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History Meets Marketing: Imaging the U.S. Mint's Historical Collection

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INDEX:

- **.01.** Introduction
- **.02.** Purpose of the Project
- **.03.** The Historical Collection
- **.04.** History of the U.S. Mint
- **.05.** The Users
- **.06.** Access
- **.07.** Problems? And how resolved?
- **.08.** Significance of this project
- **.09.** Accomplishments: Now and Future
- **.10.** Conclusions
- **.11.** Notes

.01. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in December 1999, Zimmerman Associates, Inc. (ZAI) a government contracting company [1], embarked on a unique archival and historical imaging project: to image almost the entire Mint's historical record which is spread over all U.S. Mint facilities and Assay Offices, several National Archives' facilities, and a variety of other federal agencies and commissions. Briefly, the project is divided into four separate parts: Task One is the fact finding and the writing of the statement of work which for the Mint is a flexible document that will under go revisions throughout the course of the project. Task Two, which is the current task, is to begin to preserve, scan, and catalog the materials in Washington D.C. Task Three is the preservation, scanning, and cataloging of all the other Mint facilities' historical records currently in possession of the Mint. These items will be surveyed then shipped to Washington for scanning and cataloging, then returned after the quality checks. Last, Task Four, is primarily National Archives and the

records centers, and any other government and non-government institution holding Mint-related materials.

.02. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT ([Return to Index](#))

The objective of the U.S. Mint Library-Archives Project is to produce an electronic and physical archive of historically significant U.S. Mint documents, and to store these scanned images into a database with electronic access for searching and indexing capabilities. The creation of the electronic archive will involve the configuration and operation of a production-scanning environment, and the processes to identify, select, preserve, organize, and describe each document, book, and still image in the collection. The Mint wants to digitalize and describe as many documents, books, and still images as possible that show how a coin and medal are created: from Congressional legislation to artist's designs to first-strike ceremonies and marketing campaigns. The project's final product is several fold: (1) create and catalog an electronic archives for the Historical Research Unit; (2) create and catalog a physical archives and library for the Historical Research Unit; (3) through the Mint's intranet, provide historical information to the Mint's field sites and staff; (4) provide historical information and primary sources through the Mint's public web site; and (5) support educators and students by making available CD-ROMs and lesson plans regarding the Mint's role in U.S. history. Last, to make the project as all encompassing as possible the project will need to include other institutional records such as Department of State records, the D.C. Fine Arts Commission, and the Smithsonian Institution.

.03. THE HISTORICAL COLLECTION ([Return to Index](#))

Currently, the Mint's collection in Washington D.C. consists of 225,000 pages, 5,000+ still images, 2,600 microfiche cards (approximately 144,000 pages), and 400+ monographs (approximately 150,000 pages). Much of the documents are correspondence within the Mint and between other agencies and the general public, discussions about coin and medal legislation, creating and striking of the coin or medal, and how many coins/medals will be produced. The monographs are primarily the Mint's annual reports and discusses both accomplishments for the past year and upcoming goals and projects. The still images are divided into two primary areas: Mint facilities and Mint functions, and coins and medals for marketing purposes. The microfiche cards consist of federal legislative records and early Mint correspondence.

The images are being created in true optical 600 dots per inch (dpi), either in grayscale or colour, with lossless compression, are being stored on a NT server as master tiff files which is deemed as an archival and preservation copy. Then, the images will be copied and stored to a separate access server in which the access pdf files will be available for general document distribution, both internally and externally. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) will be used in about one to five percent of the collection and at the historian's discretion.

Recently, and primarily to locate folders during the processing and scanning stages, an accessioning and tracking database was created in MSAccess and consists of fields entitled

accession number, creator, date, document type, and subject classification plus status and location information for each identified folder. This database will be used as the basis for creating both internal and external interfaces for the general public. A second access database is being created for cataloging, description, and historical purposes, and the cataloging will follow already established archival standards. Finding aids will be written and made available on the web. Through this project previously inaccessible files to the public will shed light on a different federal government agency.

.04. HISTORY OF THE U.S. MINT ([Return to Index](#))

When the framers of the U.S. Constitution created a new government for their untried Republic, they realized the critical need for a respected monetary system. Soon after the Constitution's ratification, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton personally prepared plans for a national Mint. Under the Constitution's Article I, Section 8, on April 2, 1792, Congress created the Mint, and authorized construction of a Mint building in the nation's capitol, Philadelphia. This was the first federal building erected under the Constitution.

President George Washington appointed Philadelphian David Rittenhouse, a leading American scientist, as the first Director of the Mint. Under Rittenhouse, the Mint produced its first circulating coins — 11,178 copper cents, which were delivered in March 1793. Soon after, the Mint began issuing gold and silver coins, and President Washington, who lived only a few blocks from the new Mint, is believed to have donated some of his own silver for minting.

Under President Andrew Jackson, the Mint, in 1837 and 1838, added three new southern branches to complement the Philadelphia facility. These Mints located in Louisiana, North Carolina, and Georgia, following the rapid growth of the south, resulted from the discovery of gold there in the early 1800's. In fact, the North Carolinian and Georgian facilities minted only gold coins. During the Civil War, the southern Mint facilities fell under Confederate control. The South used the New Orleans Mint to produce more than \$500,000 in gold and silver U.S. coins, and transferred much of the Mint's machinery to confederate gun factories. In addition, the Charlotte Mint was used as a Confederate Army headquarters and hospital.

Similar Mint growth followed the settling and expansion of the West, which was also driven by the discovery of gold in California. The San Francisco Mint opened in 1854 and the Denver Mint opened in 1863 in addition to other Mint facilities and Assay offices being built after the Civil War in places like Carson City, St. Louis, Seattle, Boise, Helena, Deadwood, Salt Lake City, and New York. In 1873, the Mint's administrative headquarters moved from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C.

Many of these Mint outposts were closed in the early 1900's, since advancing technology and transportation made them unnecessary. Today's U.S. Mint facilities include the Washington, D.C. headquarters and Mints at Philadelphia, Denver, San Francisco and West Point, New York. The U.S. Bullion Depository is located at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where a large portion of the nation's

gold holdings are stored. Last, when founded, the Mint was part of the Department of State. Named an independent agency in 1799, the Mint became part of the Department of the Treasury in 1873, and remains so today.

.05. THE USERS ([Return to Index](#))

The Historical Research Unit's collection currently serves all U.S. Mint staff and its customers including coin collectors, researchers, scholars, historians, the media, general public, federal and local governments, and the business community. Since researchers think in terms of coinage and medals, the Historical Research Unit plans to have the collection organized, described, and cataloged according to the chronology of U.S. Mint produced coins.

The current priorities of the Mint's Office of Electronic Business includes e-business; the H.I.P. Hip Pocket Change interactive web project geared towards kids; and the development of educational e-products. The Web Operations Division is creating the U.S. Mint's web site into an interactive medium for researchers, scholars, educators, students, and coin collectors. Both Divisions and the Historian's Office want to make the historical documents available through the U.S. Mint's Internet and Intranet, and to become a major source of information on all the Mint's coins and medals.

The Mint's Records Management Unit also wants to obtain all historical documents and photographic materials detailing the process of coin's or medal's creation including cost estimates and production information, advertisements, official and final reports, and press releases. Both the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of the Executive Secretariat have information requirements and use the U.S. Mint's historical records for a variety of Congressional and public statements.

.06. ACCESS ([Return to Index](#))

Initially, access to the project's repository will only be made internally to the Historical Research Unit, the Project Director, and the Office of Chief Counsel, and these restrictions are being made since there are many copyright and security issues. There will be four level of restriction ranging from total restricted access to those items in public domain. For example, the Mint's Security Police are very careful about releasing photographs showing and describing Fort Knox. Furthermore, there are photographs depicting the closing of the New York Assay Office and moving the gold bars to Ft. Knox. These photographs were created in the summer of 1937 although and technically falls within public domain, these images will not be released to the public. To implement these policies, all documents have file permissions set to "Restricted" and no directory and file permissions will be reset to "Public" without explicit action by the U.S. Mint Historian and the Office of Chief Counsel. As documents and images are made available to the general public through Legal Counsel, restricting of files will be removed and made available through the Mint's web page at www.usmint.gov [2]. Those materials with external or public access will include annual reports, legislation, and correspondence.

.07. PROBLEMS? AND HOW RESOLVED? ([Return to Index](#))

Regarding developments and resolving problems at the Mint, here is my caveat: The Project Director was warned that the Mint has a reputation for continually evolving with last minute changes. The Project Director was also told to resolve issues as best as possible with the understanding that requirements and needs will change again very soon. Flexibility, it turns out, is a great thing to have!

First, originally, another contractor was going to begin creating the interfaces and databases necessary for cataloging, search and retrieval, and storage of the images. That company's services was fired from the Mint and after several months of no electronic system to track the status of a particular folder, the Project Director created the Accession database in MSAccess in order to get through the next several months. The Database could be considered as a band-aid, it has become extremely useful and informative. The Mint recently hired a new contractor and their interface and database prototype will be based on my database, and this prototype will not be made available until summertime.

Next, PhotoShop, the scanning software being used, is powerful but too many of the features are not suitable for this project. PhotoShop allows for the scanning at the current requirement of 600dpi, and the ability to change the contrast and brightness for each scanned image but this project has developed very specific needs and no software currently exists to address those needs. For example, when scanning, PhotoShop only allows enhancements after the scan and for the entire photo only, not for specific blocks within the photographs. Once these enhancements are determined and noted, the scanner operators are establishing benchmarks for each type of scan, whether it is a colour document or a black-and-white photograph. This project needs software that will allow the operators to manipulate small portions of the photograph in order to create the closest reproduction possible.

Third, an ongoing issue are the endless misdirections and detours of the projects purpose and the inability to stay focus on what the project currently needs. The designing and decision making of the public access and viewing side has become the primary focus.

Last, the recommended scanning equipment and specs were not thoroughly examined during the initial review period. After the Mint purchased three scanners, upon examination, it seems that the glass beds do not allow pages larger than letter size. The project is limited to scan only those pages of letter size or smaller. As a band-aid process, the scanner operators, after receiving approval, are reducing the legal size pages to letter size on a photocopier and then scanning the letter size copy. The remaining oversize documents and photographs are being set aside and will be out-source for scanning.

.08. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROJECT ([Return to Index](#))

Unprecedented is one way to describe what is being done when the project comes up in

conversation. When comparing this project to other institutional imaging projects, imaging and scanning almost 98% of one's historical collection is unheard of due to limited funding and staff time. Comparing the Mint to other institutions' projects: NARA was given enough money to test scan about 120,000 selective images, and the Library of Congress is scanning to primarily show its Americana collection. At this time, this project is not planning to have an online exhibition of the collection nor showcasing particular documents. Granted the amount of materials that the Mint currently houses is very small when compared to university special collections and libraries. Yet, the idea of scanning just about the entirety of its historical materials is a huge task and some are watching to see what comes out of the project, and how the Mint staff and the general public are able to use the information.

There is a resurgence in interest of coins collecting especially among adolescents through the Mint's 50 State Quarter Program. There is an interest in coin making in the classroom and bringing in historical materials documenting circulating coinage. The Mint's interactive H.I.P. Pocket Change web site is geared towards middle-schoolers and brings to the classroom another version of American history, which is not well documented in history books. Teachers are using these coins to teach American history along with how coins represent American culture. These coins offer an interesting introduction to the wonderful diversity in our country and in our history.

There is a push within the Mint to have a presence on the web; that there is more to the Mint than just creating, producing, and circulating coins! There are Mint stories to tell including the Confederate States of America taking over the New Orleans Mint in 1861 and stopping coin production; the need for and building of Fort Knox and the incredible secrecy behind it; and the beautiful artwork for the coins and medals. These stories and many others will soon be available to researchers, coin collectors, educators, and the general public.

.09. ACCOMPLISHMENTS: NOW AND FUTURE ([Return to Index](#))

The current task is only six months old and in that time roughly one-fourth of the collection has been rehoused. In the last two months, two scanner operators have begun and there is now about 7,000 images on the server. The challenges that lie ahead include staying on the current course, writing and implementing standard operating procedures for all staff members, and working closely and concisely with the database contractor to create the necessary interfaces and search engines. Soon the project will face another interesting accomplishment and that will be how to incorporate the other institutions' and organizations' records, and to coordinate with them on how to effectively scan the images. Going into an organization and simply setting up a scanning station is asking a lot.

.10. CONCLUSIONS ([Return to Index](#))

Computer and database oriented people are neither historians nor archivists and do not understand the functions of an archives for historical research purposes. Their role in a project

like this one is to simply offer advice on the software and hardware functions and to not overtake the direction of the project. At one point, identification of every possible type of document and image in the collection in order to “map” the scanning requirements for each item in the archives. Now, after many discussions to simplify the scanning process, the scanners are laying the pages and images on the glass plate bed and scanning; then the software walks the operators through a basic identification process, and scans and places the image onto the server.

Technology is changing so rapidly that there are very limited standards to follow. Using .tiff as the master copy file is an unwritten standard that many institutions are implementing into their imaging projects. NARA, Library of Congress, Cornell Library's preservation program, and the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) have tested .tiff images and all recommend it as an archival and preservation copy.

Server space and file size is forever an issue/concern. At first, the Project Director was told that server space and files sizes are not an issue and the images did not have to be stored as a compressed file. In two weeks, with one person scanning, about one-fifth of the 250GB server was filled, and for two straight weeks, the Project Director and the Archives Technician needed to individually compress over 1,100 greyscale and colour image files. A very time consuming effort which took us away from other necessary functions.

For all of the delays and changes made to the project, and for all of those unseen changes in the near future, this project is setting a precedent to the technological communities, and offering a valuable resource to the historical and numismatic research communities.

.11. NOTES ([Return to Index](#))

[1] The author would like to thank Zimmerman Associates, Inc. for financial support of this research paper.

[2] The U.S. Mint's web page is <http://www.usmint.gov>. As of this date, the historical materials are not yet available; expected roll out date is Summer of 2002.

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