"MORE ACCESS, LESS BACKLOG": HOW THE KANSAS HISTORICAL SOCIETY GOT ITS GROOVE BACK

BY MATT GORZALSKI AND MARCELLA WIGET

ABSTRACT: In 2008, the Kansas Historical Society (KHS) began a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant-funded project to survey its archival and manuscript holdings using More Product, Less Process (MPLP) as its processing method. In the midst of layoffs of permanent staff, the three project archivists accomplished everything the grant required and more, including the reappraisal of government records. This article describes the process the archivists used and a survey of the professional and permanent staff in the KHS State Library and Archives Division to discover how effective they have found the new processing procedures so far. While some reservations remain, staff generally have found MPLP to be of great benefit in finding the materials they need.

Introduction

In May 2008, the Kansas Historical Society (KHS) State Library and Archives Division was awarded a National Historical and Public Records Commission (NHPRC) basic processing grant, "More Access, Less Backlog: Implementing Basic Processing at the Kansas Historical Society," to hire three project archivists to process the agency's backlog of unpublished textual materials. They were to use Mark Greene's and Dennis Meissner's More Product, Less Process (MPLP) principles. The project's broad goal was to create high-level descriptive content for all government records series and manuscript collections and input that information into a homegrown collections management database system called Dartzilla. The project archivists also reappraised state archives series and manuscript collections to further alleviate the backlog and developed new minimal processing guidelines as a standard to be followed by the agency once the project was completed.

Since Greene and Meissner's article "More Product, Less Process: Pragmatically Revamping Archival Processing Approaches" was published in 2005, several articles and conference presentations have described implementing MPLP standards at

various institutions.[1] The majority of these applications proved to be successful, but no project that the authors are aware of has equaled in scale processing a backlog that made up nearly the entirety of the agency's holdings, accrued since 1875 when the Kansas Historical Society was founded. Also, few projects have described in detail the differences that minimal processing has had on providing access to backlogged records, both for reference staff and researchers. The project archivists surveyed KHS State Archives and Library administrators, archivists, reference, and accessioning staff using the new Dartzilla database to assess how MPLP standards have impacted access and reference.[2] This article discusses the minimal processing project at the Kansas Historical Society, describes the survey given to staff members, and reflects upon the strengths and weaknesses of minimal processing, as well as the impact these standards have had on providing access to Kansas government and manuscript collections.

Literature Review

Archivists have long advocated for new approaches to cope with the magnitude of modern records. Several articles analyzing the costs and time commitments to arrangement and description have presented troubling conclusions and have been used to argue in favor of rethinking archival processing.[3] A 2003 white paper warned of the dangers of "hidden collections," declaring that backlogs hinder access to collections, research potential is limited, unprocessed records are at greater risk of being lost or stolen, and donor relations suffer.[4] Discussion concerning archival processing increased after "More Product, Less Process" was published in 2005. Greene and Meissner contended that traditional processing methods fail when applied to modern collections and challenged archivists to consider minimal descriptive standards.[5]

Because MPLP challenges the way archivists think about processing, it is not without its critics. Some have argued that it is not appropriate for personal papers and manuscripts because they are "as unique as their creator," and, thus, minimal description will overlook the "proverbial 'smoking gun' cherished by researchers."[6] While a proponent of minimal processing, Thomas Hyry laments that it puts a greater burden of discovery on researchers, requires reference staff to retrieve more boxes, potentially loses "diamonds in the rough," and creates challenges for later digitization projects.[7] Tiah Edmunson-Morton believes that minimal description hinders reference services, is of no use to off-site researchers, and ultimately leaves researchers dissatisfied. Donor relations may also suffer if donors witness treasured collections receiving what they consider minimal attention.[8] Recently, Carl Van Ness has thoroughly critiqued the methodology of Greene's and Meissner's MPLP survey, and Chris Prom discussed how institutional processing policy cannot be correlated with large backlogs, an argument also touched upon by Van Ness.[9]

Despite the criticism, most publications and conference presentations describe successful applications of minimal processing in eliminating backlogged collections.[10] In "More for Less in Archives," Hyry discusses Yale University's minimal standards and processing in the Center for Information on American records, a 16-linear foot collection, in a total of 320 minutes, or 20 minutes per linear foot.[11] Michael Strom

at Texas Christian University discussed how the 893-foot Jim Wright Collection was arranged and described in an average of 45 minutes per foot, noting that "It is hard to overstate the positive effects that making substantial progress with the Wright Papers has had."[12] At the University of Montana, three thousand linear feet of backlog was processed at two hours per foot, and it is now assumed that all collections will be minimally described and likely receive no further attention.[13] Similarly, Colleen McFarland presented how MPLP changed her life, providing access to a 3,500-linear foot backlog at a rate of 1.5 to 2.5 hours per foot. McFarland acknowledged that she "would have been a much less effective archivist without minimal processing."[14]

Reference services may not be as adversely affected by the MPLP approach to processing as some have expected. In analyzing a widely distributed American Heritage Center survey, Mark Greene found that users ranked "putting more resources into basic descriptions for all collections, even though some of those collections may never have more detailed inventories written for them" as more highly desired than detailed arrangement and description. He also found that the majority of researchers favor less detailed inventories for more access, and that they are confident in their abilities to find information in collections that are not well organized.[15] Edmunson-Morton's Northwest Archivist Processing Initiative (NWAPI) survey found that the majority of researchers are more inclined to skim until they find something of potential value, thus ignoring the bulk of description that archivists labor over.[16] These surveys indicate that researchers are most concerned with quicker access to collections instead of robust description. Anne Foster, also involved with the NWAPI, reported a noticeable increase in usage as a result of MPLP, including many collections that never before had been used.[17] Minimal processing, therefore, appears to be more of an aid than a hindrance for researchers.

Development of the KHS Backlog

An overview of the Kansas Historical Society's history and recordkeeping systems is beneficial to understanding the backlog's magnitude. The Society was established in 1875 and began serving as the state archives in 1905. The transfer of records from agencies to the archives was done on a voluntary basis until 1987, when the records management program was established. In 1992, a state records center was opened to house non-current agency records scheduled for long-term but not necessarily archival retention. The state archives currently holds approximately 35,000 cubic feet of records and over 17,000 rolls of microfilm. The Society began collecting manuscripts as early as 1877, which now total around 9,600 cubic feet and about 2,800 microfilm rolls.

The majority of the holdings have been hidden from public view, particularly those acquired in the recent past. Prior to the development of Dartzilla, staff and researchers were subject to using a plethora of confusing and inconsistent inventories, databases, and catalogs, while many records had no description at all.[18] The state archives had few complete finding aids and relied heavily on the institutional knowledge of staff. Government archivists—no more than two until 1983—concentrated on reference, acquisition and basic arrangement of new records, and limited records management

work, rather than on describing existing holdings. In preparing to move to a new facility in 1994–1995, staff members created a "quick and dirty" series-level Microsoft Access database to record provenance, locations, series titles, dates, quantities, restrictions, and container types for state archives records.[19] Although this database was intended to be used strictly as a moving aid, the archives inventory (called Arcinvy by staff) developed into a reference tool due to the lack of any other information on state archives holdings. It was not available to researchers. Of the 6,442 series entries, approximately 95% did not have descriptive information.

Manuscript collections also lacked description and were hidden from public view. Manuscripts staff, as was common in the nineteenth century, created a card catalog of individual items within collections by author and subject. When this kind of detailed cataloging became overwhelming for the small staff (one archivist 1936–1957, two 1957–1985), description was created at the series and later the collection level. Beginning in 1977, narrative finding aids were created for larger and more significant collections, but because of staffing limitations only selected collections were described. No single resource existed showing a complete list of manuscript holdings, as content information could appear in catalogs (paper or electronic), Web pages, specific collection databases, electronic documents, paper finding aids, or nowhere.

In 1999, the society joined with other Topeka libraries and formed ATLAS, a shared Web-based on-line public access catalog. Since 1995, machine-readable cataloging (MARC) records have been prepared for some cataloged manuscript collections and state archives records, mostly those on microfilm. To date, almost 1,100 records have been created for unique material, but this represents less than 10 percent of total holdings. As the Internet evolved, staff began converting text-based finding aids and MARC records to hypertext markup language (HTML) pages. Although the society has not used encoded archival description (EAD), new finding aids are organized using templates in accordance with EAD principles. If processors wish to create a spreadsheet or database for more detailed information, it is usually only accessible to staff, if staff are even aware such a resource exists.

In 2003, budgetary shortfalls forced the society to lay off approximately 10 percent of its staff. Because budgets have not been restored to pre-2003 levels and have declined in terms of actual appropriations for salaries, many other positions within the division have remained unfilled as people have left. One of these is a full-time processing archivist. Archivists formerly concentrating on arrangement and description have had to assume other tasks as positions have remained vacant. Four staff members from the division were laid off in the spring of 2009, including an additional processing archivist. These vacancies and reassignments have hampered staff's ability to arrange and describe the archival materials that the agency holds. These circumstances over the years have produced a backlog of 32,583 cubic feet and 17,720 rolls of microfilm for state archives; and 3,628 cubic feet and 873 microfilm rolls for manuscripts.

The Historical Society Project

In September 2008, the state archives and library staff hired three archivists to eliminate the backlog. Their tasks were to create high-level descriptive content; assign subject headings; confirm any restrictions on use or access; and verify and correct dates, quantities, and provenance at the series level for state archives records and at the collection level for manuscripts, whether on paper or on microfilm. The project archivists also created brief agency histories and agency-level abstract notes for state archives materials, noted series or collections for reappraisal, matched retention schedules to archival series where possible, flagged records needing preservation treatment, and developed a work flow and procedures model that ensures future accessions can be processed promptly without accumulating backlogs. Because of the accumulation of materials and ambition of the project, it was determined that 45 minutes per series or collection was the appropriate amount of time needed to describe the entire backlog in the 20 months requested in the grant. The archivists were to focus only on series or collections of one cubic foot or greater. No physical arrangement was undertaken; records were described as they were found, even if in complete disarray.[20] Photograph, audio-visual, and map collections were considered to be beyond the scope of the project and not included in the grant.

Describing large government series of several hundred or thousand cubic feet was usually accomplished within the allotted 45 minutes due to the standardized nature of these series, such as grant, licensing, or case files. Most unprocessed manuscript collections did not extend more than a few cubic feet. Project staff typically noted three types of information in a descriptive note: purpose of materials, kinds of materials, and existing arrangement, if any were easily detected. For eclectic series such as subject or correspondence files, and for manuscript collections, the archivists also noted broad topics that were the focus of the materials.

Because descriptions were created at a rate quicker than anticipated, time was available for tasks of lower priority or those not necessarily outlined in the grant. They found space for records in the initial stages of accessioning that had never made it to the shelves and were able to discover boxes that, in some cases, had been missing for years. Records backlogged at the State Records Center (SRC) that had not been transferred to the archives because of space issues were added to existing series or, if new materials, described and given unique location identifiers to indicate they remained at the SRC. More detailed attention was given to oversize records, describing individual volumes and map folders smaller than the one-cubic foot parameter set by the Historical Society for the project. Manuscript collections considered processed but having no descriptive information available electronically, such as in the ATLAS catalog or on the KHS Web site, were also described. The project staff added basic information to the database about audio-visual and library collections, usually only a series or collection title and locations, so that the database could account for the occupied shelf space.

Electronic records were not formally addressed in the grant, and the project archivists encountered them only on an irregular basis. Although the more recent and hidden accessions were created during an era where office computers were in widespread use, the vast majority of the records transferred remained paper-based. The electronic

records that project staff did encounter were typically digital photographs or text documents on compact or floppy discs, and were nearly always only a small portion of a larger series that was predominately paper. These mixed-media series or collections, therefore, contained descriptions largely based on the paper records, with a brief mention indicating electronic files were included. The project archivists did not attempt to read information on the discs, but were usually able to determine the content by disc labels or consulting accessioning paperwork and records retention schedules. The State Archives and Library is currently working on the Kansas Enterprise Electronic Preservation (KEEP) project to address future accessions of born-digital records, which is based on the National Archives Electronic Records Archive (ERA).

All descriptive information was entered into the homegrown collections management database Dartzilla. The grant initially discussed using Archon[21] because division staff felt that its functionality could be well integrated into the archive's descriptive and database practices. At the same time, division staff were also planning on linking Archon's functionality with Kansas Memory, the Historical Society's digital collections Web site.[22] As new content is scanned and posted on Kansas Memory, staff wanted a corresponding, searchable Dartzilla record to be created automatically, complete with the scanning metadata and description. This proved to be difficult using Archon, and it was decided that a better approach would be to create an in-house database that would ensure linkage between it and the Kansas Memory site.

Division staff conferred with Chris Prom during the initial database design phase. Like Archon and Archivist Toolkit, Dartzilla was designed with the ability to describe records at any level of a typical finding aid hierarchy, automatically create and export EAD and MARC records, incorporate accessioning information, import information from existing databases, provide appraisal information, manage locations, and incorporate digitized records from a given series—in other words, provide a one-stop resource for all collections management needs. As of this writing, not all of the database's features are functional, but they remain the long-term goals for Dartzilla. There is little concern over Dartzilla's sustainability among staff, as the interface is easy to navigate and input data; anyone familiar with Archon or Archivist Toolkit will not have difficulties using Dartzilla. The database administrator and programmer on-staff also are largely unconcerned, due to using widely based technologies and programs (such as hypertext preprocessor, PHP). Any new employee familiar with these technologies would be able to understand the program after spending some time working with the code base.[23]

Reappraisal

A significant component of the project concerned reappraising archival records.[24] The archivists matched series in the archives with scheduled records series, a process that had never been systematic even after the State Records Center opened in the early 1990s. Because of subsequent retention changes, a general lack of knowledge about contents found in series at the State Archives, and human error, the archivists found many series in the archives that were scheduled for destruction. Series in need

of reappraisal that either had no matching retention schedule, or were scheduled for archival retention, required more discussion with the Division Director and Assistant Director, as well as the State Records Manager. The project archivists attended State Records Board meetings where the records and retention schedules were further discussed, resulting in many changes in retention.

Project Results

By the end of the project, the archivists had worked with over 7,100 archival series and 2,700 manuscript collections. They added or edited existing description to over seven thousand archival series and 2,300 manuscript collections, and created roughly eight hundred new series-level archives records and one hundred collection-level manuscript collection records in Dartzilla. They added almost 30,000 subject headings to state archives records and over 6,500 to manuscript collections. Over 1,800 duplicative database records were merged into single series or collections,[25] and preservation notes of various priorities were added on almost 750 records. Out of a total government records holdings of approximately 35,000 cubic feet, the archivists also reappraised and deaccessioned over two thousand cubic feet. By the end of the project, the archivists had effectively looked at and described almost every government series and manuscript collection in the Historical Society's unpublished holdings, a feat that had not been managed previously.

Staff Survey

To better understand the success or failure of minimal processing in revealing "hidden" records, the archivists surveyed 10 State Archives and Library Division staff members.[26] The questions focused on how MPLP has helped or hindered access to the holdings. Two of the participants were administrative staff with backgrounds in either manuscript or government archives, one was a full-time archivist, four were reference staff, and three were acquisition staff. The project archivists were not included in the survey. These individuals were chosen because they have begun using Dartzilla as an accessioning and reference tool, and thus, can critique the high-level descriptions created. Because of their positions and responsibilities within the division, not all participants could answer the questions to the same extent, as some were more administrative. Collectively, the staff discussed descriptions for government records more so than manuscript collections, both in their appreciation over finding materials and in their concerns over implementing new processing procedures. The authors acknowledge that the survey is limited in scope because the public interface is not yet operational, so researchers' opinions about the record's accessibility remain unknown.

Overall, the results were positive. The staff found the new description to be helpful and a drastic improvement over previously used reference tools. Ninety percent of the respondents said that the added information was sufficient to find the records they

were looking for, especially when asked how it compared with the existing databases and reference tools (Figure 1).

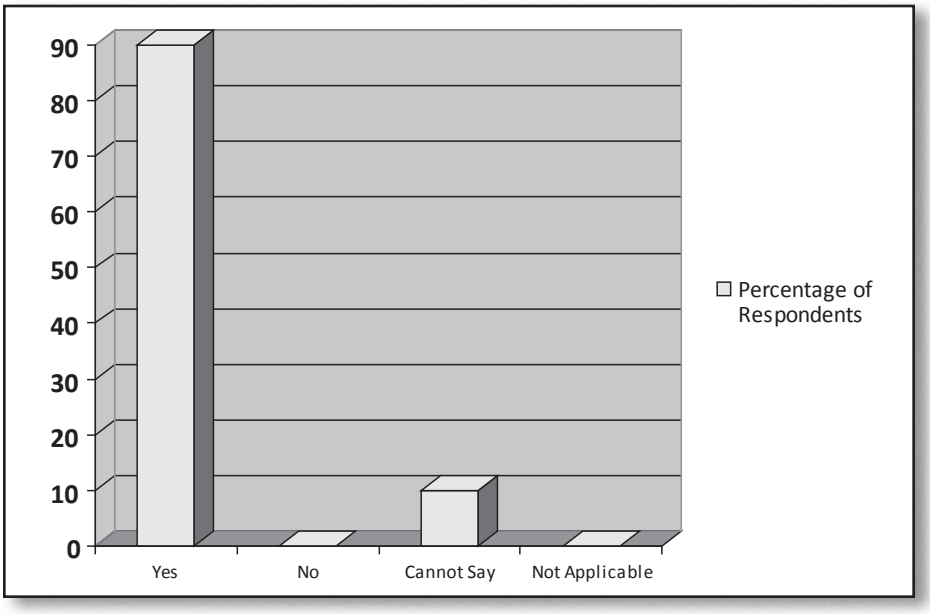

Figure 1. Has minimal description been sufficient in locating records?

Similarly, around 73 percent indicated that using Dartzilla has been very helpful for daily tasks such as reference and accessioning (Figure 2). As one respondent put it, "The previous iteration of the archives database that included only series titles (and those titles often being quite vague) required physical examination of many records that had no relevance to a request. While folder lists would be ideal and may even be required to identify specific pieces of information in the archives, the series descriptions certainly aid in limiting searches." Another respondent wrote, "I am now confident that the series title and description is accurate—not just a 'guess' as we were preparing to move to this building."

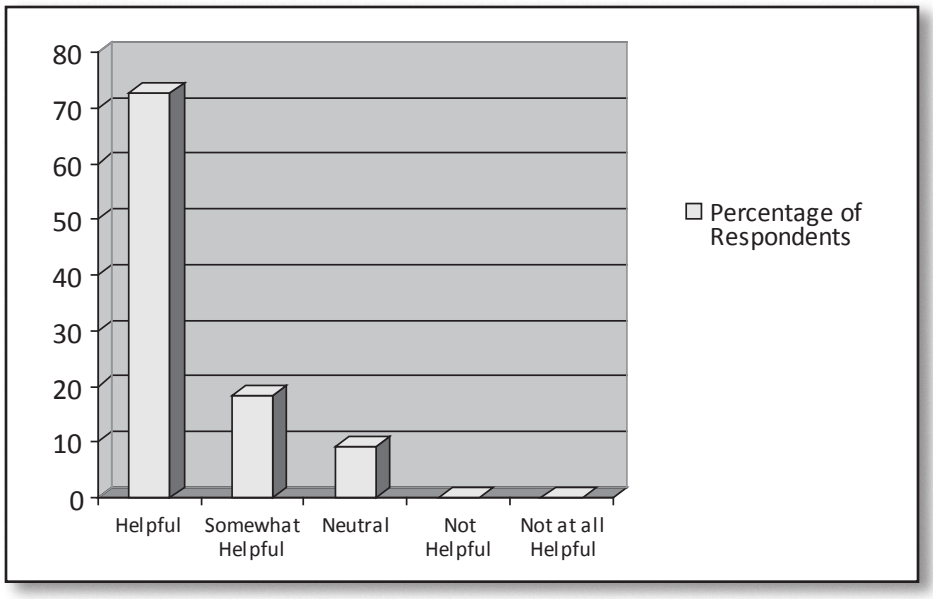

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents regarding the degree to which MPLP was helpful in staff's daily work.

Staff were also positive about keyword searching, not available in Arcinvy or other previous databases, saying that such searches provide a list of results on "what exists as well as what we have on a specific topic" from a single search. The ability to link topics between disparate governmental agency materials, and between manuscript collections and agency records, is a new boon for staff and researchers alike.

There generally remains a desire for more detailed information at lower-content levels, such as folder lists found in a traditional finding aid. One individual wrote that although accessibility is greater, "it still can be quite challenging to identify the proverbial needles in the haystack of such a large aggregation of materials . . . while the series descriptions will contribute significantly to reducing the research needed to identify the pertinent records, the lack of more detailed finding aids will still force agency personnel to examine a significant quantity of material to find the specific information desired." Nonetheless, the resulting increase in reference requests can help prioritize which series or collections receive more detailed description. One staff member understood that "You always wish for more but given the scope of the project and the lack of access before the project, the chances of finding relevant state archives materials has increased dramatically." Only 50 percent indicated the new description led to the use of materials not typically requested by users (Figure 3).

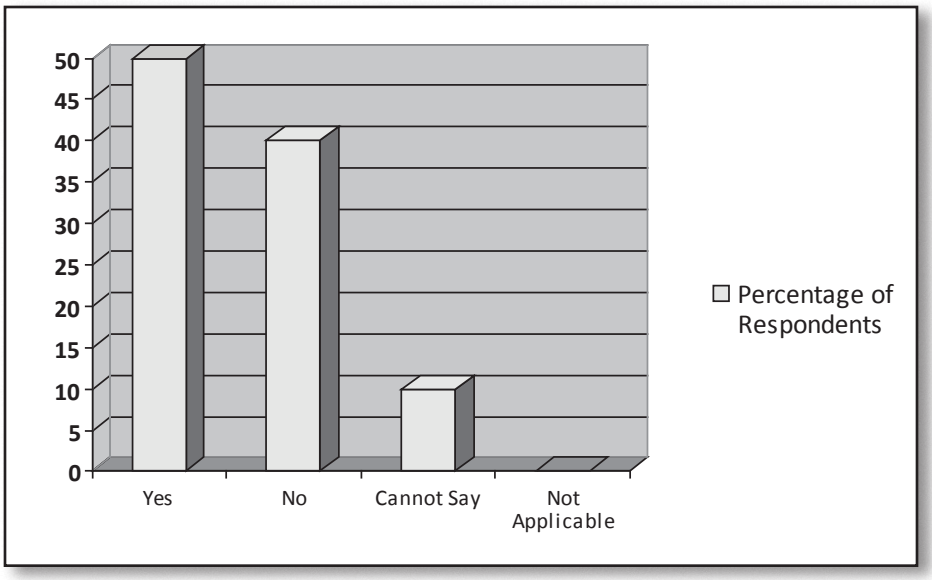

Figure 3. Percentage of staff who have used new series or collections.

This number is expected to increase as reference staff answer agency requests for their own records with a greater success than before the grant; it will, in all likelihood, continue to increase as members of the public gain access to the database. Other criticisms from staff concerned database functionality issues that continue to be improved by the information technology staff, some of which were resolved after this survey was created.

Surveyed staff were asked if the Historical Society had previous plans to eliminate the backlog; in other words, if such a task would have been possible prior to the influence of "More Product, Less Process." Twenty percent responded "no" while 60 percent could not say for certain (Figure 4).

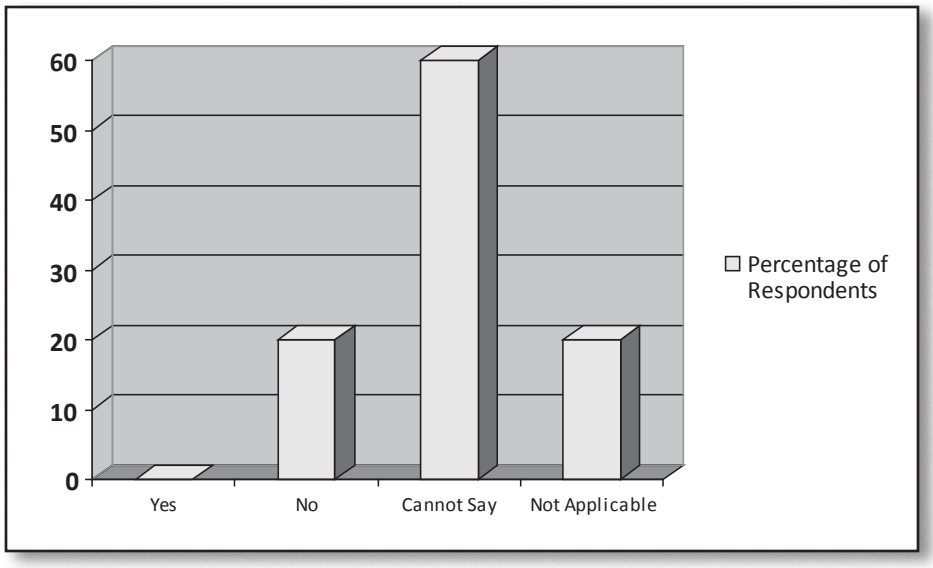

Figure 4. If not for basic processing grants, were there any alternative plans for processing the backlog?

Only one individual indicated a less ambitious project might have been implemented in order to address portions of the backlog. Another respondent summed up the situation succinctly: "It seems very unlikely that a comprehensive backlog processing project would have been implemented. Considering the current fiscal crisis, it seems quite probable that the backlog would have remained unaddressed for the foreseeable future in the absence of NHPRC funding." Another staff member noted that the June 2009 layoffs would have eliminated any hope of dealing with the backlog had the project not already started. These responses speak to the significance of the MPLP approach in offering a framework for providing access to large quantities of records. Had minimal processing not become more acceptable to the archival profession, accepted enough that the NHPRC began offering grant lines for basic processing projects, the Kansas Historical Society's backlog would not only have remained overwhelming but would have continued growing.

Archives staff were also questioned concerning their ability to describe new manuscript accessions and state records transfers upon the project's conclusion and the project archivists consequently leaving. Only 22 percent responded positively, while 66 percent could not say for certain, and 11 percent said "no" (Figure 5).

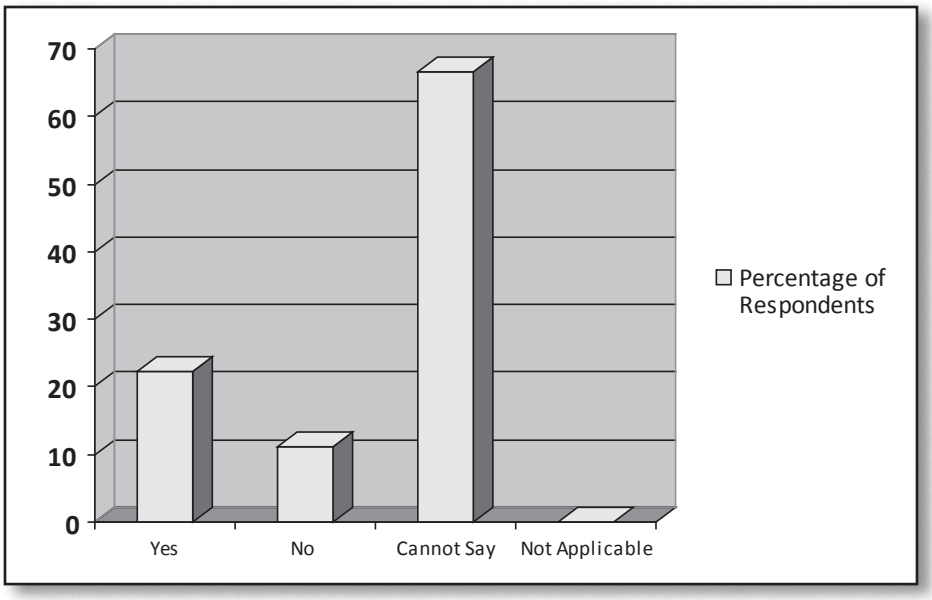

Figure 5. Degree of staff confidence in being able to maintain new minimal descriptive standards and prevent the backlog from reappearing.

Respondents overwhelmingly noted that a professional archivist devoted to arrangement and description needed to remain on staff. Unfortunately, one of the two remaining processing archivists was let go during the June 2009 layoffs; the possibility of filling this position and the effects of this absence remain to be seen. Staff members also stated that records officers at state agencies needed to be better trained in how to prepare record transfers and apply the appropriate retention schedules. Staff fear that if the processing archivist position remains unfilled, the work will again "pile up" and the backlog once again will increase. The basic processing guidelines created by the project archivists are intended to give direction to acquisition staff and ideally prevent the backlog from growing again. Acquisitions staff has already taken on more descriptive duties, particularly for manuscript collections, though description of government records continues to lag behind. Recently, stricter adherence to the records retention schedules during state records transfers at both the archives and the transferring agency already have mitigated potential backlog problems. Matching a state records schedule transfer with the corresponding Dartzilla series is now easier, allowing staff to avoid unidentified "miscellaneous" accessions that once plagued the archives, as well as giving them easier access to the description in both the retention schedules and Dartzilla.

Opportunities and Lessons Learned

The project at the Kansas Historical Society provides insight into unexpected benefits and opportunities coming out of using MPLP and working on a project of this scale, as well as lessons that could be of use to other institutions planning similar projects. One opportunity concerned internal public relations among all branches of the KHS. Archives staff presented the project at an all-staff meeting, providing them with the chance to remind other agency branches what the archives does, educate them about the importance of clearing out the backlog and what it means for the Society's own records, and demonstrating what the staff accomplished during the course of this work.

This project demonstrates the necessity for committed staff at all levels. Grant staff accomplished everything outlined within the NHPRC grant parameters, as well as additional tasks, largely because they were dedicated staff not distracted with the numerous responsibilities that typically fall upon permanent staff. The project archivists were given discretion to make on-the-spot decisions as needed, and they helped guide how the work of the project was completed. In the midst of other large-scale projects such as the KEEP electronic records project and the KHS Web site redesign, grant staff maintained regular access to and the full support of the State Archives and Library Division administration. Weekly meetings were held for most of the grant period, allowing the project archivists to present issues and concerns they could not resolve on their own and giving them input into the managerial decision-making process. However, information technology staff were not dedicated to this project, instead involved in major agency-wide projects such as overhauling the agency's entire Web site. As a result, Dartzilla's full functionality remains incomplete and the public interface has yet to be developed at the time of this writing.[27] For a project of this magnitude, it is important to have all involved staff as dedicated as possible to ensure full completion of a project within the designated timeframe.

As procedures changed during the course of the project, project staff's descriptive practices became better developed and standardized, and particular pieces of information were more consistently added, such as retention schedule identifications. Consequently, agency and manuscript collections surveyed during the project's early stages are not as well described as later materials. Some solutions involved revisiting particular series or manuscripts on an ad hoc basis when something new arose in those materials, and when project staff had time. This option may not exist for other institutions attempting similar projects on this scale. The key here was flexibility; no project, no matter how well thought out in advance, is finished without the occasional unexpected pitfall. In such situations, archivists have to face less than perfection and accept that they will not be able to fix everything.

This project makes evident that MPLP is not a perfect process, nor that it ever can be. Despite the positive feedback and the work accomplished, problems and concerns remain. These include missing boxes, misfiled materials, accessions in extreme physical disarray—meaning they remain less accessible than they could be—and records with serious preservation needs. Many of these problems were unknown before the project began, thus providing unanticipated obstacles for the grant staff. These concerns provided both a lesson and an opportunity for the KHS: because of this project, those

problems are now concrete and quantified. When looking for volunteer or intern projects and when applying for future grants, Archives and Library staff can use this information to their advantage.

Another solution to ensure that future accretions do not become hidden, government records specifically, is to focus on better records management practices and a stricter adherence to retention schedules. Since the project began, archival staff have continually worked to increase training efforts at state agencies and to streamline procedures, the results of which have been generally positive, though this effort remains on an ad hoc basis when time and other priorities permit. Archives staff have stopped simply accepting boxes from agencies—a practice that existed largely because the government archivist had no time to check what he or she was receiving—and started ensuring that appropriate records go to the State Records Center or come to the State Archives. The archives assistant has streamlined the records transfer process considerably, ensuring that records do not clutter unused corners of the stacks but go onto the shelves immediately, and that when they come to the archives they are already arranged. The backlog project provided the archives staff with the opportunity to look at all aspects of the transfer and descriptive processes and allowed them to change practices that no longer worked.

A potential sustainability issue may reflect a disadvantage unique to the Kansas Historical Society's situation, or one that may become more common as these types of grant-supported projects are performed. As the project archivists have moved on, a wealth of knowledge about the holdings and institutional memory has left with them. This concern is compounded by the current staffing and budget situation at the KHS; due to the lack of staff and the all-encompassing nature of this project, the project staff quickly became subject experts in the archives' holdings. Nonetheless, institutional memory is inevitably lost when staff move on. The true test for this project will continue to be administered as both staff and public users refine and search descriptions in the database created by the project staff. If their descriptions and notes are robust enough—even if they are brief—that individuals are able to find the materials they need, then the project will have passed muster.

Conclusion

The completion of the basic processing project was a major step for the Kansas Historical Society in gaining true intellectual and physical control over its archival holdings. Given the recent reduction in staff and an uncertain future, the "More Product, Less Process" approach has provided the society with a means to operate within extremely limited resources. The project has resulted in the best access the State Archives and Library Division has ever had to its holdings, leaving it with a new collections management database system unlike any predecessor, one that already provides descriptive information for all state archives series and manuscript collections. When Dartzilla becomes available publicly, it will provide researchers with a search tool unlike any that the Historical Society has been able to offer before, increasing government transparency and availability of all collections in the archives. Problems

that remain with archival and manuscript materials are now concrete and have been categorized with the information that the project archivists gathered, thereby giving the division staff better leverage when prioritizing what steps to take next with their collections.

Institutions struggling with a similar situation will hopefully be able to refer to the Kansas Historical Society project as a guide for planning and executing a large-scale descriptive initiative. In a time when records are produced in larger quantities and users expect quicker and more efficient access than ever before, perhaps minimal description can not be considered ideal. One respondent provided insight that likely reflects the state of mind of many archivists who have experimented with the MPLP approach: "It is a trade off . . . more information helps me identify specific records a patron is researching. However, I am not opposed to giving the patron direction and letting them search the records or collections. It seems to me the question is, do you put more time into detailed information or record general information? With the current situation, I think less work is best." A minimal processing approach has given the Society the best control it has ever had over its holdings, the results of which have already profoundly helped staff and, consequently, researchers.[28]

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Marcella Wiget received her M.A. in History from Colorado State University in 2006. Upon graduation, she worked as curator of collections for the Reno County Historical Society in Hutchinson, Kansas until December 2007; in 2008, she worked as assistant archivist for the Bessemer Historical Society before joining the Kansas Historical Society as a project archivist on the same grant as Matt. She remains at the KHS, now working on another NHPRC-funded project to describe the Menninger Archives.

NOTES

1. Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68 (2005): 208–263.
2. The Kansas State Historical Society recently changed its name to the Kansas Historical Society, and the Library and Archives Division changed its name to the State Library and Archives.
3. See Terry Abraham, Stephen E. Balzarini, and Anne Frantilla, "What is Backlog is Prologue: A Measurement of Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 48 (1985): 31–44; Megan Floyd Desnoyers, "When is a Collection Processed?" *The Midwestern Archivist* 7 (1982): 5–25; Paul Ericksen and Robert Shuster, "Beneficial Shocks: The Place of Processing-Cost Analysis in Archival Administration," *American Archivist* 58 (1995): 32–52; Uli Haler, "Variations in the Processing Rates on the Magnuson and Jackson Senatorial Papers," *American Archivist* 50 (1987): 100–109; Karen Temple Lynch and Thomas E. Lynch, "Rates of Processing Manuscripts and Archives," *The Midwestern Archivist* 7 (1982): 25–34; William J. Maher, "The Importance of Financial Analysis of Archival Programs," *The Midwestern Archivist* 3 (1978): 3–24; William J. Maher, "Measurement and Analysis of Processing Costs in Academic Archives," *College and Research Libraries* 43 (1982): 59–67; Helen W. Slotkin

and Karen T. Lynch, "An Analysis of Processing Procedures: The Adaptable Approach," *American Archivist* 45 (1982): 155–163; and Michael J. Sullivan, "Budgeting For Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 43:2 (1980): 209–211.

4. Barbara M. Jones, Nicole Bouche, Pat Bozeman, L. Gayle Cooper, Elaine Engst, Jain Fletcher, Jane Gillis, Julie Grob, Steven Hensen, Tom Hyry, Margaret Kimball, Deborah J. Leslie, Elizabeth Lilker, George Miles, Christopher Prom, and Henry Raine, "Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers: Creating Access to Unprocessed Special Collections Materials in North America's Research Libraries," 6 June 2003, <www.arl.org/bm~doc/hiddencollswhitepaperjun6.pdf> (12 October 2007).
5. Greene and Meissner, "More Product, Less Process."
6. Andrew Mangravite, letter to the editor, *American Archivist* 69 (2006): 13. For a response to Mangravite's arguments, see Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, letter to the editor, *American Archivist* 69 (2006): 13–15. Greene and Meissner ultimately argue that providing access to hidden collections should be the true focus of our profession, not reverting to standard processing practices that have helped create the backlogs in the first place.
7. Thomas Hyry, "Reassessing Backlogs," *Netconnect,* Spring 2007: 9 (supplement of *Library Journal*); Tom Hyry, "More for Less in Archives: The Greene/Meissner Approach at Work at Yale," 8 August 2006, <http://www.worldcat.org/arcviewer/1/OCC/2007/08/08/0000070504/viewer/file209.pdf> (1 December 2009).
8. Tiah Edmunson-Morton, "Reference Service and Minimal Processing: Challenges and Opportunities," 4 September 2007, <http://temarchivalmusings.blogspot.com/2007/09/saa-2007-session-307.html> (1 December 2009). See Donna M. McCrea, "Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana," *American Archivist* 69:2 (2006): 284–290 and Christine Weideman, "Accessioning as Processing," *American Archivist* 69 (2006): 274–283 for additional discussion on minimal processing and donor relations.
9. Carl Van Ness, "Much Ado about Paper Clips: 'More Produce, less Process' and the Modern Manuscript Repository," *American Archivist* 73 (2010): 129–145; Chris Prom, "Optimum Access? Processing in College and University Archives," *American Archivist* 73 (2010): 146–169.
10. Much of this literature review is covered in Matt Gorzalski, "Minimal Processing: Its Context and Influence in the Archival Community," *Journal of Archival Organization* 6:3 (2008): 186–200.
11. Hyry, "More for Less in Archives." See also Hyry, "Reassessing Backlogs" for an abbreviated version of "More for Less in Archives." The Center for Information on American records are one example of Yale's backlog. Hyry states, however, that the archives did not achieve the progress eliminating the backlog they had hoped for due to staff being pulled away for other projects.
12. Michael Strom, "Texas-Sized Progress: Applying Minimum-Standards Processing Guidelines to the Jim Wright Papers," *Archival Issues* 29:2 (2005): 110.
13. McCrea, "Getting More for Less," 288–289. To mitigate the negative perceptions donors may have regarding minimal processing, McCrea now focuses on the preservation and greater access to their collections as opposed to how they will be arranged and described.
14. Colleen McFarland, "It Changed My Life: Lessons Learned from Minimal Processing," 6 October 2006, <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/lonearr/publications/McFarland_MPLP.doc> (2 October 2007). Minimal processing also has been successfully applied to photograph collections. See: Anne L. Foster, "Minimum Standards Processing and Photograph Collections," *Archival Issues* 30:2 (2006): 107–118. Because Foster's article concerns photograph collections, outside the scope of the KHS project, it was not discussed in this article.
15. Mark A. Greene, "MPLP: It's Not Just for Processing," *American Archivist* 73 (2010): 184–187. Greene's article also reflects on MPLP and its relationship with appraisal, preservation, electronic records, digitization, and privacy concerns.
16. Edmunson-Morton, "Reference Service and Minimal Processing."
17. Anne L. Foster, "Reference and Minimum Standards Processing: Examining a Reciprocal Relationship," formerly at http://uaflibrary.us/blogs/nwapi/the-new-normal-minimun-standards-processing-at-uaf/ (accessed October 23, 2007). Foster acknowledges, however, that new reference practices in response to security and restriction concerns have led to researchers needing more assistance in locating materials. UAF staff has also had to help researchers navigate through the variety of description between collections.
18. The databases mentioned throughout this article were created for accessioning, descriptive, and inventory purposes. KHS staff cannot say for certain how many existed because different software programs used over the years have defined "database" differently, though many of these databases

were created in MS Access. Archives Inventory (a staff and reference version), Manuscripts Inventory, numerous microfilm databases, databases for Genealogical Society of Utah film of specific counties' records, accessioning databases, and other related programs and tables will become obsolete as this information is imported into the new collections management system.

19. Manuscript collections did not have such a database.
20. In many instances, the project archivists benefited because of previous arrangement work that had been completed.
21. http://www.archon.org.
22. http://www.kansasmemory.org.
23. Christine Desmuke, E-mail to authors, 20 September 2010. She also noted that the agency has made a commitment to custom programming, indicating that at least one programmer needs to remain on staff.
24. While project and permanent staff noted manuscript collections in need of reappraisal, these collections were not formally re-evaluated within the timeframe of the grant.
25. Duplicative series entries in the database in need of merging were caused by staff confusion over vague series titles and by importing skeletal entries from multiple databases.
26. The survey was created using http://www.surveymonkey.com. For a listing of the questions asked and the results, please see Appendix 1 at the end of this article.
27. The Historical Society was awarded a time extension on the grant, extending it beyond May 2010 to December 2010.
28. The authors of this article would like to thank the National Historic Public Records Commission for the funding for this project, and Patricia Michaelis, Mathew Veatch, and Robert Knecht for permission to write this article and for their guidance throughout this project. They would also like to thank the reviewers for their comments.

Appendix 1—Basic Processing Backlog Survey Questions

1. How has the high-level description at the series level for government records and the collection level for manuscripts helped or hindered you in your work? Would you prefer to have more detailed information (e.g., folder lists)?

Very helpful:	72.7%
Somewhat helpful:	18.2%
Neutral:	9.1%
Not helpful:	0%
Not at all helpful:	0%

2. Are state records and manuscript collections easier to find and more accessible as a result of More Product, Less Process (MPLP) description?

Very accessible:	60%
Somewhat accessible:	40%
Neutral:	0%
Not accessible:	0%
Not at all accessible:	0%

3. Are you using series or collections you have not regularly used before?

Yes:	50%
No:	10%
Cannot say:	20%
Not applicable:	20%

Appendix 1 – continued

4. Has the information (series or collection titles, agency information, subject headings, key words) the archivists added been sufficient for finding what you are looking for?

Yes:	90%
No:	0%
Cannot say:	10%
Not applicable:	0%

5. How has Dartzilla improved reference and/or general searching, compared to using the existing databases (e.g. ARCINVY)?

Greatly improved:	90%
Somewhat improved:	10%
Neutral:	0%
Not improved:	0%
Not at all improved:	0%

6. Had the NHPRC not offered a grant line in basic processing projects, were there any alternate plans for processing the backlog?

Yes:	0%
No:	20%
Cannot say:	60%
Not applicable:	20%

7. Have the procedures staff have put into place in the past year worked so far? (Do you think staff will be able to keep processing new materials as they are accessioned with the procedures this grant project has set up?)

Yes:	22.2%
No: 1	1.1%
Cannot say:	66.7%
Not applicable:	0%

8. What do you think are the next steps after this grant project is over? [open-ended text question]