. The main reason to digitize was access, not preservation. Presently, slide inventorying and organization are complete, but not the scanning. Although 4,888 slides have been digitized, progress had stalled for some months because of the disappearance of the scanners' slide trays. Thankfully, they were recently recovered and are available for use again.

The project's interviews occur weekly, when Dr. Stover meets with the subject specialist, and further integrate participatory archives. Because Dr. Stover still has a sharp mind, it was logical to collaborate with him. Typical interviews last for two hours and have a work area that includes a laptop, slide viewer, and box of slides. Most recently, they began using one of Dr. Stover's old projectors, which has improved annotations through the details evident in the larger projected images.

Interview sessions are unstructured and open-ended. Dr. Stover and the subject specialist view and discuss the slides with questions that reveal the slides' geographic and historical contexts. Curiosity about the slides' contents and the attending enthusiasm often drive conversations in unexpected, yet rewarding, directions. The subject specialist frequently searches online to further explore concepts, check facts, or search for other images about the places and people in the slides. The following anecdote describes a memorable interview session and illustrates the strengths of this informal interview process that so often is driven by a shared passion for and knowledge of geography.

During a typical session, Dr. Stover and the subject specialist reviewed a colleague's slides that were in Dr. Stover's collection. While discussing the photographer's background, the subject specialist learned some history about the university's geography department. More interesting, however, were the labels on some of the slides: "*qanats*, Iran." Questions arose about the intriguing pattern these *qanats* made on the desert landscape, which Dr. Stover defined as features of agricultural landscapes in arid portions of the Middle East. Further questions about their structure and pattern triggered a detailed response from Dr. Stover about their structure and utility. Shared curiosities were fired; together they found further details online and not only confirmed Dr. Stover's initial statements about *qanats*, but uncovered specifics about their

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[1] They were Nikon Super COOLSCAN 9000 ED scanners with VueScan 9 Professional Edition software on Windows 7 Professional computers.

construction and how their method of transporting water is intimately linked to the local topography of desert landscapes. The entire exchange was abridged in the annotations and it was a moment where their shared vocational background and personal rapport combined to better understand the slides' contexts and increase their value to future researchers.

As this anecdote suggests, the interview goals have been multifaceted. Some are formal and parallel to the interview goals Kevin Dunn outlined in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (Hay 102). These objectives include using interviews to fill gaps in the information represented by the slides, to investigate what motivated Dr. Stover to take the photographs, and to develop a narrative of his life experience. Following UCLA's participatory archives model, the subject specialist's education as a geography graduate student improved the annotations because of his schooling. Further, his exposure to interviewing practices and archival processes have expanded his repertoire of professional skills and better informed him of the utility of archives in geographic research. These experiences have put tangible and intangible benefits of archival work in a light that often is not fully explored in geography classrooms. Finally, the interview sessions have been pleasurable and rewarding to learn about Dr. Stover's life and work. At times, the line blurs between the subject specialist's role as an expert interviewing an informant and his role as a friend and admirer. Yet, this blurring itself is valuable since it has frequently infused interview sessions with an energy that drives the archival process forward.

Section 3: Research Scenarios and Applications

Because of the breadth of subjects in the slides, researchers in many disciplines may benefit. The photographs could support instruction and research in topics that include agriculture, anthropology, economics, geography, geology, history, human ecology, science education, and sociology. Specific subjects addressed below focus on research applications in geography, anthropology, and history.

Geographers agree that their field is a visual discipline, both in research and education (Driver; Rose; Hollman). Dr. Stover clearly intended the slides to support geographic topics, particularly those focused on cultural or human geography. The slides illustrate human effects on the natural landscape, including agricultural and industrial production and processes and other regional land use. Furthermore, because Dr. Stover habitually noted where and when he took photographs, geographers can use his slides as starting points in studies using repeat photography to glean insights about cultural or physical landscapes (Byers; Works and Hadley). For example, a 1970s slide showing a hotel in Colorado led the subject specialist to the online photographs of the Denver Public Library. There he found images of the hotel between the late 19th century and the present, and Dr. Stover's photograph filled a temporal gap.

Researchers studying historical transportation geographies would find the collection valuable, as well, since many slides reveal past connections between far-flung locations. A notable example of this is a set of photographs documenting the family's return voyage from New Zealand to North America during the late 1960s, which include images of various ports of call in chronological order, as well as commercial shipping images.

Dr. Stover used his slides as instructional illustrations of geographic concepts and phenomena while a professor, and they have continued classroom relevance. Regional and cultural geography courses would benefit from incorporating his photographs in lectures since they offer examples of past cultural landscapes and practices, which often are important in the formation of contemporary landscapes. Also, physical geography courses would benefit from his extensive documentation of geophysical processes that cover multiple locations and phenomena.

For anthropologists, the Papers offer a rich data source documenting a mid-twentieth century Midwestern Methodist family. The slides depict religious celebrations and cultural events such as Christmas and Easter. They provide a visual record of birthdays, weddings, graduations, and other rites of passage. The sharing of food is shown through picnics, Sunday dinners, and potluck gatherings. Such a range of images illuminates areas of possible interest in the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, and human ecology. Additionally, there are personal journals and over 300 poems that can provide future researchers with contemporaneous commentaries. Further, the Papers illustrate life in other cultures that include New Zealand, Australia, Pacific Islands, South Asia, North America, and Europe.

The photographs also support local history research by recording temporal changes in particular locations, addressing aspects of social, political, and physical histories. For example, the family moved to Manhattan, Kansas, in 1965, and the slides illustrate forty years of local events, including Independence Day parades, Band Day processions, high school football games, and track meets. While glimpses of Manhattan in 1965 are visible in present-day Manhattan, Dr. Stover's photographs help document the extensive changes that have occurred. Socially, the slides provide evidence of community events, especially picnics and potlucks–regular gatherings to mark the starts and finishes of the school year or the arrivals or departures of friends and colleagues. As noted, food was often present and social networking of an earlier era is evident. The collection further documents specific times and places in many other locales, which could be of possible interest to historians studying these places. The slides also support studies of particular points in national history, including the life and times of a World War II veteran in active service and consequences of the G.I. Bill for veterans and their families. Furthermore, some images document defunct communities and extinct economic and social practices.

The discussion of potential use for the Papers draws heavily from the vocational backgrounds and experiences of the university archivist, subject specialists, and members of the family. Beyond the possibilities noted herein, there will be future uses not yet discovered.

Conclusion

The Papers project serves as a case study in enhancing access to primary sources through cross-disciplinary collaboration and the digital humanities. Although it is not a digital humanities project, it embodies many of the values which digital humanists promote and provides ample

working space for such activities. It has been an exploration for the Department in interdisciplinary description of archival materials. This collaborative spirit has improved the information that researchers review when they use this collection. Also, it has given the subject specialists an expanded understanding of the utility of archives in their field of research, which often is not deeply explored in the classroom.

The Department also explored the concept of participatory archives with this project. Tapping the expertise of subject specialists allowed those outside the archival profession to participate in the process of describing archival materials. A further step the Department has considered is to allow social tagging or commenting on these digitized images by anyone with internet access. An example of this crowdsourcing is the Library of Congress and its page on The Commons of Flickr. This action would allow even broader levels of interaction and would match the spirit of participatory archives.

Archives, as repositories of primary sources, unique materials, and historically significant records, could be viewed as hubs for documenting civilization. As David Gracy explained, "[Archivists] are at the hub of what civilization is. . . . Civilization is the sum of human experience. Archival repositories hold the records of [this] experience documented as it was gained through time and across space." Similarly, archives should be at the hub of interdisciplinary research and digital humanities. Archivists should develop relationships with subject specialists across multiple disciplines for many purposes, including to increase the use of archival materials in teaching and research or to enhance descriptions of holdings as has been done with the Papers project. As archives become central to research and instruction in their community, they become a hub with spokes leading to the connected disciplines.

Improved interconnectedness can create a collaborative environment in which archivists, subject specialists, and other interested stakeholders advocate for more efficient ways to digitize primary sources and electronically tie the images to web-accessible descriptions. In this way, digital humanists would have more content for their research and improved context to better understand the value of the materials. These efforts would create yet another spoke tying scholars to archives at the hub of interdisciplinary research and digital humanities.

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