

Final Performance Report

Grant No. NAR10-RB-50084-10

Eliminating Archival Backlogs

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Minnesota Historical Society

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Performance Summary

During the October 2010-June 2012 period, the Minnesota Historical Society carried out a Basic Project to eliminate an archival backlog comprising 4,700 cubic feet, to produce 500 MARC catalog records and 300 EAD finding aids, to carefully track our productivity, and to begin tracking the online use of the electronic products produced under the grant (primarily finding aids).

We are very pleased to be able to make a final report to NHPRC on the very significant achievements we have been able to realize as a result of this grant. While we were confident that we would be able to hit all of the agreed-upon deliverables (please see section immediately below for detail), we are happy to report that these grant funds enabled us to achieve many other programmatic successes that would not have otherwise been possible. As always, we are extremely grateful to the NHPRC for the funds that have supported all of this work.

I would point out a number of core achievements that are worth noting:

1. **Performance.** This turned out to be a very high performing project, with the processing team hitting or exceeding all the targets noted in the grant application. Aggregating all arrangement and description (and incidental) work, we were able to maintain a processing performance average of 1.62 hours per cubic foot of collection materials.
2. **Quality of output products.** With regard to our results, we emphasize that project staff have not achieved this level of productivity at the expense of quality. The finding aids that have been produced are very high caliber, with many of them including digitized content and other enhancements, and all of them exhibiting rich keyword searchability to leverage discovery and access. Many repositories performing MPLP (More Product, Less Process) work have been able to produce basic catalog records linked to rudimentary container lists. We have raised the bar a notch or two, and are proud of the quality of our work in the face of high productivity expectations. I would praise the talent and dedication of our project staff who continuously sought to marry high performance with great researcher outcomes.
3. **Innovations to discovery and finding aids.** The project allowed us (sometimes forced us) to improve our discovery environment and our finding aid model. The EAD finding aid functionality was improved largely via a simplified handling of links to digital collection content, and especially to facilitate the description of, and access to, born-digital archival content. Discovery was enhanced through creating links to Wikipedia entries and through creation of a [What's New](#) landing page on the Library website. It provides another portal for browser-based discovery of archival collections; it provides a helpful index of archival collections; it promotes the NHPRC project; and it provides a mechanism for staff to blog about their work and, especially, to highlight particular collections as they are processed, further enhancing discovery.

4. **Improvements in internal processes.** The grant project also helped us to bring the government records workflows and procedures into much better harmony with those for manuscript collections, especially the production of EAD finding aids. All work units are now sharing uniform tools and approaches, which leaves us with a more efficient and sustainable archival processing environment. Of particular note is the development of a simple set of accessioning tools (Excel worksheets) that make it easier to re-use container lists and other description created during acquisition and accessioning. This improvement not only boosted productivity, but allowed us to produce deeper, richer descriptive content than might not otherwise have been possible.
5. **Unintended benefits.** In addition, the project work resulted in some achievements that emerged with no prior intent, as fortuitous side-benefits.
 - a. Building and testing an MPLP approach to digitization and serving out the digital content in findings aids. In doing this, we figured out how to perform access-focused digitization at a low unit cost, how to efficiently serve out the content via the EAD finding aids, and how to begin establishing a preservation framework for our growing archival digital content;
 - b. Developing an MPLP approach to describing and linking to natively digital archival files;
 - c. Being able to produce a very effective online finding aid to our extensive collection of [Northern Pacific Railway Company records](#), which would have been completely out of scope but for the high productivity realized overall by the NHPRC project.

In conclusion, I would emphasize that this project has been a game-changer for MHS, allowing us to eliminate a large backlog and create effective access to rich documentary materials, to refine our techniques of arrangement and description, to create more efficient and uniform internal processes to keep our program sustainable in the years ahead, and to build a fluid processing team. I also think that our project may have some value as a model for other repositories, not because we produced any true innovations (others have been doing all of these things), but because we were able to put a lot of existing approaches and techniques together to create something of real value for our audiences in a very cost-effective way.

Performance in accomplishing project deliverables

1. *Submit complete reports by the deadlines in the Grant Award Summary.*

This is our fourth and final report to the Commission, which we believe concludes our reporting responsibilities.

2. *Acknowledge the National Historical Publications and Records Commission in all print and electronic products that result from grant support. The Commission strongly encourages grantees to use the NHPRC logo in grant products and publications and to link to its website. The final narrative reports must include three copies of grant products.*

Each EAD finding aid we create or revise under this grant includes an EAD sponsor element, a citation to the NHPRC website, and an NHPRC logo. In cases where parallel work being funded by the state's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund is adding digital archival content to finding aids, we are pleased to see the NHPRC logo paired with the ACHF logo knowing that the joint efforts of both projects are doubly increasing exposure to these rich documentary materials. Recent examples include the papers of Minnesota Supreme Court Justice [Sandra Gardebring](#) and a series of sound recordings from the office of Governor [Tim Pawlenty](#), which include a mixed set of analog and born-digital files.

Our [What's New](#) page that serves as a landing page to publicize this project and showcase its descriptive products was viewed an average 156 times each month during the last six months. Peaks have occurred during those months when newsletter articles were published. Realizing that we were also creating a great many catalog records for very small collections that did not require inventories, we added a section to link catalog record summaries to our local MnPALS library catalog.

The products of the grant are the catalog records and finding aids, themselves. They are available by traversing links found elsewhere in this report. If a complete list of collections processed under this grant is desired by the Commission, we will provide it upon request.

3. Publicize the project and its methods through press releases, web 2.0 resources, blog entries, announcements on appropriate listservs, an article in at least one publication, and at least one presentation about the project.

Throughout the course of this project referrals from Wikipedia have reigned as the fourth leading traffic source to our finding aids. We have continued to add references to Wikipedia articles based on our monthly *What's New* page at an average rate of 3 per month and are pleased to note that the Society's premiere of a web-based Minnesota Encyclopedia included links to our finding aids as well.¹

Publicity about our progress on this project was included in three newsletters published by the Midwest Archives Conference, the State Library Services of the Minnesota Department of Education, and the Twin Cities Association of Records Managers and Administrators.² Links to the project's *What's New* page were included in each of these articles.

In addition, the project director has, and continues to, promote the project and its useful outcomes in various conference and class presentations. The project team intends to produce a retrospective case study on the project, which we will submit for publication.

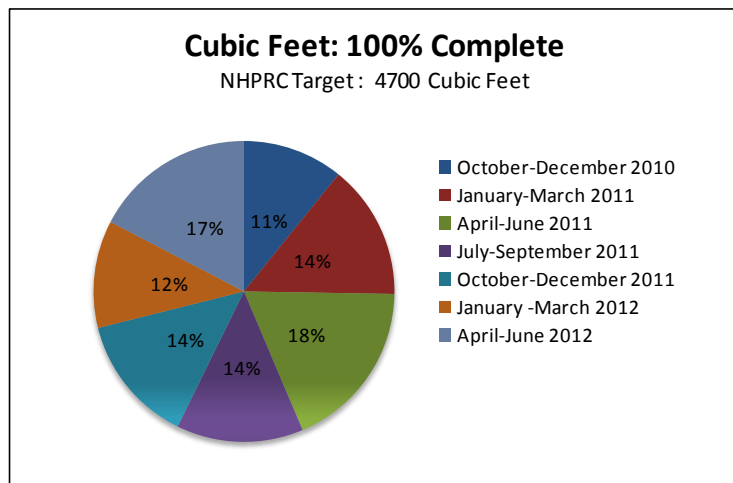
¹ MnOpedia: Minnesota Encyclopedia, <http://www.mnopedia.org/>.

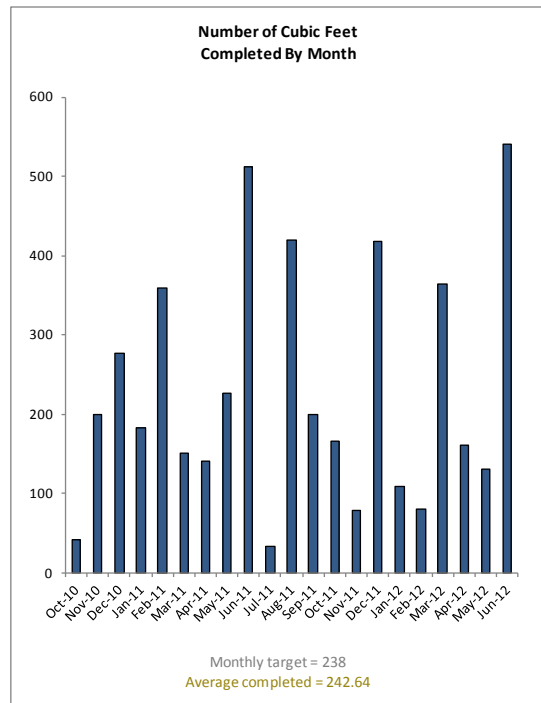
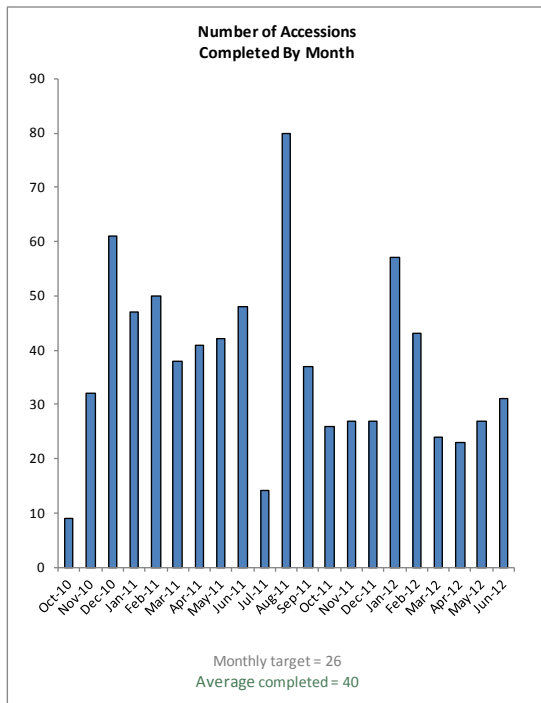
² *MAC Newsletter* 39, no. 2 (October 2011): 15; *Streaming News*, (July-August 2011): 3-4; *Metro Record* 42, no. 1 (September 2011): 5-6, available at http://www.twincitiesarma.org/linked/2011_09_metro_record.pdf (accessed January 23, 2011).

4. *Process at least 4,700 cubic feet of records, including 3,100 cubic feet of government records and 1,600 cubic feet of manuscript collections.*

We have exceeded the productivity targets required by the grant. The tables and charts below summarize in detail our processing progress by reporting periods.

	Government Records		Manuscripts		Project Total	
	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Accessions	Cubic Feet
October-December 2010	49	337.35	53	181.05	102	518.40
January-June 2011	68	1101.30	198	471.30	266	1572.60
July-December 2011	60	932.15	151	383.80	211	1315.95
January-June 2012	99	755.52	106	609.95	205	1385.17
Total	276	3146.32	508	1645.80	784	4792.12





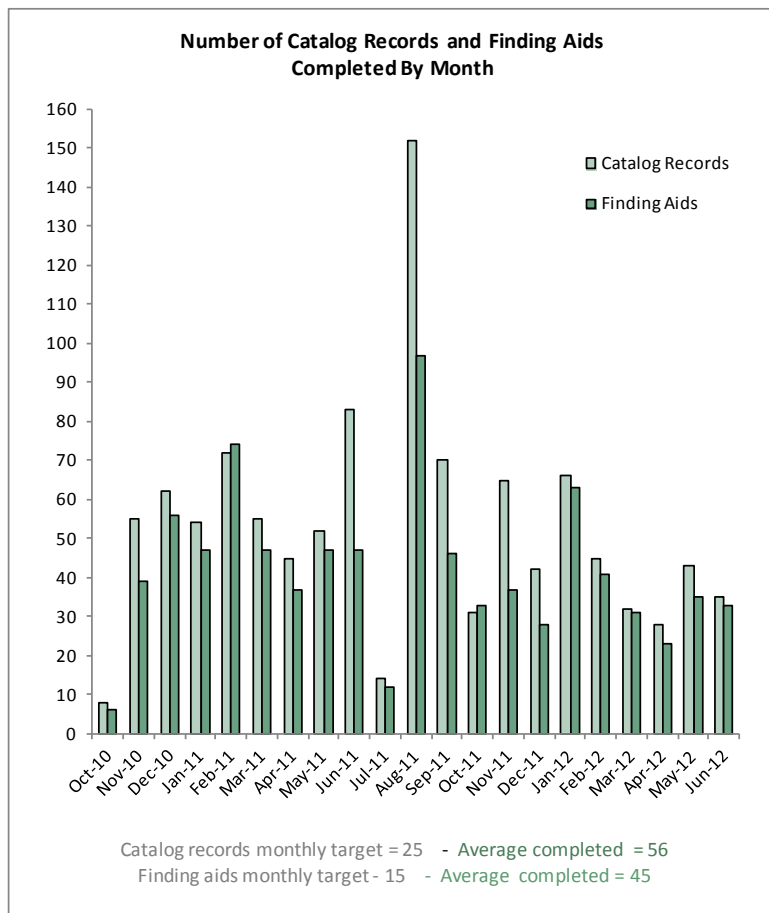
5. *Create or revise at least 300 EAD finding aids and at least 500 MARC catalog records and post them to the historical society's OPAC and to national bibliographic databases including OCLC and a web accessible repository of EAD finding aids.*

Throughout this project, we completed on average 56 catalog records and 45 finding aids each month. All told, we added or enhanced 1,109 catalog records and 879 finding aids in the course of working on this project.

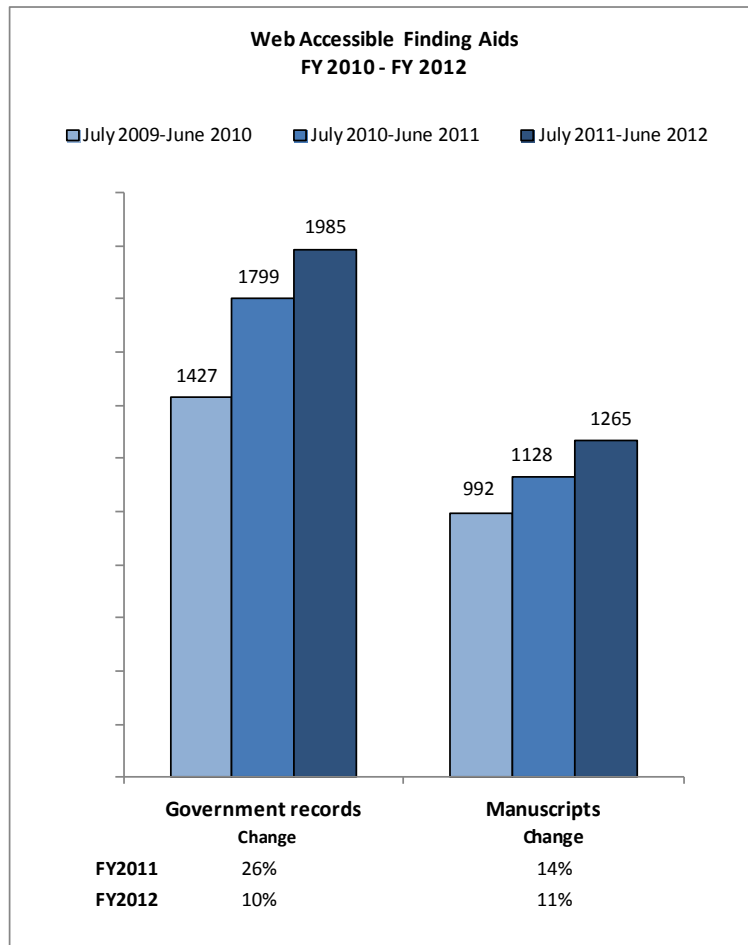
Overall, these descriptive products add up to a modest 1.6% increase in the total number of MARC catalog records for archival collections and a gigantic 34% increase in the number of web-accessible finding aids. The fact that the change in the total number of catalog records is not as great as the change in finding aids can be explained by the high incidence of accessions that represented additions to existing collections as well as the fact that catalog records were sometimes deleted in the course of bringing together parts of collections that had been separately described before these accessions were added. We believe that separating parts by format or shelving area introduces unnecessary complications in our collections management procedures and, worse, disturbs collection context and content. We made great effort during this project to bring parts together into one inventory whenever occasioned by an addition of new materials. And, because we have a new SOLR index that taps into our EAD encoding, the depth and detail of our archival

collections are no longer hidden behind the more limited discovery afforded through MARC catalog records alone.³

	Government Records		Manuscripts		Project Total	
	Catalog Records	Finding Aids	Catalog Records	Finding Aids	Catalog Records	Finding Aids
October-December 2010	83	86	42	35	125	101
January-June 2011	195	188	166	111	361	299
July-December 2011	234	158	140	95	374	253
January-June 2012	155	140	94	86	249	226
Total	667	552.32	442	327	1109	879



³ Our new SOLR-based index, launched just this past March 2012, offers a single entrance to all of the Society’s different research collection data sources as well as branded search pages to each separate source. The single search box is evident in the upper right-hand corner of all Society web pages. The finding aids search page can be accessed at: <http://greatriversnetwork.org/index.php?brand=findaids>.



6. *Track processing rates during the course of the project.*

	Government Records				Manuscripts			
	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Total Time	Avg. Proc. Rate ⁴	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Total Time	Avg. Proc. Rate
October-December 2010	49	337	364.25	1.08	53	181.05	525.75	2.90
January-June 2011	68	1101	987.25	0.90	198	471.30	1381.75	2.93
July-December 2011	60	932.15	832.00	0.89	151	383.80	1054.50	2.75
January-June 2012	99	775.52	950.75	1.23	106	609.65	1655.75	2.72
Total	276	3146.32	3134.25	1.00	508	1645.80	4626.25	2.81

⁴ Rates are in hours per cubic foot.

	Project Total			
	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Total Time	Avg. Proc. Rate
October-December 2010	102	337	890.00	1.72
January-June 2011	266	1101	2369.00	1.51
July-December 2011	211	932.15	1895.00	1.44
January-June 2012	205	1385.17	2606.50	1.88
Total	784	4792.12	7760.50	1.62

We expected there to be differences between the two collecting areas based on differences in record-keeping practices, acquisition size, open or new collection status, and legacy data conditions. As expected, these differences can be seen in the average size of accessions, the resulting descriptive products, and required processing time. What we far underestimated was how often a government record acquisition became two or more record series and how often a manuscript acquisition represented an addition to an already existing collection. And although we expected manuscripts acquisitions to present less organized conditions, the percentage of time spent on physical processing versus descriptive tasks did not greatly differ between the two areas (51% for government records; 59% for manuscripts).

	Average number of cubic feet per accession	Average number of resulting MARC records per accession	Average number of resulting finding aids per accession	Average number of processing hours per accession
Government records	11.40	2.42	2.00	11.36
Manuscripts	3.24	0.87	0.64	9.11
Project Total	6.11	1.41	1.12	9.90

7. *Design and track e-metrics to measure use of the project's digital products and services.*

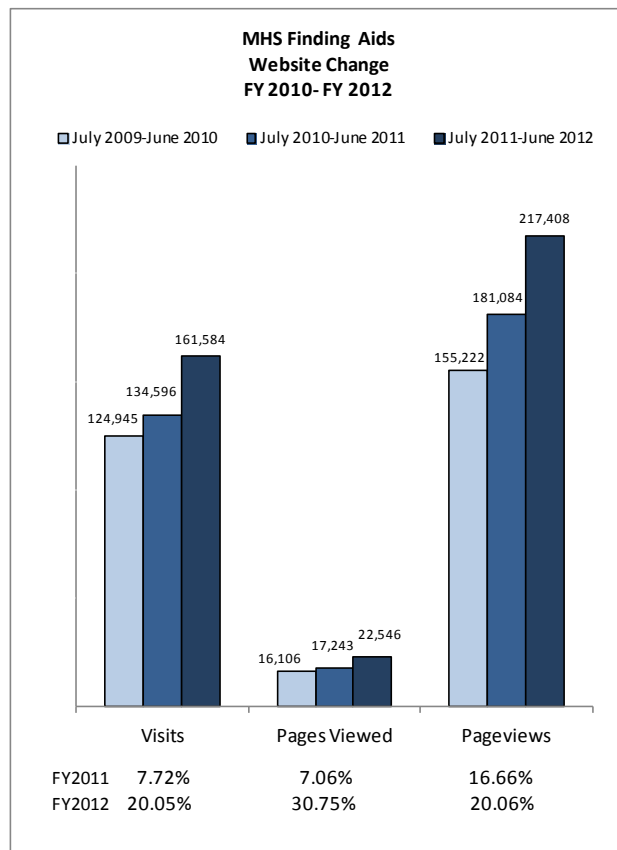
By the end of this project, we had estimated that we would see what we thought would be a steep 10% increase in the number of visitors and pages used on our finding aids website.

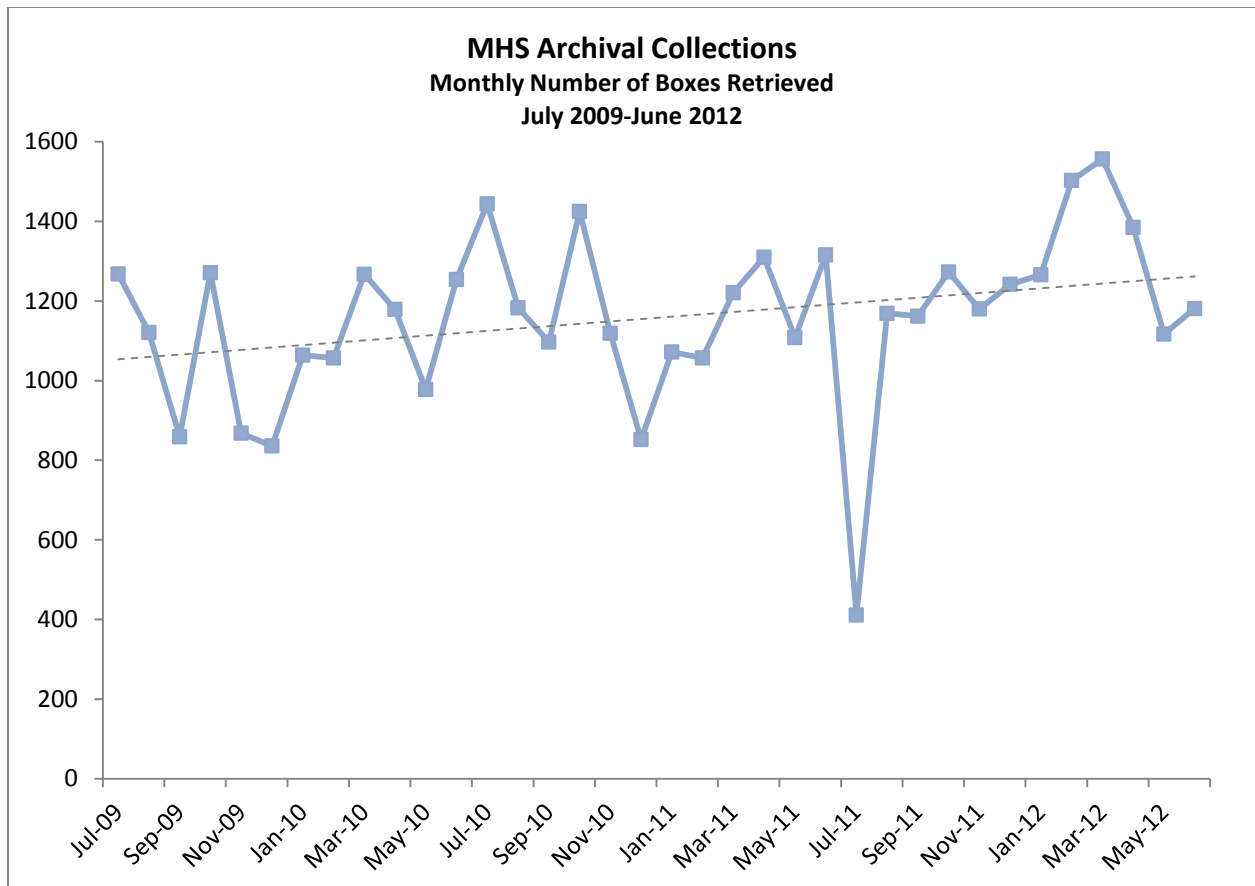
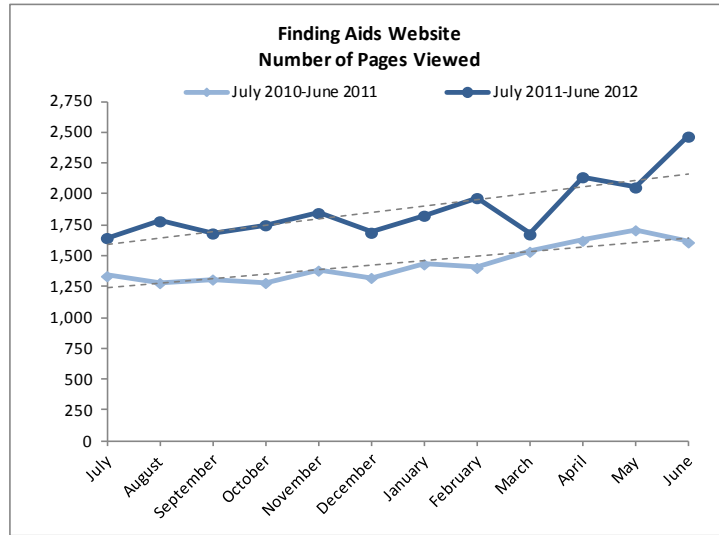
Monthly longitudinal trends tracked over the last two years evidence increases of 20% in the number of visits, 31% in the number of pages viewed, and 20% in pageviews over what appears to be somewhat cyclical annual traffic patterns. Compared to the fiscal year that ended before we began this project in June 2010, the number of visits increased 29% and both the number of pages and pageviews increased by an overwhelming 40% between July 2011 and June 2012.

Moving away from web statistics to physical reading room numbers, we also find a notable upward trend in the number of archival containers retrieved for researchers on a monthly basis over the duration of the project, as shown in the final graph in this narrative. Since new finding aids were loaded onto the website as soon as they were produced, it seems reasonable to presume, at least

tentatively, that exposing our hidden collections through this grant has positively affected use and outcomes for users. We will continue to monitor usage into the foreseeable future.

	Visits	Pages Viewed	Page-views	Change: Visits	Change: Pages Viewed	Change: Page-views
July 2009-June 2010	124,945	16,106	155,222			
July 2010-June 2011	134,596	17,243	181,084	8%	7%	17%
July 2011-June 2012	161,584	22,546	217,408	20%	31%	20%
Change between fiscal years 2010 and 2012				29%	40%	40%





Appendix

Government Records - Monthly Processing Totals										
	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Microfilm/ Microfiche	e- Records	Catalog Records	Finding Aids	Total Time	Physical Processing Time	Cataloging Time	Average Proc. & Cat. Rate
Oct-10	6	39.33			5	5	39.00	17.00	22.00	0.99
Nov-10	13	52.75	201		38	24	146.50	53.50	93.00	2.78
Dec-10	30	245.27			40	37	178.75	86.00	92.75	0.73
Jan-11	13	110.05			30	27	142.50	76.75	65.75	1.29
Feb-11	16	258.35		1,746	41	54	160.25	64.25	98.75	0.62
Mar-11	13	60.05	163	438	35	30	201.50	68.50	113.75	3.36
Apr-11	8	66.60			19	19	131.50	80.25	51.25	1.97
May-11	10	118.10			25	22	110.50	59.00	51.50	0.94
Jun-11	8	488.15	1126		45	36	241.00	169.25	71.75	0.49
Jul-11										
Aug-11	20	283.55	2046		98	71	314.75	149.75	164.00	1.11
Sep-11	15	191.60			42	31	227.25	155.25	72.00	1.19
Oct-11	5	47.65			18	14	34.50	6.25	28.25	0.72
Nov-11	11	67.05	10		50	23	142.75	74.00	68.75	2.13
Dec-11	9	342.30	1410		26	19	112.75	69.50	43.25	0.33
Jan-12	20	83.45			33	34	247.50	107.50	140.00	2.97
Feb-12	33	77.85	80		37	33	101.00	46.25	54.75	1.30
Mar-12	16	15.41			27	25	85.25	31.00	54.25	5.53
Apr-12	10	142.01	38	3	15	11	97.50	43.50	54.00	0.69
May-12	8	83.80	45000	800	23	19	127.50	55.00	71.50	1.52
Jun-12	12	373.00			20	18	292.00	185.00	107.50	0.78
Total	276	3146.32	50074	2987	667	552	3134.25	1597.50	1518.75	1.00
Monthly average	14	159.31	2535.39	151.24	34	28	158.70	80.89	76.90	

Percent of total time	Physical processing 51%	Description 49%
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Note: The lack of numbers for July 2011 is accounted for by the 3-week state government shutdown, which also closed MHS. Acquisitions that were started in July or the preceding months were completed in later months.

Manuscripts – Monthly Processing Totals									
	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Microfilm/Microfiche	Catalog Records	Finding Aids	Total Time	Physical Processing Time	Cataloging Time	Average Proc. & Cat. Rate
Oct-10	3	2.50		3	1	11.00			4.40
Nov-10	19	146.35		17	15	340.00			2.32
Dec-10	31	32.20		22	19	174.75			5.43
Jan-11	34	72.45	3	24	20	263.50			3.64
Feb-11	34	100.55	1	31	20	252.25			2.51
Mar-11	25	91.10		20	17	233.50			2.56
Apr-11	33	74.20		26	18	188.50			2.54
May-11	32	109.20		27	25	290.50			2.66
Jun-11	40	23.80		38	11	153.50			6.45
Jul-11	14	34.15		14	12	138.25	109.00	29.00	4.05
Aug-11	60	135.35		54	26	236.75	163.25	75.00	1.75
Sep-11	22	8.70		28	15	65.50	28.00	39.50	7.53
Oct-11	21	118.85		13	19	274.25	87.05	191.55	2.31
Nov-11	16	11.45		15	14	78.75	25.00	53.75	6.88
Dec-11	18	75.30		16	9	269.50	126.75	142.75	3.58
Jan-12	37	24.75		33	29	86.50	34.00	52.50	3.49
Feb-12	10	2.25	336 ⁵	8	8	462.25	308.50	153.75	1.37
Mar-12	8	349.50		5	6	626.50	542.00	84.50	1.79
Apr-12	13	19.70		13	12	54.25	16.50	37.75	2.75
May-12	19	46.15		20	16	108.50	26.00	82.50	2.35
Jun-12	19	167.30	4	15	15	317.75	134.25	173.50	1.90
Total	508	1645.80	344	442	327	4626.25	1600.30	1116.05	2.81

Monthly average	26	83.33	17	22	17	234.24	136.20	94.98
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Percent of total time	Physical processing 59%	Description 41%
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Note: Time split between physical processing and cataloging activities was not consistently tracked between October 2010 and June 2011. The averages and percentages given here are based on an average of 11-3/4 months rather than the full 19-3/4 month project period.

⁵ Each reel of microfilm (~1,000 images per reel) is given an equivalent value of 1 cubic foot in this table.