

Interim Performance Report

Grant No. NAR10-RB-50084-10

Eliminating Archival Backlogs

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Minnesota Historical Society

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## **Overview of third reporting period: July-December 2011**

The biggest news on our backlog elimination project was NHPRC's approval of a six-month extension which allows us to expand work--as and if necessary--through June 30, 2012. But let us assure you we will keep working until the grant funds are all spent, which will happen sometime between April and June.

The project extension gives us some room to achieve a few tactical benefits. First, we can gain back time that was lost to a late project start (mid-October 2010 rather than July) and to the three-week state shutdown this past July. Second, the extension will permit needed time to bring forward manuscript acquisitions from the "deep backlog" that we can process and catalog under the NHPRC project. Third, and as an added bonus, we can realize an important discovery and access objective by converting the Northern Pacific Railway finding aids into EAD. This project parallels analogous work already started for the finding aids to the Great Northern Railway Company. By having the flexibility to shift some staff onto private grant funding for a few months, we are able to dedicate attention to these very popular and rich collections.

We have already reached our goals for the numbers of new or revised MARC records and finding aids and we exceeded our goal during the last quarter for the number of accessions that have been arranged and described. We continue to achieve remarkable productivity on the project, staying well on target with regard to the total cubic footage of processed and cataloged accessions.

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 of a high caliber, with many including digital objects and other enhancements. Many repositories performing MPLP (More Product Less Process) work have been satisfied to produce basic catalog records linked to rudimentary container lists (if that). We have raised the bar a notch or two above that, and are proud of the quality of our work in the face of high productivity expectations. The project staff deserves a good deal of praise for their passion and effectiveness.

## **Performance in accomplishing project deliverables**

1. *Submit complete reports by the deadlines in the Grant Award Summary.* This is the third of three interim reports to NHPRC. Given the late start on our project and the 21-day Society-wide shut-down we are very pleased the Commission has accepted our request to extend the project through June 30, 2012. We will write a full, final report after the project is completed.

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 family papers and Civil War letters of [Thomas Cheetham](#) and miscellaneous records from both the [Minnesota Territorial Archives](#) and the [State Legislature](#).

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.

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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> Links to the project's *What's New* page were included in each of these articles.

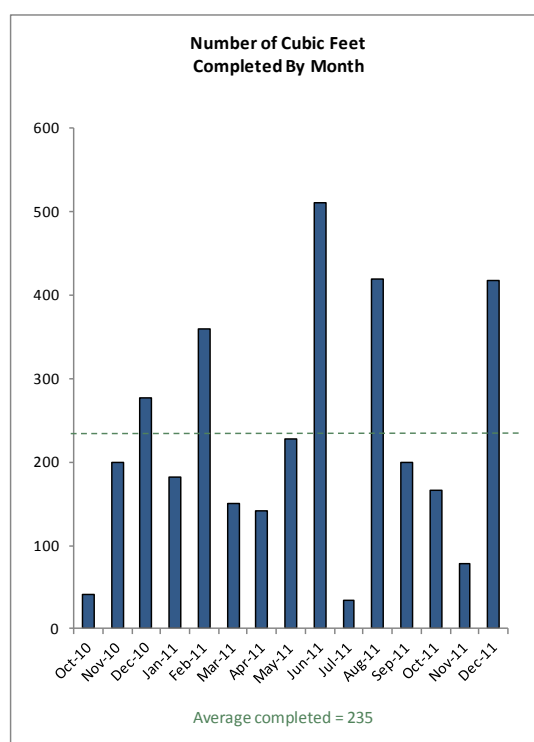
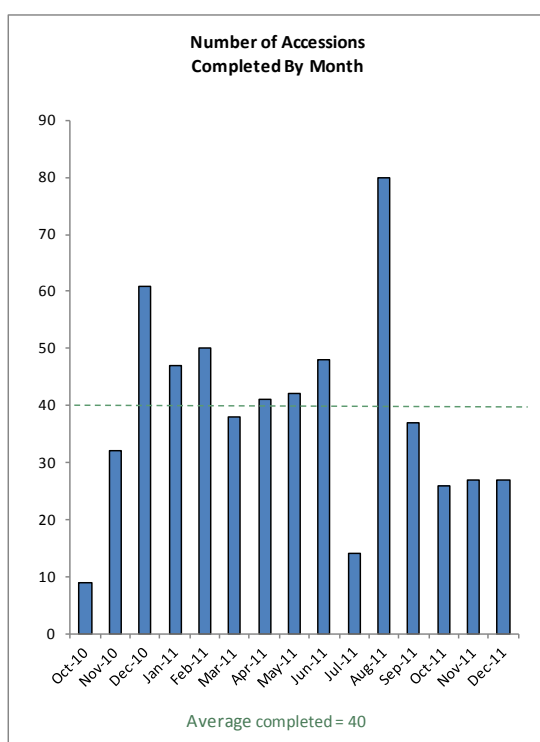
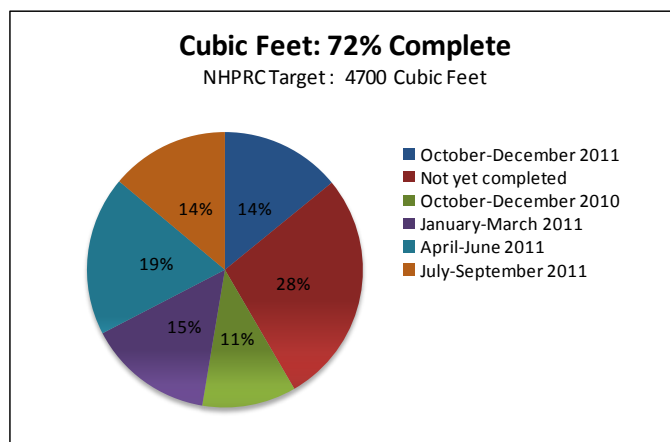
4. *Process at least 4,700 cubic feet of records, including 3,100 cubic feet of government records and 1,600 cubic feet of manuscript collections.* In our second interim report, we reported completion of 2,091 cubic feet or 45% of the project goal. Over the current July-December 2011 reporting period we completed an additional 1,315 cubic feet, resulting in the complete processing of 72% of the project total by volume. The work completed during the reporting period comprises 932.15 cubic feet of government records and 383.8 cubic feet of manuscripts. On average each month, we have processed and cataloged 40 accessions of 235 cubic feet. Because of our late start and the three-week Society-wide shut-down in July, only 71% of the intended project timeframe has elapsed, which puts us barely ahead of our target for the reporting period. Because of the steady productivity achieved in each of the reporting periods, we remain confident that we will easily achieve the overall project target of 4,700 cubic feet by completing the remaining 1,294 cubic feet by June 30, 2012.

The tables and charts below demonstrate our processing progress to date:

	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>2370.80</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>1036.15</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>3406.95</b>

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

<sup>2</sup> *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](http://www.twincitiesarma.org/linked/2011_09_metro_record.pdf) (accessed January 23, 2011).



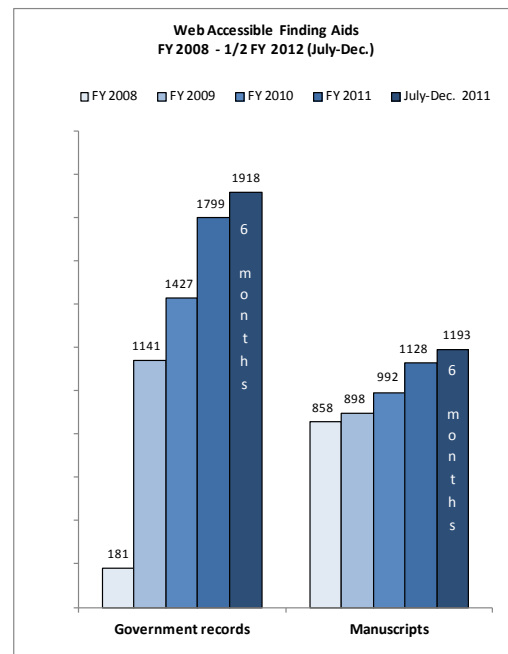
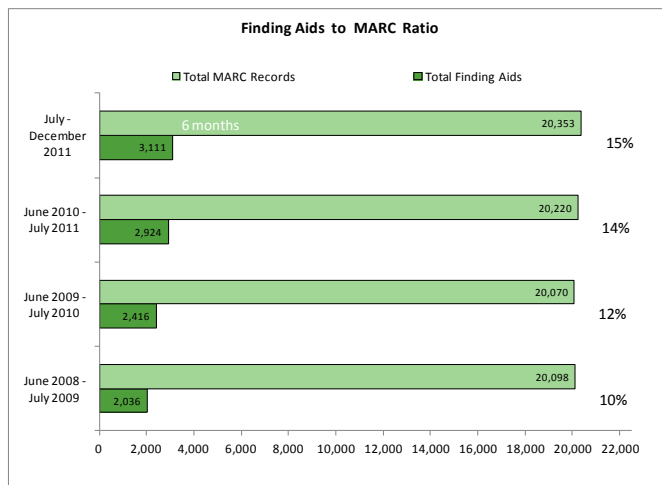
5. *Create or revise at least 300 EAD finding aids and at least 500 MARC catalog records and post them to the historical society's OPAC and to national bibliographic databases including OCLC and a web accessible repository of EAD finding aids.* During the July-December 2011 reporting period, project staff created 374 MARC catalog records that were entered in both our local MnPALS system and OCLC World Cat. Combined with the 486 catalog records created in the first two reporting periods, the project's cumulative total now stands at 860, far in excess of our stated goal of 500 records for the entire project. The team also created or revised 253 EAD finding aids during the reporting period which, when added to the 400 created in the first two periods, more than doubles the overall project target of 300. Throughout the course of this project, we have produced an average of 59 catalog records and 45 finding aids each month.

Of the total 374 catalog records under the current reporting period, only 133, or slightly more than one-third, were new. The remaining 65%, just under two-thirds, involved revisions to existing data.

However, the production of finding aids tells a different story. While the majority of the accessions we processed were additions to collections that were already cataloged in MARC format, the finding aids existed only as typescripts or in word-processed formats that required full EAD mark-up. 187 (74%) of the total 253 finding aids produced between July and December resulted in new EAD inventories. Additionally, these earlier finding aids often existed as multiple legacy inventories based on disparate shelving locations, alternative microfilm formats, or restricted status. These legacy inventories were transformed and combined into one EAD file. We believe the resulting finding aids benefit both user access and internal collections management by bringing all the disparate parts together in one standard descriptive tool that allows for future ease of maintenance. Examples of these are the correspondence and journal of Revolutionary War soldier and post commandant [Josiah Snelling](#) and the county auditor's assessment rolls for [Clay](#), [Isanti](#), and [Stearns](#) counties.

The results from this project can be seen in the number of finding aids added to our web site. Just over the past six months, the number of web-accessible inventories increased by 7% for government record series and 6% for manuscripts. In terms of the ratio between finding aids and MARC records, the finding aids on our website now represent 15% of our cataloged collections, a 5% increase since July 2009.

	Government Records		Manuscripts		Project Total	
	Catalog Records	Finding Aids	Catalog Records	Finding Aids	Catalog Records	Finding Aids
October-December 2010	83	66	42	35	125	101
January-June 2011	195	188	166	111	361	299
July-December 2011	234	158	140	95	374	253
<b>Total</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>653</b>



6. *Track processing rates during the course of the project.* We are continuing to monitor our processing rates throughout this project and are still achieving an average productivity beyond

what we anticipated. Despite variations in processing complexity, descriptive detail, or digital attention, we achieved a very admirable, overall processing rate of 1.51 hours per cubic foot throughout the course of this project.

On average, our processing rate for government records during the current reporting period was 0.89 hours per cubic foot. On average, the government records accessions were 15.54 cubic feet in size that required 13.87 hours to process and catalog. Slightly lower than our last reporting period, the time gained during this period was due to the size of several large accessions. The largest consisted of 330 cubic feet of [session laws](#) from the Secretary of State’s office that required only 34 hours, including packing and transporting the laws from the secretary’s office. For this accession, the laws were bound volumes that were already in good order, had been preliminarily inventoried over the summer, and only one record series resulted. The next four largest accessions were tax lists and assessment rolls from Clay, Isanti, Sibley, and Stearns counties. These four accessions totaled 209.25 cubic feet that resulted in 17 record series, 17 catalog records and 17 finding aids, and altogether required 109 hours to complete. The time expended on the largest accessions is far lower than our average, but, on the other hand, the smallest government records accessions required far more time. Over the last six months, 4 accessions of 0.1 cubic feet were processed. These four small accessions resulted in 30 MARC records and 6 finding aids that required 21 hours to complete. The most complicated of these small accessions, originating from the [Cass Lake Land District](#) of the U.S. General Land Office, resulted in 25 catalog records and one finding aid.

Our earlier estimate of a processing rate of 2.5 hour per cubic feet for manuscript accessions was slightly optimistic. During the current reporting period 151 accessions totaling 383.80 cubic feet were processed at an average rate of 2.77 hours per cubic foot. On average, manuscript accessions were 2.54 cubic feet in size that required 7.04 hours to process and catalog. The four largest accessions included 56 cubic feet of the congressional files of [David Minge](#) that required 25.5 hours to process and catalog; 45 cubic feet of [Kiene family](#) business records that required 86 hours, and 44 cubic feet from the state-wide [Minnesota Senior Federation](#) association and its affiliated metropolitan region that were processed and cataloged as one addition in 68 hours. During this period we also added 8 cubic feet to the papers of [Eugene McCarthy](#) and reprocessed 45 cubic feet that had been reappraised in 1995 but never completed. Work on the McCarthy papers required a total of 180 hours that included the migration of a typescript inventory of more than 300 pages to EAD. Also during this same period, 47 manuscript accessions, almost one-third of the total, each of 0.1 cubic feet or less altogether consumed 128.50 hours. For these very small accessions, the average processing rate increased to 27.4 hours per cubic foot. In these cases, additions were made to existing collections with typescript container lists that were migrated to EAD or that involved the production and addition of digital content. Examples include the papers of [Charles Eugene Flandrau](#), Indian agent to the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute Dakota; [Thomas S. Williamson](#), physician and missionary to the Dakota Indians at La Qui Parle and Kaposia; [James B. Christie](#) and [Thomas D. Christie](#), two brothers who served in the Civil War; [Frank B. Kellogg](#), Minnesota senator and U.S. ambassador to Great Britain; [Karl Rolvaag](#), Minnesota governor and U.S. ambassador to Iceland; and [Michael John Dowling](#) (our second finding aid with a digital archival object in an MP4 file format), blizzard survivor and newspaper publisher.

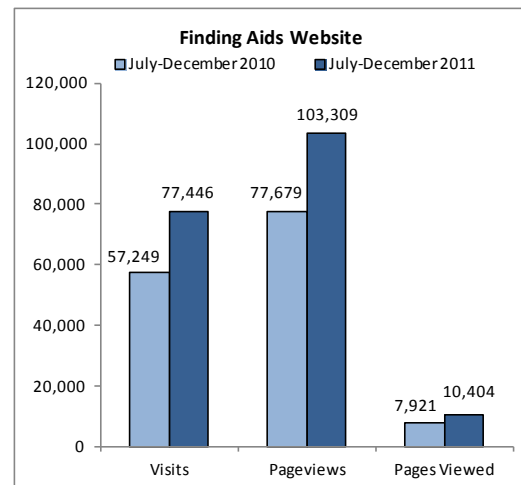
	Government Records				Manuscripts			
	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Total Time	Avg. Proc. Rate	Accessions	Cubic Feet	Total Time	Avg. Proc. Rate
October-December 2010	49	337	364.25	1.08	53	181.05	525.75	2.90
January-June 2011	68	1101	987.25	0.90	198	471.30	1381.75	2.93

July-December 2011	60	932.15	832.00	0.89	151	383.80	1063.00	2.77
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>2370.80</b>	<b>2183.50</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>1036.15</b>	<b>2970.50</b>	<b>2.87</b>

	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	1886.50	1.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>3406.95</b>	<b>5154.00</b>	<b>1.51</b>

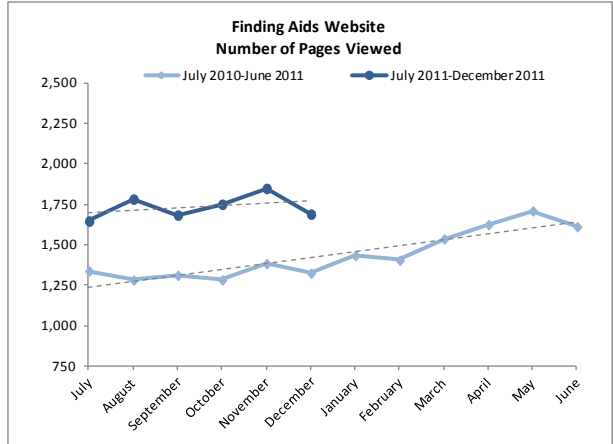
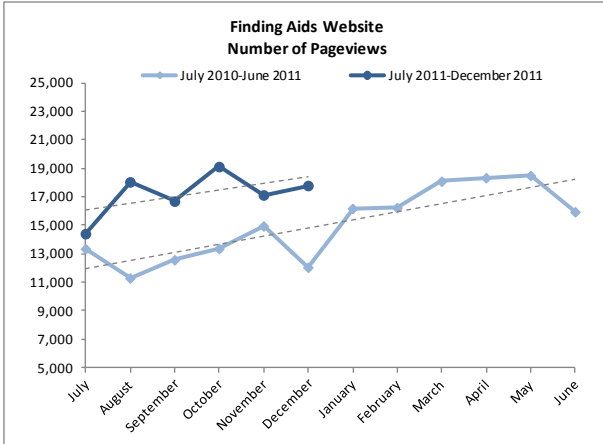
7. *Design and track e-metrics to measure use of the project's digital products and services.* Since the project began, we have used Google Analytics to evaluate the use of our EAD finding aids by web visitors. We hypothesized that by increasing the number of web-searchable finding aids, we would increase online discovery and drive reading room access. In our proposal we projected a 10% increase in both web use and reading room retrieval but we are seeing much higher results.

In our last report, we compared the number of visits to our finding aids website, the number of individual pages that were viewed, and the total number of pageviews between Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011 and learned that we had experienced a 7.7% increase in the number of visits, a 7% increase in the number of individual pages viewed, and a 16.7% increase in the total number of pageviews. In this reporting period, we continue to see increased growth in finding aids use. Comparing July-December 2011 to the same six-month period in 2010, we see a 35% increase in visits, a 33% increase in the number of pageviews, and a 31% increase in the number of individual pages that were viewed.

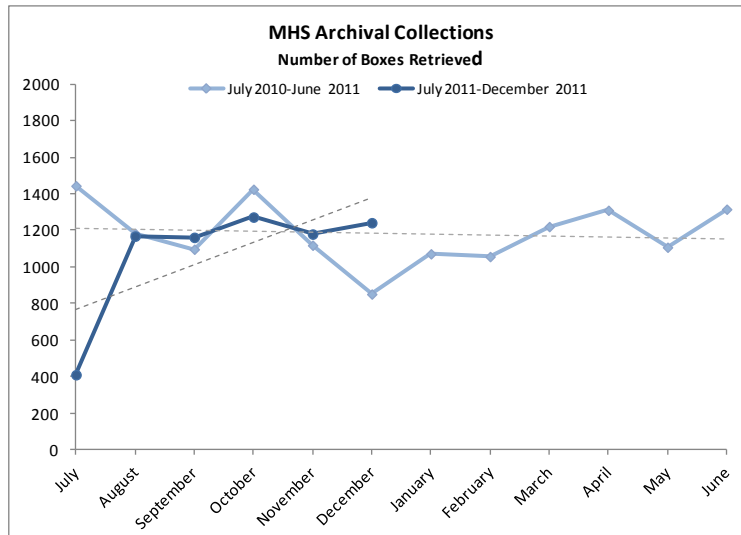


Considering that we added only 6% more finding aids to our website over the last six months bringing the total number of EAD finding aids to 2,139,<sup>3</sup> these results seem surprisingly far in excess of our 10% projection, indeed almost too good to be true. A fuller look at annual trends over the last two years gives us a steadier picture of audience interaction.

<sup>3</sup> A total of 3,430 finding aids were available on our website at the end of December 2011. Of these, 2,139 were EAD versions in XML that contain a Google Analytics tracking code. The remainder were 1,289 PDF files and 2 HTML files that did not include Google Analytics tracking codes.



In the previous interim report we announced an overall **9%** increase in the number of archival containers retrieved for researchers, and suggested that this increase in discoverability is translating into greater audience impacts in terms of use of archival collections. The following six months showed flat or slightly declining archival container retrievals. A large share of these disappointing results can be attributed to the fact that our reading room was closed for three weeks in July due to the state government shutdown. And seasonal fluctuations probably play a part as well.



We are very interested to see how these trends bear out over the next six months.