Outreach and Engagement

Assistant Editor: Erin McBrien, University of Minnesota. Contact Erin at emcbrien@umn.edu if you would like to guest author a column or have a good idea to share.

Recollection Wisconsin Digitization Initiative

By Vicki Tobias, WiLS / Recollection Wisconsin Digitization Initiative

In the fall of 2024, Recollection Wisconsin launched a new initiative to support Wisconsin's local history organizations in their digitization work. In outreach to and communications with these organizations, we've heard time and time again about their desire to digitize their collections but that they lack time, resources, and on-site expertise to get started and, equally important, resources to sustain the work. To fill this need, we envisioned a cohort-based program that provides an easier entry into digitization work for organizations while offering future information professionals valuable hands-on work experience. Each student takes a digitization or digital curation project from start to finish, which is supported by Recollection Wisconsin staff well-versed in digital project management, training, and mentorship.

The Recollection Wisconsin Digitization Initiative (https://recollectionwisconsin.org/rwdi) builds on years of engagement with Wisconsin's local history organizations. In 2019 and 2020, supported by a grant from the National Historic Records and Publications Commission and in partnership with the Wisconsin Historical Society, Recollection Wisconsin researched and began building a Digital Readiness Community of Practice. At that time, Recollection Wisconsin did not have the resources to offer direct support to small and underresourced organizations, but we could connect them to each other and to training

Ho-Chunk Language Division digitization workstation. Courtesy of Kierstin Wagner.

materials. We continued to actively engage with most of Wisconsin's 450 local history organizations. Through these conversations, we understood that the next most pressing area of need is skilled labor to digitize and describe materials. State budget funds awarded in 2023 enabled us to offer our local history community the direct support they most need.

Building on our commitment to support this work and nurture long-standing relationships with local history organizations, the Recollection Wisconsin Digitization Initiative is a collaborative endeavor that brings together Wisconsin organizations with local history collections (public libraries, museums, archives, and local history or community organizations) and Wisconsin-based information school graduate students to digitize and publicly share these new digital collections via Recollection Wisconsin (www.recollectionwisconsin.org), Wisconsin's Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) hub.
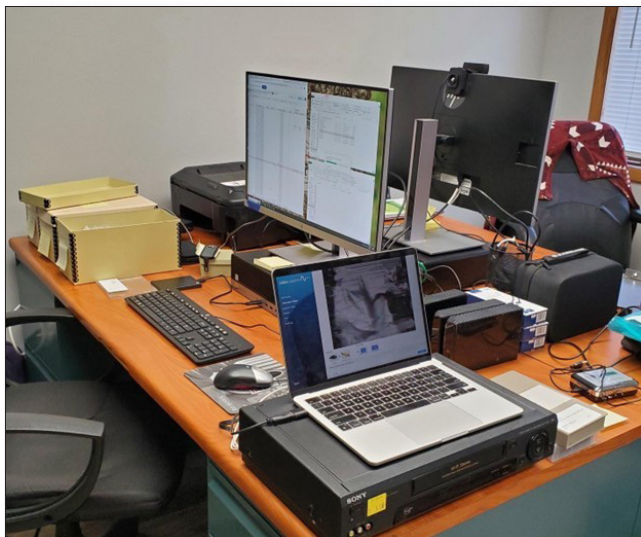
Project Teams

Three key players form each project team: a host-site supervisor, a student intern, and a Recollection Wisconsin project manager.

We invite organizations new to Recollection Wisconsin to serve as host sites—those with a desire to digitize and share their unique local history collections. As part of the application process, we help them hone their project plan and prepare their work environment. We encourage applicants to select materials that might tell new or lesser-known stories about their community's history (see information about Recollection Wisconsin's gap analysis below).

We match each host site with a student intern to do the work. Student applicants share their interest and experience in digitization and metadata work, preservation, project management, or simply working with local history collections or organizations. Students and host sites participate in an informal interview to gauge interest and readiness and to answer questions.

A Recollection Wisconsin project manager oversees the application process, pairs accepted students and host sites based on needs and expertise; manages the students' work and learning opportunities; and importantly, serves as

the official practicum or independent study supervisor. Graduate school practicums often require an MLIS holder with professional experience to supervise students, and organizations don't always have staff available who meet that requirement.

Student Participants

Students selected for this program are enrolled in the UW–Madison Information School, UW–Milwaukee School of Information Studies, or a similar graduate program. They receive practicum or independent study credit depending on the program's requirements, earn a $2,500 stipend, and gain training and experience related to digitization best practices, metadata, digital preservation, collection development, and content management systems. Their project work varies depending on their host site and its collections but usually includes a range of digitization-related tasks, such as scanning or digital photography, metadata creation, project management and documentation creation, and digital file organization and management.

Portable overhead book scanner on loan to the Edgerton Public Library. Courtesy of Julia Lalor.

We had three student participants in fall 2024. Kierstin Wagner (UW–Milwaukee SOIS) worked with Samson Falcon and Adrienne Thunder at the Ho-Chunk Language Division to digitize and organize Ho-Chunk language learning materials using the Mukurtu content management system.

Julia Lalor (UW–Madison iSchool) worked with Beth Krebs-Smith at the Edgerton Public Library to digitize and provide access to historic local newspapers including the *Edgerton Reporter* and the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* using the ResCarta content management system.

Jacqueline Steel (UW–Madison iSchool) worked with Vito Bortolotti at the Eagle River Historical Society in collaboration with Tracy Vreeke at the Nicolet Federated Library System to digitize and describe materials documenting tourism and recreation in the Eagle River area, including historic resorts and supper clubs "up north." These materials will appear in Recollection Wisconsin via CONTENTdm.

You can read more about our initiative and the fall 2024 cohort projects on the Recollection Wisconsin blog (https://recollectionwisconsin.org/tag/recollection-wisconsin-digitization-initiative).

Front and back of a matchbook from a historic supper club digitized for Eagle River Historical Society. Courtesy of Jacqueline Steel.

Gap Analysis

In 2020, Recollection Wisconsin staff completed a gap analysis of Recollection Wisconsin collections (https://recollectionwisconsin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Gap-Analysis-Phase-1-Report.pdf). Aside from revealing geographic and subject area gaps in our digital collection,