

Success Beyond Access: CLIR-ing the Way

Harlan Greene

Amy Lazarus

Dale Rosengarten

Abstract

The College of Charleston Libraries have utilized three successive CLIR grants to process hundreds of linear feet of collections documenting African American and Jewish history and culture. Project staff built on relationships not only with these communities, but also with students, researchers, and local, national, and international cultural heritage institutions, to provide constituents a level of access going far beyond traditional finding aids. Using CLIR funds, we have not only processed collections, but made them available to our stakeholders, researchers, and even non-traditional users such as tourists, in ways previously unimaginable. Researchers can now access our collections not only in our reading room but also by searching the Lowcountry Digital Library for manuscript and iconographic materials and oral histories, and by viewing virtual exhibits focused on our collections. Project staff regularly gives class presentations and supervises student internships and honors theses. In collaboration with like-minded institutions, we produce exhibitions, publications, and online educational resources. We welcome tour groups from across the country who come to Special Collections to see materials processed with funding from CLIR. Our home institution recruits students and attracts donors by showcasing these collections. Remarkably, even people who never set foot in the reading room profit from their accessibility.

In this essay we offer three perspectives: Head of Special Collections Harlan Greene discusses the projects at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture and Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC), and examines how accessible archives impact a wide range of audiences; Curator Dale Rosengarten describes the persistent efforts that have

contributed to the Jewish Heritage Collection’s remarkable success; and Processing Archivist Amy Lazarus provides examples of incorporating technology, academic engagement, and outreach into her work on our latest CLIR grant.

Sowing the Seeds Harlan Greene

Since 2008, the College of Charleston has been fortunate to receive three Hidden Collections CLIR grants. There is some irony in this, for Charleston is known, and markets itself,



Harlan Greene leading a walking tour in Charleston, September 2010.

as “America’s Most Historic City.” Tourists come from around the globe to see, tour, touch, and now even taste the revealed, preserved, and accessible past; the city is regarded as a world attraction and a significant part of the economy derives from the allure of our historic assets. How could we have hidden history?

Easy. The fact is, the collections that have received CLIR funding document groups written out of history, or underrepresented, because their stories are painful or difficult to parse in a tourist brochure. Scholars, entrepreneurs, and the chamber of commerce are now recognizing the value of including previously excluded stories in interpretations of the past. Belatedly the city is embracing and advertising both African American and Jewish histories—the subjects of our newly “unhidden” collections.

While our archivists did not drive this change, the change has been reinforced by their good work. “Success beyond access” describes not only our innovative processing strategies but also the impact three CLIR grants have had outside the archives and research room.

The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture was the recipient of our first CLIR grant in 2008. With collections of materials documenting enslaved Africans, free people of color, civil rights leaders, African American social groups and institutions, and even the work of a trailblazing English anthropologist, Avery was well known for its historical building, erected in 1868 as a school for recently freed slaves, as well as for its cultural programs. Its archives were touted but were not used to their fullest extent, as no archives can be, until their contents were arranged and described. With its collections now largely catalogued and accessible, usage by students, scholars, genealogists, and film makers has escalated—with ripple effects across the campus and beyond.

Today, Avery’s collection is used as recruiting tool for a burgeoning African American studies program; as the program expands and hires more staff, candidates are brought to Avery to see the rich primary materials available to faculty to use as teaching aids and in their own research. The College now offers a major in African American studies, as well as a minor—a fact not unrelated to Avery’s accessible archives.

But it is not only faculty from that department who use Avery. Jon Hale, an assistant professor in the school of education, reports that “The Foundations of Education course is now a general education (humanities) course because we utilize the collections at Avery for a primary course assignment. This assignment is used for SACS accreditation.” Dr. Hale also consults for Charleston County Public School System—a system, like the city itself, which still suffers from the sins of the past. “While many of the local teachers know Avery,” Dr. Hale notes, “I make it a

point in my courses that students visit Avery and utilize their collections to create Document Based Questions, which are a requirement of the new Common Core standards. Therefore, as teachers readjust their teaching to new standards, a number are incorporating Avery sources into their pedagogy.... Avery,” Hale summarizes, “has helped grow the work of the education department.”

Black history is being incorporated—or perhaps the more appropriate word is *integrated*—into general education courses and even grammar school classrooms. Charleston, a historically black city for much of its existence, never included much black history in its representation of itself, except in a stereotypical, servile manner. But now, partially with the impetus of the historical assets at Avery, that is changing. The city’s plans to build an International African American Museum, years in the making, depend in part on access to



Conference-goers gather outside Special Collections in Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston to view the exhibits in our display cases. Biennial Scholars' Conference on American Jewish History, held in Charleston, South Carolina, June 2006. Photo by Dana Sardet.

Avery’s well-catalogued collection of artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts.

While Charleston has long been recognized as “the Ellis Island of black America,” less well known is its history as the cultural capital of American Jewry. In 1800, Charleston had the largest Jewish population of any city in North America and remained the Jewish metropolitan center of the new republic until the 1820s. How many people know that South Carolina claims the first professing Jew

elected to office in the Western world, the first Jewish patriot to die in the American Revolution, the first Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Societies, and the first dissidents to attempt to reform Judaism in the United States?

Bountiful yet unprocessed materials on southern Jewish history, on the Holocaust in Europe, and a vast collection of iconographic Judaica from around the world gained us two other CLIR grants. Here, too, the broad and lasting effects of revealing hidden collections can be demonstrated. Our experience processing hundreds of linear feet of the Jewish Heritage Collection, housed in Addlestone Library's Special Collections, about six blocks from the historic Avery Center, is another case of success beyond access.

Since 1995, when the Jewish Heritage Collection was inaugurated, it has enjoyed a strong symbiotic relationship with the College's Jewish Studies Program, established in 1984. In response to a query about the impact our collections have had on the Jewish Studies Program, which expanded from a minor to a major two years ago, Student Recruitment Counselor Helen Slucki responded: "Your collections do help us in recruiting students....When I meet prospective students who are interested in majoring in history or Jewish studies, I definitely go into more detail about...what resources we have available here, including the archives." These materials, Ms. Slucki notes, give families of prospective students "a level of comfort" and are a "push factor" in recruiting. For those interested in the Jewish Studies Program, a dedicated Jewish Heritage Collection strengthens the academic resources of the department. Slucki further notes that even for students who never actually use the archives, its presence influences their decision to attend the College. Prospective Jewish Studies donors also are brought to the library to show off our Jewish Heritage Collection and encourage their support. Again, accessible archives have

a tangible impact on the growth and development of academic programs and on the parent institution itself.

Beyond the academy, diverse communities have taken note of these collections. When Brith Sholom Beth Israel, an Orthodox Jewish congregation in Charleston, brought together Jews from across the country for a Shavuothon, a communal observance of the biblical holiday of Shavuot, organizers provided time in the program for these very observant individuals to walk the distance from the synagogue to Addlestone Library, bypass the elevators, and take the stairs to the third floor to see a display of new treasures from the Jewish Heritage Collection. Our staff was on hand to guide them through the exhibit and engage in discussions about southern Jewish life, past and present.

As noted earlier, Charleston is a tourist city, and our now unhidden collections have added an asset to the local economy. Jewish museums, congregations, and federations from across the country, seeking educational opportunities, now regularly contact us. JHC Curator Dale Rosengarten provides slide lectures on southern Jewish history and showcases materials from our internationally important Rosenthal Collection. For 20 years, Dale has worked diligently to secure the funds to process collections and pursue new avenues for public education and outreach.

Tilling the Soil

Dale Rosengarten

We built it and they came! With persistent effort, we have created opportunities to attract an audience, engage students and scholars, publicize our collections, and reach the general public. As a faculty member, I regularly teach courses with an archival research component. As members of the Special Collections staff, Harlan Greene and I both present classes and

workshops on demand, highlighting our collections whenever possible. We produce educational materials and websites. We collaborate with reference librarians to generate research guides for specific syllabi with links to material in the Jewish Heritage Collection, including guides for Southern Jewish History (http://libguides.library.cofc.edu/jwst_315) and Holocaust Studies (http://libguides.library.cofc.edu/fysm_142_primary). When students come to Special Collections looking for material for research papers, we welcome them into the archives for extended consultations—sometimes with excellent results. A recent honors student advisee of

mine, for example, wrote a paper on a Jewish-owned rice plantation on the Ashley River, based on the planter's journals, and successfully submitted it the following year for publication in a respected academic journal. Our position as faculty members, archivists,



and scholars gives us access to colleagues in allied fields. In 2003, we invited Jeffrey

A roundtable on the Eldridge Street synagogue restoration project in lower Manhattan was held in the sanctuary at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, during the Biennial Scholars' Conference on American Jewish History, held in Charleston, South Carolina, June 2006. Photo by Dana Sardet.

Gurock, a professor at Yeshiva University and an expert on the history of Orthodox Judaism in the United States, to explore our collection of Brith Sholom Beth Israel records and write a history of the congregation, which we published in 2004, in time for BSBI's 150th anniversary. Last year, when eminent Jewish historian Gary Zola was in residence as the College of

Charleston's Arnold Distinguished Visiting Chair, we provided his class with a resource guide and supplied him with archival material for his current research project. Zola, executive director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, has agreed to collaborate with us on a website that will provide digital access to manuscript prayer books written by founders of the Reformed Society of Israelites that now reside in his collection and ours.

When a scholar finds something in the Addlestone Library catalog or the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL) he or she thinks will be useful, we often are able to suggest additional materials now processed and available—if not digitized. In one mutually profitable exchange a Ph.D. student in Florida requested imagery of the Jewish ritual of *kapparot*. He had seen a postcard from the Rosenthal Collection posted on LCDL and hoped we could make it available for use in an article. We sent him that image—and another 15 we had scanned but not yet put online at the time of his request, but which are now digitized and available. Realizing that we had holdings on the topic from which other scholars would benefit, he returned the favor by offering us a *kapparot* image in his possession.

As we raise the profile of the Rosenthal Judaica Collection—the focus of our latest CLIR grant—we are attracting interest from serious collectors, most recently from an expert in New York who specializes in commemorative medals. He was excited to see our newly processed materials and offered to curate an online exhibit in the future. Collectors not only can offer detailed subject knowledge; they can become potential funders and even donors of their collections.

Our efforts over the past 15 years to collect Holocaust-related materials helped persuade a major donor to establish an endowed chair at Jewish Studies. Another donor—himself a Holocaust survivor—gave substantial gifts to both Jewish Studies and Special Collections, and subsidized the creation of our Holocaust Quilt Memorial website, based on archival material we proactively collected (<http://holocaustarchives.cofc.edu/>). Most recently we provided a rationale for endowing the new Pearlstine/Lipov Center for the Study of Jewish Culture, an initiative in which we are a full partner. Our plan is to develop a consortium of southern Jewish archives and academic programs; to build an online portal that will help researchers locate relevant archival materials across the South; to offer research fellowships and archival internships; to encourage scholarship in regional studies; and to promote Jewish heritage tourism.

For the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC) we produce a biannual newsletter, loaded with no-longer-hidden archival images and documents. We help the Society plan its fall and spring meetings, sometimes constructing an archival exhibit on the theme of the conference. This spring, for instance, we are creating a display of materials on World War II for a meeting to be held on the 70th anniversary of VE-Day. JHSSC returns our support with an annual stipend that pays part of the salary of our oral history archivist, who played a vital role in JHC's first CLIR grant.

Special Collections has become a sought-after stop on the itinerary of Charleston's "Jewish focused" tours. I am frequently asked to address a visiting Jewish federation or congregational group from places as far flung as Rochester (NY), Dallas, Greensboro, Memphis, Savannah, Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, and Denver. These encounters are seldom a one-way street. Tour groups regularly make financial contributions to Special Collections, and offer leads and sometimes actual artifacts to enhance our holdings.

While our mission is mainly academic, we have been able to assist efforts of cultural conservation. The Legacy Project, for example, which strives to help declining congregations plan for an uncertain future, used our collections and images and even interviewed us on camera, to produce a film focusing on Temple Sinai in Sumter, South Carolina, its emotionally wrenching decline. The materials we presented, processed during our first CLIR grant, had been gifted to JHC by the congregation as part of its living will. Closer to home, we have revised the



A highly successful panel brought together the “Kings of King Street”—ten King Street merchants, past and present. The event, which attracted a standing-room audience, was held in Arnold Hall in the Jewish Studies Center. January 24, 2013. Photo by Dana Sardet.

the risk of losing the collection, the archives’ home institution has offered to upgrade its services.

Because the Rosenthal Collection and our Holocaust Archives are global in scope, we have become a resource for the European theater, as well as for American audiences. Through the Lowcountry Digital Library, researchers in states from New York to California and internationally from Austria, England, and Wales have discovered collection images online and requested permission to use them in a variety of media, including articles, books, videos,

docent manual for Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim and provided the first in a series of training sessions.

Evolving archives, too, have begun to look to us as a safe haven, or a wise counselor. Last year a Jewish collection in a neighboring state, for example, considered relocating its material to our library in an effort to find a more activist and professional steward. To counter

educational television specials, and exhibits. An organization in Amsterdam contacted us in search of a Dutch survivor whose story is included in our Holocaust Quilt website—the staff had recently acquired a photo archives that contained studio shots of the woman and her mother in 1942. Here was a dramatic demonstration of the presence of the past, an example of what archives are uniquely able to do.

All of our activities, exchanges, and outreach rest upon our ability to process and catalog our collections. Without the painstaking work of CLIR-funded professionals like Amy Lazarus, we would not have achieved nearly as much. Her report is next.

Harvesting the Crop

Amy Lazarus

While processing the William A. Rosenthal Judaica Collection, grant-funded archivists succeeded in establishing new audiences on and off campus, increasing the discoverability of the hidden collection, and exploring new ways of using the materials. These are certainly part of access; but our successes were accomplished in non-traditional and innovative ways beyond arrangement and description—strategies that required us to reach outside the archives and the research room, both physically and virtually.

Specifically, we recruited student interns to digitize materials; established regular contact with students and faculty, informally spreading word about the collection; maximized use of social media; introduced Rosenthal Judaica to Special Collections patrons; and collaborated with a scholar to create an online educational tool. Combining outreach and access, I can now report that some strategies were more fruitful than others.

The Rosenthal CLIR-funded grant called for the hiring of a project and processing archivist to process and catalog the collection. Both were active in recruiting undergraduate

interns to digitize items as the collection was being processed, thanks to an existing vehicle for their access—the College’s Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL). By the end of the grant period, almost 5,000 collection items were available online. While the student workers were not able to produce totally reliable metadata on their own, their recruitment provided an excellent opportunity for outreach. Early in the grant cycle, project staff began to interact with various college departments, contacting staff, posting fliers, and asking specific professors to make these internships known to students. Jewish Studies and Anthropology, in particular, saw the potential value of the program.

The student interns, who earned three credits for a semester’s work, were surely the main beneficiaries. Instead of turning them into drones, we put the tasks in context, introducing interns to the basics of archival science, its uses, and importance. After they learned about digitization procedures and metadata, and gained an appreciation for the significance of the collection materials, we provided background information on aspects of Jewish history and culture, topics the students knew little about; in this way, we contributed to the larger mission of our parent institution by broadening the world view of its students. One-on-one guidance was given to each student on the cultural facts relevant to the specific task at hand. As a result, several interns expressed interest in a career path related to archives and museums. Besides encouraging a vocational direction, project staff provided reference letters supporting applications for archival internships and post-graduate jobs. Recruiting interns helped spread news of the collection through academic circles and impacted individuals in a meaningful way.

While the interns themselves had many positive experiences, the products of their work were not uniformly successful. Examining the reasons why may help guide future projects. The internship program began during JHC’s first CLIR grant. Though dedicated and enthusiastic,

students lacked the specialized subject and language skills necessary to understand the multilingual and sometimes esoteric materials. Without knowledge of Jewish ritual, synagogue fixtures, key moments in Jewish history, and Bible stories and figures, untutored yet eager interns often missed the relevance of certain crucial details. The use of an Internet engine to translate languages also led to misidentified items and other inaccuracies.

The College has no master's program in library sciences to tap. At our small liberal arts institution, finding undergraduates with the combination of skills and education required was difficult, at best. Despite the obvious appeal of making archival materials available in digital format to a worldwide audience, access at any cost is not the way to proceed. Realizing this, and seeing that it often takes more time to correct metadata than to create it, archivists hired under the second CLIR grant took care to look for interns with language proficiency, establish quality control measures, supplement the students' gaps in knowledge by providing translations and background on Jewish history and ritual, and increase supervision and scrupulous review of work. Ultimately this proved too time intensive to be practical. After two semesters, we decided the Rosenthal Collection was not a good candidate for student internships. To continue uploading new items to LCDL, we began creating metadata for a backlog of scans from the previous grant. With a more suitable collection, training student interns for digitization might be more appropriate. It is never a mistake, however, to reach out to other academic departments and provide individual instruction to a new generation of archival patrons and potential archivists.

Student intern recruitment was not the only way we utilized the academic environment to create a network of users. I audited Hebrew language courses and took the opportunity to engage with faculty and students. This allowed me to introduce a key constituency to the Rosenthal

Collection and describe examples of the materials it contains. Many students had little sense of what an archivist does and their curiosity spurred additional promotion and outreach.

Towards the end of the project we saw an unexpected opportunity to create a digital exhibit and, with CLIR's permission, hired Samuel D. Gruber, an established scholar with a specialty in synagogue architecture, to choose images from the collection and write text around a central theme highlighting one of the collection's strengths. A digital exhibit, we felt, would not only serve scholars and publicize the collection within the field



of Jewish studies, but also provide an educational tool for a lay audience.

Adopting the title “The Life of the

Synagogue,” (<http://lifeofthesynagogue.library.cofc.edu/>) we have produced an insightful and engaging online exhibit that will interest scholars around the globe, and also serve Jewish day schools, high school students, and undergraduates.

Project Archivist Sarah Glover and Processing Archivist Amy Lazarus review Rosenthal Collection materials with consultant Samuel D. Gruber. November 2014. Photo by Dale Rosengarten.

In creating this resource, project archivists functioned as scholars as well. Building on formal education in Jewish history and culture and the knowledge gained from the research required to process and describe the collection, we were able to guide our consultant, showing him what images were available, suggesting others, and contributing to the exhibit text. Project coordinators Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten helped edit texts and ensure the exhibit was accessible to a range of audiences.

To encourage use of the collection, staff of our previous CLIR grant established A Synagogue A Day Tumblr (<http://asynagogueaday.tumblr.com/>), which gained dedicated followers day by day, week by week, beginning in August 2011 and continuing to the present. Each post includes a short blurb about the collection, where it can be found, and links to the Lowcountry Digital Library, the Rosenthal website, and the collection's Twitter account. Thus, no matter where viewers find the image, it leads them back to the Rosenthal Collection. Through both grants, project archivists have maintained a blog with updates, a highlight reel, and information on parts of the collection that were not digitized (<http://rosenthal.library.cofc.edu/news-and-updates/>). The blog has prompted several requests for images, specifically an entry on the German periodical *Allgemeine illustrierte Judenzeitung*.

While many of our ventures were deliberate undertakings, requiring planning and implementation, we found opportunities in unlikely situations, such as translating materials for donors and researchers using collections other than Rosenthal. While providing this language assistance to researchers, project staff served as “ambassadors” for Rosenthal Collection, introducing Special Collections users to new sources we were making available for research.

Through all these various means, it has become apparent to everyone involved in the project that thinking creatively about access can lead to novel ways of thinking about the collection itself. Even when attempts did not fully succeed, they provided valuable lessons for the future. Our efforts to engage new audiences and make use of emerging technologies already have, and will continue to, raise the visibility of the “unhidden” collections at the College of Charleston.