

The Digital Collections at Colorado Law

by Robert M. Linz

In July 2011, the Colorado legal community lost a champion of Indian rights and the environment when David Getches, a faculty member and dean at the University of Colorado Law School (CU Law), passed away. In the weeks that followed, CU Law's William A. Wise Law Library began to receive donations of Getches's writings and other materials about his life. The collection initially comprised nearly 1,000 bound books and reports. Over the months, it grew to include law review articles, transcripts of his speeches, photographs, and video clips.

When Phil Weiser and Susan Nevelow Mart came on board at CU Law—Weiser as CU Law's new dean and Nevelow Mart as director of the law library—they made using technology to modernize library collections and processes a priority for the law school. The donation of Getches's materials was the ideal opportunity to use technology to preserve and provide access to the work of an important scholar and friend of the Colorado legal community. CU Law began planning for an event in April 2012 to commemorate Getches's life and work. The law library set out to digitize selected donated materials that now comprise the Getches Collection for the April commemoration.

The Process

When the library undertook this project in July 2011, there were several obstacles to overcome. Though members of the library staff had some experience with various technologies—such as digitizing print materials, creating searchable metadata, and developing websites—the law library had never undertaken a project of this type and breadth. A Digital Archives Committee (DAC) of librarians and staff was created to address both digitization and archival issues related to this collection. Its initial work was to determine the scope of the project. Members of the DAC began obtaining information about technology and process issues associated with

this type of project. In August, the DAC and other interested persons attended a webinar entitled “The Art of Scanning,” presented by a Nebraska librarian experienced in digitizing print materials. The DAC also began to develop a task list for the project.

Selecting the Right Equipment

Among the first tasks was to identify and obtain the proper equipment. To create a digital copy of a book or document, the library would need a computer, a scanner, and software to edit images and create document collections in the portable document format (PDF). The DAC determined that an existing computer could be used for the project, but that a scanner and the appropriate software would need to be purchased. Fortunately, Dean Weiser made funding available for these technology purchases.

In July, the DAC began exploring scanner options. Scanners run the gamut from inexpensive desktop models to sophisticated and costly planetary styles. The inexpensive scanners, whether as dedicated scanners or as part of a multifunction device, tend to be slow and produce low-quality scanned images. The user places a document on a glass platen and the scanning camera slides underneath the glass to capture the image. Planetary scanners, on the other hand, can produce high-quality scans. In this type of scanner, the user places the document face-up on a platen; the scanning camera rests above the platen to capture the image. Because they have better optics, planetary scanners tend to be expensive.

After reviewing and testing various scanners and consulting with vendors and users, the library purchased a mid-range planetary scanner with a V-shaped platen to minimize stress on book bindings. The unit has two Canon digital single-lens reflex cameras to capture high-resolution images of the document. The library can use this scanner for rare books, as well as for oversized documents such as newspapers.



About the Author

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The scanner came with capture and image editing software. In addition to learning how to use the software, one challenge in document scanning is to obtain a high-quality scan of the page. Librarians define a “good” scan as one that produces sharp, readable text and images while minimizing stray marks or image bleed-through from the back side of the page. Using a combination of the provided and separately purchased software, the committee learned how to obtain clean, clear text while eliminating “noise.” After being scanned, the documents were recompiled into digital books using the software, which automatically limits the size of each file. (If a file is too large, it will take too long to download and frustrate users.)

Storing Files

The DAC also needed to determine where to store these files and how to build an interface to search them. To be accessible to users, the files must reside on a Web server and be accessible through a website. The law library’s Web server lacked this capability. Various products, called repositories, exist to serve as both host and search engine for these types of document collections. The library began exploring options, all of which would be expensive and difficult to set up. Fortunately, the CU libraries had an established partnership with Colorado State University (CSU) libraries to share the expense and administration of one of these products—Digitool from Ex Libris Corporation.¹ Librarians from CSU already had completed the difficult task of setting up and implementing this repository. By September 2011, a member of the CU law library staff joined the CSU–CU repository project committee to learn how to use the software and help complete the installation of the repository.

By December 2011, CU law library staff had completed basic training in using the Digitool repository product. By mid-April, most of the files that comprise the Getches Collection were loaded onto the Digitool server and were accessible.

Creating a User-Friendly Interface

The DAC faced one other technology challenge. Although Digitool housed the documents and provided a method to search and retrieve them, its Web interface was uninspiring. It provided a

search engine to access the documents but did not allow for a customized Web interface to highlight items in the collection or to otherwise make the collection visually inviting. Library Director Nevelow Mart wanted to create a more robust, attractive interface for the April unveiling of Getches’s materials. In January 2012, the law library hired a research associate who was skilled in Web development and tasked him with developing the new Web interface. By early April, he had developed an interface on the law library’s website that was both functional and visually attractive, and that enabled access to the materials on the Digitool server.

Assembling the Materials

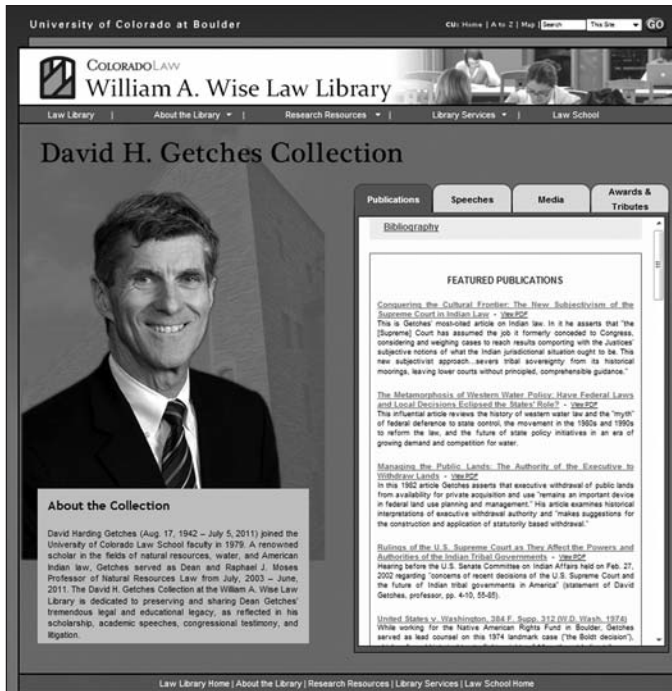
While some members of the committee were focusing on the technological aspects of the project, other members were assembling and preparing materials for the collection. This work involved identifying the corpus of Getches’s materials. This task proved quite challenging. Getches was a prolific writer and advocate, and was involved in many projects over the span of his career. Nonetheless, the librarian assigned to this part of the project diligently located those materials and compiled them into a bibliography. She also obtained access to the physical document, where possible, to be added to the library’s print collection. In this process, she and other committee members identified materials to be added to the digital archive. If the materials were not already digitized, they were added to the digitization queue. An important and challenging part of this work was obtaining copyright permission to digitize these materials.

Adding Metadata

The law library’s cataloger was tasked with creating descriptive metadata for each document added to the repository. Catalogers create bibliographic records of their print materials so that users can locate them in a library catalog; digital materials need the same kind of descriptive data about their contents so they can be discovered by search engines. This metadata comes in a variety of formats, and each format uses different terminology and techniques to describe common document elements such as title, author, and publisher. Some books already possessed this data, but many other items required the cataloger to create this unique metadata. Also, to

CU Law Library Director Susan Nevelow Mart (center) with members of the Digital Archives Committee. Left to right: Erik Beck, Karen Selden, Jane Thompson, Susan Nevelow Mart, Connie Fields, Matt Zafiratos, and Robert Linz. DAC member Kerry Francis is not pictured.





A screen shot of the David H. Getches Collection home page.

be used by researchers searching the collection on Digitool, this metadata needed to be added to each record stored on the Digitool server. This posed a few challenges for both the cataloger and technologist. The addition of metadata, which represented the final step in the creation of the digital archive, was completed in April 2012.

The New Digital Environment

The creation of this archive took the time and talents of many staff in the law library and support from the wider law school and university communities. In addition to the accomplishment itself, the project highlights two larger aspects of legal research—the ease and immediacy of research materials and the valuable role of librarians.

Researchers are increasingly searching for materials online. Overwhelmingly, researchers are beginning their research with Google and looking to online resources such as Google Scholar for full text journal articles, Google Books for digital versions of books, and many other online databases for digital document. Coupled with high-speed Internet access, e-readers, and tablets, researchers now have incredible resources within easy reach. Today, digital

researching makes it less necessary to visit a physical library for simple research needs.

Librarians play an important role in this digital research environment. It is the work of librarians to provide access to research resources. Researchers have depended on librarians to make intelligent decisions about acquiring, organizing, and managing collections that meet users' research needs. Furthermore, librarians have helped researchers efficiently learn to use the resources. These roles continue for librarians; however, today they primarily are being accomplished using information technology tools and resources in a digital environment.

Future Projects

The CU law library—the largest law library in the Rocky Mountain region—is planning to digitize other collections of value to practitioners and legal researchers. Some of these projects will be digitizing the works of notable Colorado legal scholars and practitioners, and other projects will provide access to materials in the law library's Rare Book Room. More ambitious projects include digitizing historical *Colorado Register* and *Code of Colorado Regulations* publications, Colorado session laws, and the briefs of the Colorado appellate courts. Successful completion of these larger projects will require the cooperation of other Colorado libraries and government officials. This project to digitize Getches' materials has provided the library with a template to complete these other projects.

Conclusion

On April 26 and 27, in CU Law's Wittmeyer Courtroom, scholars gathered to celebrate the life and works of David Getches. In the final morning session on Friday, Director Nevelow Mart unveiled the David H. Getches Collection. Conference attendees were introduced to the features and development of the website.² They were encouraged to explore the articles, photos, and videos and to leave comments in the online guestbook. Following the presentation, the law library staff who began the process nine months earlier gathered for a photograph in front of the website displayed on the oversized projector screen in the courtroom. Materials from the symposium have been added to the collection.

Notes

1. Company and product information can be found on the Ex Libris website, www.exlibrisgroup.com.
2. The David H. Getches Collection website is available at www.colorado.edu/law/lib/getches.html. ■