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Beyond a Box of Documents: The Collaborative Partnership Behind the Oregon Chinese Disinterment Documents Collection

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank their project partners, Tom Banse and Colin Fogarty of the Northwest News Network and Marcus Lee of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.

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Natalia Fernández
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ABSTRACT

This article is a case study of a collaboration between the Oregon Multicultural Archives of Oregon State University, Portland State University Library's Special Collections, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), and the Northwest News Network to preserve and make accessible a recovered box of Oregon Chinese disinterment documents. By examining what influenced and engaged each partner, this case study offers an opportunity to better understand the motivations of diverse stakeholders in a “post-custodial era” project that challenges traditional practices of custody, control, and access.

In early 2010, an anonymous caller contacted Tom Banse, Regional Correspondent for the Northwest News Network, to pitch a story. He had in his possession a box of documents that he was confident was of historical significance. However, he told Banse, he was concerned about turning over the documents to a repository where they might simply be shelved, no more known or available than when they had been within his personal possession. He had called Banse in the hope that the reporter would be inspired to investigate and share one of the many stories held within the box. Perhaps in this way, the documents would be vitalized and valued, securing their future and preventing a fate in which they effectively disappeared. Skeptical at first, Banse was ultimately drawn into the history contained within that box. From it came a news feature, broadcasted throughout the northwest and picked up by the Voice of America. But more than that, the box of documents

became a responsibility that Banse and his producer, Colin Fogarty, took to heart. At the conclusion of their work, they set out to find a way to ensure the future of the documents, not just by finding them an appropriate home but by building a web of stakeholders and “creat[ing] relationships and contacts that could lead to something more, something that stretches beyond this one box of documents.”¹ This article is a case study of that resulting collaboration. It traces the development of the relationship between four project partners, the Northwest News Network, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA), a component of Oregon State University’s Special Collections & Archives Research Center, and Portland State University (PSU) Library’s Special Collections. The collaboration ultimately resulted in a digital exhibit and an ongoing connection that has continued to value access over competition and custody. By examining what influenced and engaged each partner, this case study offers an opportunity to better understand the motivations of diverse stakeholders in a project that challenges traditional practices of custody, control, and access.

The Story in the Documents and the Practice of Disinterment

The documents Tom Banse received from the anonymous donor recorded the details of a 1948 disinterment of Chinese immigrant remains throughout Oregon. The project recovered remains from 559 graves at 23 cemeteries in 17 towns across the state. It was common for Chinese immigrants that came to the Pacific Northwest during the mid-19th through the mid-20th century to make arrangements for their remains to be disinterred and shipped back to their home provinces in China. In traditional Chinese culture, there was a shared belief that the continuity between this life and the afterlife depended on the care of one’s material remains by family members after death. Exclusion laws, however, made permanent settlement in Oregon, as in many other states, problematic for Chinese immigrants. Laws prohibiting land ownership, restricting the immigration of Chinese women, and forbidding mixed-raced marriages made establishing families in the region nearly impossible for the many single men who made up the majority of the Chinese immigrant population. Unable to build new familial networks in the Pacific Northwest, many Chinese immigrants chose instead to make arrangements to return their remains to their home provinces after death.² Local district or family associations would oversee the burial, disinterment, and shipment to China for a “death insurance” fee. These associations generally purchased plots of land in a town’s cemetery, commonly a designated “Chinese section” within a cemetery. Though the exact time for exhumation varied, it was usually at least three years after death and burial; however, it could be decades later. At the appropriate time, the organization or association charged with the task would exhume designated remains and arrange

1. Colin Fogarty, email message to the authors, February 15, 2011.
2. Sue Fawn Chung and Priscilla Wegars, eds., *Chinese American Death Rituals: Respecting the Ancestors* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005).

their shipment back. Most were sent on to the Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong, which received Chinese remains from all over the world. The hospital would advertise the arrivals so that families could come to claim their relatives and transport their remains back to their home provinces. The records in Banse's possession traced the process of the 1948 disinterment project from the initial planning to the final shipping stages and included applications and permits for exhumation from the Oregon State Board of Health, lists of graves, cargo manifests, receipts and purchase orders, insurance paperwork, and related correspondence. A handful of the materials also made reference to an earlier disinterment project in 1928.

Intrigued by the materials, Banse began to research their historical context. In the course of his investigation, Banse found that the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) of Portland had been responsible for the major disinterment projects in the state. Established in the late 19th century, the CCBA was a Chinese community-serving organization that assisted immigrants with employment and immigration processes, provided support in the face of racial discrimination, and facilitated communication with family members in China. The CCBA remains an active organization in the Portland community and maintains a small museum onsite in its historic building. The collection's connection to the CCBA was confirmed when Banse found it held a selection of related records, including those from an earlier regional disinterment in 1917.³

Banse's resulting story, broadcasted in July 2010, focused on the mysterious fate of the remains disinterred in 1948 and shipped out to China in 1949. The records indicated problems between the CCBA, the shipping company, and the boat's captain. Money was misappropriated, the courts became involved, and the contested shipment lingered in the Hong Kong harbor long enough to fall into the chaos of the impending civil war.⁴ While Banse's feature focused on this particular incident, he also recognized the many other stories found in the documents remained to be investigated and shared. The records included names, dates, and places of birth and death that together represented a uniquely detailed picture of Chinese immigrant life throughout Oregon, including information about a number of once vital Chinese communities that have since disappeared from the rural landscape. The disinterment records could be foundational in reconstructing this important aspect of shared Oregon history. The individual information captured in the disinterment rosters and

3. Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (<http://www.ccbaportland.org/>) and Marcus Lee, "Oregon Chinese Disinterment Documents: A Collaborative Effort to Share an Untold Story" (presentation given at the annual meeting for the Northwest Archivists, Salem, Oregon, April 2012).
4. Tom Banse, "Unfinished Journey: Historic Documents Trace Immigrants' Remains Long Trip Home," originally broadcast on July 12, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128464249>.

permits could be invaluable to descendants seeking genealogical information on family members who might not otherwise be traceable.⁵

Building a Collaborative Partnership

Having come to understand the significant cultural and historical importance of these records, Banse and Fogarty, once finished with the documents, recognized the importance of securing their future in some way. Due to the clear connection of the documents to the CCBA, they decided to begin the conversation with the CCBA representatives they had met in the course of Banse's research—in particular, Marcus Lee, who serves as the chair of the CCBA history museum and archives committee. At the time Banse and Fogarty approached them, however, the organization had just begun a series of renovations to its facility and as a result, they were hesitant to take on physical custody of the additional documents. Concurrent to their conversation with the CCBA, Fogarty and Banse also contacted representatives of PSU Library's Special Collections and OSU's Special Collections & Archives Research Center, affiliates of the two largest public universities in the vicinity. Fogarty had begun scanning the original documents while they were in the possession of the Northwest News Network but lacked the equipment to capture several of the very large pieces. While the original conversation focused on identifying a partner to digitize the larger documents, it quickly broadened to include how to best serve the overall needs of the collection and the community to which it belonged. Bringing together both branches of their conversation through an email to the contacts from the CCBA, PSU, and OSU, Fogarty stated that the hoped outcome was “for the documents to be preserved in a way that allows appropriate public and scholarly access while respecting the Northwest's Chinese community's strong desire to keep these papers close to home.”⁶

From the discussion rose a number of questions. Where could the collection remain in the interim while the CCBA completed its construction? How could the documents be made more broadly accessible? What would be of most help to the CCBA and its community in the long run? At CCBA's request, it was decided that the materials would be transferred to and remain at the PSU Library in the secure storage of PSU's Special Collections until the CCBA was prepared to reclaim custody. In the interim, the campus's close proximity to the CCBA would allow community members easy access to the collection and help facilitate local research requests. While holding the documents, PSU's Special Collections could perform basic archival rehousing and create custom containers for more fragile items. Through its Oregon Multicultural Archives, OSU had an existing technological infrastructure and previous experience

5. Tom Banse, “Oregon Chinese Disinterment Documents: A Collaborative Effort to Share an Untold Story” (presentation given at the annual meeting for the Northwest Archivists, Salem, Oregon, April 2012).
6. Colin Fogarty, email message, July 23, 2010.

curating and hosting digital collections, making it the logical lead for creating an online exhibit highlighting the documents in their historical context. In the spring of 2012, the online exhibit “Oregon Chinese Disinterment Documents” was launched, providing around-the-clock access to all the materials passed on by the anonymous donor to Tom Banse, an achievement celebrated by the four partners in a panel presentation at the Northwest Archivists and Oregon Heritage Commission Joint Conference in April 2012.

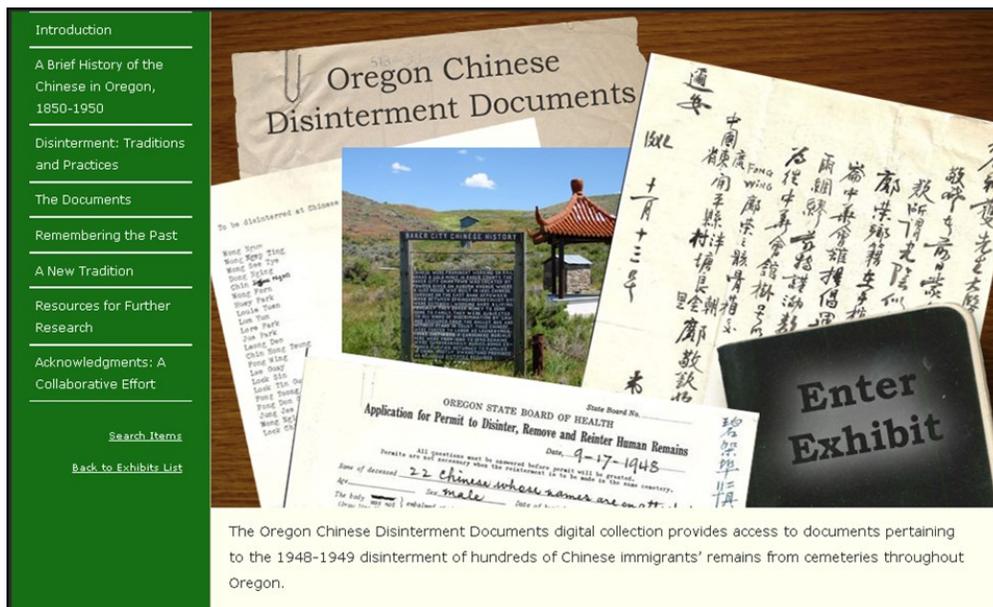


Figure 1. The online exhibit includes digital access to the collection’s documents, information regarding the history of the Chinese in Oregon and disinterment practices, and links to further local and national resources regarding the Chinese immigrant experience in the United States. (<http://archives.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/oregondisintermentdocuments>)

Collaboration and Community in the Post-Custodial Era

There are two themes that have come to define the archives profession’s understanding and expectations of the “post-custodial era”: access and cooperation. In his prescient article, “Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era,” F. Gerald Ham noted that rapid developments in information technology were transforming

the archives landscape in a number of ways.⁷ The proliferation of electronic records, the ability for such records to exist simultaneously in multiple repositories, and the possibility of broad virtual access all posited challenges to a custodial perspective on records that Ham argues was “excessively proprietary” and too inclined to encourage archivists to be “preoccupied with our own gardens, and too little aware of the larger historical and social landscape that surrounded us.” For Ham, the growth of “increasingly complex and decentralized holdings” at a time of shrinking resources for archives could only be effectively addressed through “inter-institutional cooperation” and “networks designed to maximize the use of limited resources.”⁸ Further, he saw this culture of cooperation as an opportunity to facilitate outreach from larger, more established institutions to smaller organizations both as way to promulgate professional standards and practices and to “share the responsibility” of maintaining the historical record.⁹

Citing Ham’s call to action as a pivotal moment in the transition from a “custodial” to “post-custodial” era, Jeannette A. Bastian, in her article, “Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Postcustodial Role for a New Century,” critiqued the professional response that immediately followed as overly-focused on the appraisal and management of burgeoning records. She felt this missed the clear potential for a shift from traditional notions of custody preoccupied with protection and control to one more informed by community need and driven by a commitment to broad access.¹⁰ For Bastian, in the true post-custodial paradigm, “[c]ustody only serves an archival purpose in the long term if it accommodates the people and events to whom the records relate as well as the collective memory that the records foster.”¹¹ Bastian’s advocacy for the primacy of access in archives is set against the backdrop of the post-colonial Virgin Islands, where she argues the vestiges of colonialism carried over to a provenance-focused system that has ultimately separated those in the local community most affected by related records from realistic access to them, thereby undermining the possibility of a “cohesive and reliable construction of collective memory.”¹²

Her example highlights the strong connection between an archival emphasis on access and the relationship of communities to their records. As Bastian notes repeatedly, access in archives is more accurately a question of control—who has the

7. F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era,” *American Archivist* 44:3 (1981): 207-216.

8. *Ibid.*, 211.

9. *Ibid.*, 213.

10. Jeannette A Bastian, “Taking Custody, Giving Access: a Postcustodial Role for a New Century,” *Archivaria* 53 (2002): 76-93.

11. *Ibid.*, 91.

12. *Ibid.*, 93.

power to provide, deny, or demand access? Returning control to communities, or at the least enlisting and valuing their direct engagement, is a major theme in the growing body of professional literature focusing on community archives and records. This advocacy for community determination and participation in archival procedures and processes informs explorations of community-driven collection development, appraisal, and description, as in the framework proposed in Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan's "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections."¹³ Such advocacy also supports relationships between institutional repositories and community archives that replace a focus on traditional transfers of property with "the emphasis [on] the handing on of knowledge to future generations and the sharing of expertise between organizations."¹⁴

These themes of the post-custodial era are manifested in a number of current projects that emphasize collaboration and access with a focus often on communities previously under-represented in traditional archives and now committed to an active leadership role in their own historical preservation. In Colorado, archival repositories at the University of Colorado Denver and the Colorado State University-Pueblo collaborated with the special collections of local public libraries and formed specific initiatives to reach out the Latino/Latina community. To further support community control and involvement, Colorado State University-Pueblo developed the Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage & Diversity Archives as well as the Chicano Movement Archives. Each has specific initiatives to actively consult the collection donors regarding their records to ensure that the community retains stewardship of its materials if it so wishes.¹⁵ Taking advantage of ongoing advances in technology as well as a relative democratization of digital access, the South Asian American Digital Archives (SAADA), founded in 2008, is an online repository showcasing the histories of people who have immigrated to the United States from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The original materials remain with the individuals, communities, or institutions while their digital surrogates are made freely accessible online. Although the project team is based in Philadelphia, the SAADA is a purely digital entity.¹⁶

13. Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections," *Archivaria* 63 (2007): 87-101.
14. Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "New Frameworks for Community Engagement in the Archive Sector: from Handing Over to Handing On," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16:1-2 (2012): 59-76. See also: Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens, "It is noh mistri, wi mekin histri.' Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK, Challenging and Subverting the Mainstream" and David Mander, "Special, Local and About Us: the Development of Community Archives in Britain" in Jeannette Allis Bastian and Ben Alexander, eds., *Community Archives: the Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet, 2010).
15. Beverly B. Allen, Dana EchoHawk, Rhonda Gonzales, Fawn-Amber Montoya, and Mary M. Somerville, "Yo Soy Colorado: Three Collaborative Hispanic Cultural Heritage Initiatives," *Collaborative Librarianship* 4:2 (2012): 39-52.
16. South Asian American Digital Archives, <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/> (accessed December 9, 2012).

Stakeholders in the Post-Custodial Era

As with the post-custodial projects described above, the collaboration around the Chinese disinterment documents was predicated on a shared assumption that the CCBA would drive all decisions on stewardship of the records, along with a shared goal of optimizing public access. Post-custodial collaborations between mainstream repositories and community archives have demonstrated that they can yield a number of other benefits for the participants. Established institutions can use collaboration to “enhance their profile with under-represented user groups and potentially increase the scope of their collections,” and community archives can meet their goals of increasing the visibility of their history and gaining new archival skills.¹⁷ In this case study, however, the collaboration drew in four diverse participants including two large but differently resourced public university libraries and a news organization with no previous connection to archival projects. The particulars of each stakeholder’s perspective and motivations in this case demonstrate the benefits of looking for partnerships and arrangements outside the usual sphere. It is an example of how a post-custodial project unbound from traditional expectations of practice and policy can invite involvement and support from unanticipated stakeholders.

The Northwest News Network

At the completion of their news story on the Chinese disinterment documents collection, reporter Tom Banse and producer Colin Fogarty found themselves in the unusual position of holding a box of unique historical documents without an obvious home. While a news story on the history of Chinese immigrants in Oregon fit in well with the station’s mission to tell stories of the Pacific Northwest region with “special attention to the places ‘in between,’”¹⁸ being the permanent custodian of the documents did not. It was clear that the long-term stewardship of this collection was beyond their purview but it was not immediately apparent where it should be transferred. The anonymous donor had expressed concern that if the collection was given to the wrong repository it might simply “disappear into a black hole.”¹⁹ Banse and Fogarty agreed that an active response was a priority, a feeling bolstered by their contact with Marcus Lee and Rebecca Liu of the CCBA. The CCBA representatives wanted to take ownership of the collection but also saw the value of a broader exposure for the materials. From this shared perspective, the beginning of a collaborative project came with Colin Fogarty then contacting representatives from PSU and the OMA.

17. Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd, 61.

18. NW News Network, “About,” <http://nwnewsnetwork.org/about> (accessed December 9, 2012).

19. Tom Banse, telephone interview with Paschild, November 26, 2012.

For Banse, prioritizing access was in service both to his listeners and to himself as a reporter. His news story based on the documents had been widely disseminated throughout the region and his hope was that those in the audience whose interest had been piqued would “be able to dive deeper” into the records if they wished.²⁰ And as a former state government reporter, Banse recognized the importance of open records and public access to information; he believes, “more access is always the default over less.”²¹ Beginning the discussion with the CCBA, however, was the necessary first step from the perspective of the news agency, which was invested in “not poisoning the well” with a community they anticipate continuing to cover with some regularity.²²

While the Northwest News Network is now the least actively involved in the direct stewardship of the collection, Banse envisions maintaining an ongoing relationship with the collaborators and the records. The knowledge base he developed in researching for his original story has already served him well in covering additional stories related to Chinese immigration in the Northwest. Banse continues to be called upon to speak on the disinterment records in different forums, including talks at local historical societies in locations represented in the original documents. From this, he continues to build a range of contacts throughout the Pacific Northwest that will benefit the work of the Northwest News Network in general. While this project was highly unusual for him as a reporter, Banse sees the outcome as “everything you could wish for and more” with the “best of all worlds coming out of it.”²³

The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Portland

Established in the in the late 19th century, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Portland (CCBA) originally functioned both as an informal governing body for the Chinese immigrant community helping to resolve internal conflicts, and as a centralized resource for supporting immigrants in acclimating to their new environment. The early CCBA assisted with housing and employment issues, helped navigate and respond to racist exclusion laws, served as a clearinghouse for communication between the community and connections in China, and, as noted previously, oversaw a number of disinterment projects for communities throughout Oregon. As the needs of the community have changed over time, so has the role of the CCBA, which now focuses more on student scholarships, language instruction, cultural heritage events, and the urban development impacting Portland’s historic Chinatown neighborhood. The CCBA also maintains a collection of artifacts and

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

documents, currently overseen by Marcus Lee, chair of the CCBA history museum and archives committee. It was through Lee and his co-committee member, Rebecca Liu, that the Northwest News Network first made contact with the CCBA. Lee, in turn, became the primary representative of the CCBA in the resulting collaborative project.

For the CCBA, the benefits of the collaboration were clear from the onset. A current priority of the CCBA is to upgrade and stabilize its historic building and operational systems. With grant-funded construction underway, housing the newly discovered documents at PSU for the interim was a welcome option. Lee also noted his desire to provide greater access to the documents would “get the roadblocks out of the way” for researchers.²⁴ As a family historian himself, Lee felt strongly about surfacing “pockets of information” that researchers might otherwise miss or overlook.²⁵ In particular, with the genealogical information included in the disinterment collection, Lee thought of family historians and researchers based in China and Taiwan for whom digital access might be the only means to utilize these materials. The CCBA, however, currently lacks the resources necessary to provide this level of online access, such as scanning equipment and reliable image hosting. Internal requests for funding to support digitization must compete with the more pressing needs of the facility renovation, such as insulated windows or other repairs and improvements. Because of this, the outside scanning assistance from the collaborative partners and their infrastructures, including ongoing support and Web hosting by OSU’s Oregon Multicultural Archives, enables broad online access to the collection that the CCBA cannot yet provide and may not be able to provide in the near future. Beyond specific support for secure storage and digital access, Lee cited the resulting professional network as the greatest benefit of the collaboration. As a volunteer with no professional background in archives, museums, or preservation, Lee stated he often turns to local archivists and other cultural heritage professionals for advice on the archives and other related projects.

Looking forward, the ongoing challenges for the CCBA include clarifying its goals to maximize the efficacy of its few resources. Lee believes there is support within the organization to make its museum more visible. Whether or not that includes also providing adequate secure space for its archives is unclear. Overall, Lee emphasizes the need to bridge gaps between generations within the Chinese American community in order to move forward. In his view, the elder generation may feel a stronger tie to their historical records than later generations who may feel the CCBA should be more service oriented. Filial piety and ancestor worship are important elements of traditional Chinese culture and still resonate for many elders. At the same time, Lee feels that because of the Oregon Chinese American community’s history, there may be a lingering resistance among certain generations to going

24. Marcus Lee, telephone interview with Paschild, November 30, 2012.

25. Ibid.

outside the community for assistance after years of “inward turning out of necessity” and a resulting “do it ourselves” approach. Nonetheless, Lee sees collaboration as an effective and perhaps necessary means to address the needs of “a small institution with limited resources.”²⁶

The Oregon Multicultural Archives

The opportunity to collaborate on a project such as this, in which the original documents were able to remain with the community but the OMA also was able to act a conduit to make the materials accessible to the public, was a great match for the archive. While other Oregon institutions and archival repositories sometimes collect materials pertaining to ethnic minorities and their histories, the Oregon State University (OSU) Libraries established the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) in 2005 with the specific mission to establish relationships with Oregon’s African American, Asian American, Latino/Latina, and Native American communities and if they desire, to assist in preserving their histories and sharing their stories.²⁷ Because of this, the OMA’s main role within the Chinese disinterment documents project was never to compete to acquire the collection, but instead to cooperate to assist in its preservation and accessibility as per the community’s desires. The project fit the OMA mission perfectly in the establishment of a relationship with the CCBA and in assisting in sharing Oregon’s Chinese disinterment history.

The OSU Libraries, which houses the OMA, has a history of using technology to collaborate on the state level with other institutions to make their materials digitally accessible while the institutions maintain physical control of the records. In 2010, the OSU Special Collections & Archives Research Center digitized the Darlene Hooley Papers, a collection physically held by the Mark O. Hatfield Library at Willamette University. The digital collection is a part of the OSU Institutional Repository ScholarsArchive.²⁸ In 2011, the OSU Libraries launched the Oregon Digital Library Project, an online collection that brings together digital collections from archival repositories all over the state of Oregon.²⁹ While these two projects are examples of collaboration between archival institutions, the OMA’s collaboration within this project is unique to the OSU Libraries in its collaboration specifically with a community archives.

At times, the OMA acts as a traditional repository in that it attains physical and legal custody of a new collection; however, this only occurs after a conversation with the organization, individual, or community group regarding their options to keep

26. Ibid.

27. Oregon Multicultural Archives: <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oma/index.html>.

28. Darlene Hooley Papers digital collection: <http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/handle/1957/14383>

29. Oregon Digital Library Project: <http://odl.library.oregonstate.edu/record/search>

control over their materials. Especially in the instance of an already-existing community archives such as the CCBA, one that seeks assistance to make its materials more accessible to a broader audience yet would like to retain control of the documents themselves, the OMA can act as a disseminator of information rather than a custodian of the physical content. This scenario is possible thanks to the ability to digitize materials. The OMA had experience with this concept on a smaller scale through its work with the OSU Cultural Centers. The four centers, representative of the four communities within the scope of the OMA, each have a collection of photo albums that document the lives of the students they serve. In conversations with the centers' staff, they all expressed a desire to make their history more accessible in order to make it better known by the larger campus community. Yet they also said that it was important to them that any student could just walk into each center and open an album. In an ongoing project, the OMA temporarily takes physical custody of the albums, digitizes them, makes them accessible through the OMA digital collection, and then returns them to the centers. Through this project agreement, the centers retain physical custody of their history. Custody of their records empowers them to retain their autonomy as well as an atmosphere of openness and intimacy for their community to interact with those materials. When contacted with the opportunity to collaborate with the CCBA's disinterment documents in similar fashion, the OMA applied the same approach to the project.

The OMA acts as the digital custodian of the disinterment documents so that the physical materials can remain within the community in which they originated.³⁰ Not only do the digital surrogates of the collection provide broader access to the documents, as Lee had originally hoped, they also provide an indirect means of preservation of the collection through such digitization projects. Ideally, with most researchers accessing the documents through the online exhibit, the physical materials will not be handled as much. Both the community and the collection benefit: the community retains control of its records and the collection is promoted and made accessible, yet also preserved.

As a stakeholder in this project, the OMA has greatly benefited from the experience working on a statewide collaborative project, thereby increasing exposure of the archive's mission and its ability to show this project as an example when working with new communities. The ability to share the story of this successful collaborative relationship with other communities has been integral to various discussions with potential donors. The Chinese disinterment documents project is heavily cited as a means to encourage communities to share their histories while, if so desired, retaining physical custody of their records.

30. The digital surrogates of the collection's documents are digitally housed in Oregon State University's institutional repository ScholarsArchive (<http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/handle/1957/21890>). OSU's Special Collections & Archives Research Center is responsible for the long-term preservation of and access to the digital files.

The Portland State University Library's Special Collections

Unlike that of the OMA, the mission of Portland State University Library's Special Collections does not explicitly focus on regional ethnic communities. The department's collection development plan concentrates on the Portland metropolitan area with an emphasis on public planning and development, a scope that includes not only the records of professional planners but also figures in local elected positions, grassroots organizations, and community groups, all of which have played active roles through civic engagement in the formation of the region. Under this plan, however, Special Collections has accessioned a number of holdings related to the diverse communities of Portland, including the Portland Japanese American Citizens League Records, which represents the organization's history in the city from the 1930s through the 1980s, and the Verdell Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford Family Collection, which reflects over one hundred years of African American community organizations and activism in Oregon. In this context, the CCBA records, documenting a long-term and active local community group, are a logical fit. If there had been interest from the CCBA in donating the materials, Special Collections would have been happy to assume permanent legal and physical custody, as is its usual practice. Instead, agreeing to take temporary custody was Special Collections' first foray into post-custodial stewardship. At the same time, providing other forms of support for non-custodial collaborations is not new for the institution. As a lead partner in the Oregon Sustainable Community Digital Library (OSCDL) project, the PSU Library had taken on the role of scanning all materials to be included in the resulting centralized online repository, including records held by participating organizations. Primary resource materials were loaned to the Library, scanned, and returned to their owners with the Library retaining the rights to make use of the digital images within the OSCDL as well as related projects and redesigns. As part of another non-custodial community collaboration, Special Collections is developing an agreement to allow a local heritage organization to use the Library's instance of Archon to provide online access to its finding aids.

But while the PSU Library's technological infrastructure has been sufficient to provide scanning assistance and some other means of technical support in certain collaborations, in the case of the Chinese disinterment document project, the resources and capabilities of the OMA far outreach what is currently available from the PSU Library.³¹ This disparity of technical resources, however, most likely helped facilitate the participation and cooperation of the two major public university libraries in the collaboration. Rather than attempt to replicate the services of the OMA, PSU Library's Special Collections brought to the table its own unique

31. While Portland State University exceeds Oregon State University in full-time enrollment, in 2010, PSU's library had 11 fewer librarians and professional staff members, and lagged in expenditures by over \$2.6 million. Data accessed from: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education 2010," <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010028> (accessed April 23, 2013).

strength—its physical proximity to the CCBA and its community. In terms of convenience, the virtual access provided by the OMA may well be more easily accessible to the majority of the community than the original documents at Special Collections or its future home with the CCBA, where accessibility at both locations is limited by open hours, available staffing, and the ability to visit. At the same time, the CCBA is a walkable distance from PSU's Special Collections. And while the organization's local members may still prefer to access the collection online, they are aware that with little delay or effort, they can make physical contact with the material if they desire. In the event that CCBA does consider developing an ongoing repository relationship with PSU or another entity, this initial successful stage of collaboration, with its emphasis on ongoing access for the community organization, may raise the comfort level of the CCBA with a more complete transfer of legal custody.

Nonetheless, with no clearly branded “product,” only temporary possession of the original materials, and no claim to digital surrogates, the motivation for Special Collections to participate in the collaboration may be less apparent. In theory, having the materials on campus is an added resource for the PSU Library's core constituency of students and faculty. At the same time, the unknown duration of PSU's possession of the documents limits the sort of publicity and outreach Special Collections might usually engage in to raise the visibility of a collection it owns in perpetuity. Thus, while the impact on Special Collections' resources by this particular collection is arguably minimal due to its small size and the relative stability of its materials, the outcome of the investment of time in the partnership cannot be clearly quantified or assessed. Instead, the collaboration resonates more generally with the provision of community engagement and service emphasized in the university's mission statement, which in turn defines those of the PSU Library and its Special Collections. As an urban-serving public university, PSU cites “community and civic engagement” as a core value, stating, “PSU values its identity as an engaged university that promotes a reciprocal relationship between the community and the University in which knowledge serves the city and the city contributes to the knowledge of the University.”³² By establishing itself as a logical, unique, and active point of contact to the surrounding community beyond the campus, Special Collections demonstrates its support and embodiment of the PSU's mission, positioning it to strategically advocate for its relevance to both the library and the university. As a relatively new department at an often resource-strapped institution, being able to appropriately leverage these connections may be a key to maintaining and potentially even increasing staffing and support.

Beyond these broader and perhaps more political benefits, community collaborations offer more tangible positive outcomes as well. Partnerships with local cultural institutions open the door to grant opportunities that value and support collaborative work, a mutual benefit for independent organizations who are aided in

32. Portland State University: <http://www.pdx.edu/portland-state-university-mission>

fund-seeking by an association with a larger and more established institution. Community collaborations also help develop connections and relationships of trust that highlight Special Collections as a strong candidate repository in the event that an independent organization opts to pass on stewardship of their holdings in the future or decides to refer collection donors elsewhere. Collaborative work also exposes the holdings of Special Collections to a broader pool of potential users and a more diverse audience for programming and exhibits. Relatedly, it also helps develop and cultivate financial donors who identify as stakeholders within represented communities. While a candid listing of these motivations may run the risk of appearing highly calculated, for Special Collections, this “strategy of enlightened self-interest”³³ may well be the best way to both secure the future of the department and to support the sincere altruistic commitments that obligate public institutions.

Ongoing Challenges

As the partners look towards the future, a number of questions and challenges remain in the practicalities of the collaboration. The personal nature of the collaborative network has lent itself to arrangements and plans confirmed via “handshakes” rather than formal documented agreements. As the collaboration considers the long-term, it will need to establish a stronger paper trail to ensure a stability that can be sustained beyond the participation of the original representative individuals. To this end, PSU and CCBA are now drafting an official memo of understanding that will clarify issues such as the liability and right of access for the two parties for the remainder of the time that PSU serves as the repository of the collection. The OMA and the CCBA may also develop a memorandum of understanding regarding the digital custody of the records as well as documentation of the CCBA’s wishes for the permanent public access of the collection’s digital surrogates. Additionally, although the issue has yet to arise, all three institutions need to develop a more formal system to handle reference or other inquiries pertaining to the collection. Currently, due to the personal relationships between the project partners, it is easy to simply forward an email or pass on contact information. However, institutional policies and procedures need to be documented and agreed upon so that the institutional relationships can then outlast individuals.

Conclusion

The incentives and benefits as described by the participants in this collaboration reflect a blend of institutional, professional, and personal elements that came together to engage each of them as true stakeholders, both integral to and impacted by the project’s success. These new forms of collaboration are a means for coping with needs beyond the existing resources of individual organizations, allowing stakeholders to come together to leverage what they can contribute to best benefit

33. Ham, 212.

both their own self-interest and that of the collective. Nonetheless, the collaborative project could easily have been a non-starter if any of the parties contacted had decided to dispute the ownership of the materials or the goal of shared and open access. Instead, the two large collection-holding institutions, PSU and OSU, had already expanded their missions to encompass untraditional non-custodial relationships with communities and their collections, helping to defuse potential competition with one another. But more than that, the project was enabled because the two participants able to isolate the records, the Northwest News Network and the CCBA, were represented by individuals with strong personal and professional commitments to broad access. By understanding all the elements that can motivate different stakeholders, archivists can better strategize more effective outreach and encourage advocacy and assistance from a wider and more diverse pool of supporters.

Little is known of the documents' original anonymous donor except for his perspective on traditional archives. Evidently aware of the reality that a repository may accept a collection without the means or the priorities to make it accessible, the donor instead reached out to a reporter in a news network in the hope of securing the future visibility and accessibility of the records. As archivists grapple with the conundrum of how to deal with significant and meaningful collections with only limited resources at hand, they should remember to be open to collaborative opportunities, perhaps with unanticipated partners, that may achieve far-reaching results beyond the capabilities of one single institution. Through the Chinese disinterment documents project, each project partner was able to offer unique support, play an active role in a larger network, and reveal a previously untold story. As Colin Fogarty wrote, and the anonymous donor hoped, this project, the partnerships it formed, and the lessons it holds have reached far "beyond [a] box of documents."