

4-1-2013

Inspection Is Essential!

Ann Flowers
Bentley Historical Library

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Flowers, Ann (2013) "Inspection Is Essential!," *MAC Newsletter*: Vol. 40 : No. 4 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter/vol40/iss4/10>

This Other News is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in MAC Newsletter by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Inspection Is Essential!

By Ann Flowers, Bentley Historical Library

Having just come through two projects that consisted of digitizing microfilm, I want to share some of my experience with colleagues who might be dealing with similar projects.

My principal work is in conservation, but, since 1987, I've also been in charge of microfilm projects for manuscript collections and published materials. I was part of the team that assembled the Research Libraries Group (RLG) standards, and I followed those standards in all the projects under my supervision. I prepared the materials for filming, sometimes with student assistance, so that they would arrive at the vendor camera-ready; then I was available for questions or consultation with the vendor and did my own quality control inspection when each project was complete. I had experience with a variety of

vendors and loved working with the good ones, who had high standards of quality themselves and were eager to correct their mistakes.

Digitization is wonderful for access, as all of us know. Our director initiated a project to digitize some of our microfilmed manuscript collections, with the goal of mounting them on-line so that researchers can readily use them. Because this was a rather large project, the University of Michigan required that we get bids. Several vendors submitted bids, and, not surprisingly, we went with the lowest, which was significantly lower than the others.

Since I had been so involved with the microfilming of these collections, it was natural to get involved with their

(Continued on page 28)

Resources for Digital Imaging QC Auditing

By Sara Holmes, NARA

All digitization projects should be regularly and promptly checked for problems during the course of a project. Whether the work is completed in-house or contracted out, the sooner a problem with equipment or handling is identified, the sooner it can be corrected. These sources can help you to know what to look for when auditing your projects:

- Puglia, Steven, Jeffrey A. Reed, Erin Rhodes. "Common Imaging Problems." *Digital Repository at the University of Maryland*. <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/12953/1/Common%20Imaging%20Problems.pdf>.

Provides examples and brief discussion on recognizing and understanding the causes of common imaging problems, including tone reproduction, clipping, color balance, channel registration, resolution, bit depth, noise, sharpening, and compression.

- Stanford University Libraries, Digital Production Services. "Quality Assurance—Image Defects." <http://lib.stanford.edu/digital-production-services/quality-assurance-image-defects>.

Shares information developed for the Stanford University Libraries staff who perform imaging and image QC auditing. For each type of image defect, provides

images of the problem, descriptions, possible causes, and remedies. Image defects covered include improper cropping, banding, blocking, compression artifacts, noise, poor color rendering, dirt, hairs, and many more instances of less-than-acceptable images.

- Stanford University Libraries, Digital Production Services. "Quality Assurance—Cropping Guide." <https://lib.stanford.edu/digital-production-services/quality-assurance-cropping-guide>.

Demonstrates, with a variety of examples, proper cropping with both narrow and wide margins. Also includes examples of inappropriate cropping and how to crop in special cases, such as bound materials or flat items that are irregularly cut.

- Stanford Media Preservation Lab and New York University. *AV Artifact Atlas*. http://preservation.bavc.org/artifactatlas/index.php/AV_Artifact_Atlas.

Covers a wide range of defects that can occur in the digitization of video and audio, both analog and digital. Assists archivists without formal audio and video training in identifying whether an error is inherent to the original recording or the result of an imperfect transfer, so archivists can better inspect a vendor's product.

(Continued from page 27)

digitization. I assumed that scanning microfilm would be a very simple, straightforward process—you feed the film through a scanning machine, and images come out on the computer, right? Wrong!

I am a firm believer in the importance of quality control inspection for any kind of reformatting, and my experience with this project confirmed it. There was an interesting assortment of problems, many of which I could never have imagined before I saw them: distortion of images, overcropping with print loss, misplaced targets, missing pages, out-of-order pages—sometimes significantly out of order—whole folders missing (sometimes found in a different collection), partial images, repetition of images, variations in image size, negative images of positive originals, focus problems, and blank pages where there were none on the original film.

The University of Michigan digitization specifications require splitting frames when materials are filmed two up, or two pages per frame, which led to another series of problems: splitting of images from letters or diary volumes that should not have been split (because the writing went all the way across both pages), failure to split images that should have been, and a mixture of split and unsplit images within the same volume. The seemingly trivial issue of the resolution target layout being divided into three separate images at both the beginning and the end of the roll resulted in many extra images because of the number of film rolls we were scanning.

Billing was another interesting experience. As I mentioned above, the vendor had submitted a bid to the university, which was accepted. Surprisingly, the amount for which they billed us significantly exceeded that bid. The image splitting was likely a factor, since our page counts going in were for microfilm images. Regardless of the reason, the university had only authorized payment for the amount that was bid. I documented the needless duplication of images, blank frames, and resolution target divisions that had inflated the image count, and the vendor issued us a credit, which brought our payment back in line with the original estimate.

In spite of all these issues, the digitization company was a joy to work with. The staff members with whom I came in contact were unfailingly polite and friendly and wanted to produce a good product. I am not clear about what their

quality control inspection consisted of—I felt as if I was their main inspector! Whenever I got back a batch of new work, I went through it with my usual care, just as I had with the original microfilm projects, checking against the film whenever that was needed. It took a lot of my time (more than had been anticipated), but it was worth it. We were spending a lot of money on this project, and we wanted it to be good. Researchers around the world will be using these materials on-line, and we want them to be happy and to think well of us.

The vendor has gone to great lengths to correct the problems, and I now await the final version. I would gladly work with this company again, but I would never take for granted that everything is fine without checking.

As an experiment, I asked our director if we could do a small project with another vendor to see how it would compare—small, so that we could choose the company and not have to put the project out for bids. He agreed, and we went ahead. I had expected very few problems because this business is more established and well known than the company we used for the larger project. I was wrong! My first quick inspection didn't turn up much: a few cropping issues, and a few upside-down images, but a more complete examination of the film turned up a whole host of page reversals that occurred in the splitting process. In addition, they missed a folder break, so two folders were combined into one, and two collections were given the same identifying number. Their quality control inspection did not seem to be any better than that of the other vendor; like the other company, however, employees were polite, friendly, and conscientious about fixing the problems when I reported them. I would gladly work with this company again too.

This experience reinforced for me how essential it is for archivists and librarians to carefully check the product they receive from a vendor. We are all busy with other things, but these projects are very expensive, and, if they are worth doing at all, they are worth doing well.