

## **Documenting an Environmental Disaster: The River Valley Collection at Marion Public Library**

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### **Abstract**

Marion Public Library (located in Marion, Ohio, 45 miles north of Columbus) serves as repository for a collection of documents produced in response to local concern about the incidence of leukemia and other ailments among the population. Former athletes at the River Valley High School, several miles east of town, were particularly at risk. Inquiries revealed that the school was built on a former WW II military site, and that the school's ballpark was above a dump site for noxious chemicals.

From being considered a relatively minor issue, local outrage grew until something was done. The school was relocated and the old buildings closed. Eventually the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and its contracting agency Montgomery Watson, cleaned up the site.

One consequence was the production of voluminous documentation, requiring the attention of a Documents Librarian and a Catalog Librarian. The resulting repository is of interest to scholars, and the library has received a surprising number of requests via interlibrary loan. Such requests, made possible via appropriate bibliographic description and access, demonstrate that a collection of primarily local interest can serve a wider community, provided that proper attention is given to its maintenance.

Of particular interest to scholars of grey literature is the issue that arose during the course of the documentation project of the partial transition from a paper-based paradigm to electronic resources. Initially, documentation was generated, in most cases using electronic technology, with a view to the paper version as end product. The realization that documentation in an electronic medium can serve as the objective happened during the course of the project, but was not fully realized. Indeed, the persons who generated the documentation are not known to have expressed the transition from paper to electronic version as a concept. As a consequence, further work entailing retrieval of the electronic originals where still available, and document scanning where not, remains a possibility. Such work will likely fall to librarians; it is unlikely that the original authors will assume responsibility.

### **The Social and Historical Context of the River Valley Collection**

Surely no material is more obscure, more "grey," than what is classified as secret! Perhaps had secrecy not been a primary concern of the U.S. Government during and after World War II, Marion and its surrounding communities might have avoided the tragedy that ensued when the River Valley High and Middle Schools were constructed atop the dump site of the Formerly Used Defense Site known as Marion Engineer Depot (MED). Hindsight is easy, however. Another way of phrasing the question is, "Who could have known?" Even in 1988 with the publication of Charles Mosher's compilation<sup>2</sup> of anecdotes and newspaper cuttings from the local paper, the Marion Star, given the benefit of four decades of hindsight little was uncovered. The existence of the dump site was either unknown, ignored

or disregarded during the process of acquiring the tainted land for educational purposes. And no mention of leukemia is found in Mosher's anthology.

Two formerly used defense sites are located in the Marion area: Scioto Ordnance Plant (SOP) and Marion Engineer Depot. Both of them are covered in the extensive documentation known as the River Valley Collection (RVC) at Marion Public Library (MPL), although only MED was implicated in the leukemia tragedies. The investigation and cleanup activities of the 1990s onwards took place - and continue - in both locations. SOP was by far the larger - and the more dangerous to work in during the war, for it produced explosives destined for use against enemy powers. SOP was constructed not long after Pearl Harbor and employed thousands of workers, however production stopped after just one year of operation. After VJ day the SOP site was deactivated and decontaminated, then parcels of land were sold off for agricultural and other uses, including a prison, an airport, and a housing subdivision. A historical marker at the airport documents the relocation of area residents as their land was expropriated via eminent domain.

Some buildings constructed during the war were converted to other uses. Other buildings from pre-war days had never been demolished and reverted to their previous usage. Notable is Likens Church, a prominent local landmark since the 19th century. Among the hearsay documented in Mosher's book, Likens Church was rumored to have had, at one time, uranium stored in the basement<sup>3</sup>. Uranium storage was however unsubstantiated, and investigations including radiological tests provided no evidence. But the Atomic Energy Commission did have a minor role in SOP's future, with Monsanto labs occupying a small part of the SOP property for a while.

Marion Engineer Depot meanwhile continued in active service until 1960. It adjoined a long-distance highway (formerly U.S. 30 South, now state route 309) and a major east-west railroad. After going out of service, most of it was transformed into the Marion Industrial Center. The River Valley School District acquired a small tract of the land, upon which the now disused school buildings were constructed. During its occupancy by MED, some of this land had been used as a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp, Camp Marion, the residence of Germans captured in North Africa after the allied overthrow of the Axis powers there. The POWs were occupied in activities lawful under the terms of the Geneva convention<sup>4</sup>. Again, secrecy was an issue: Fraternization of locals with POWs was, in a word, verboten.

No exact picture emerges, from either official documentation or the competent journalistic reporting of area newspapers, of just how or when it became known among some sufferers of leukemia that they shared a common bond as graduates of the River Valley schools. Perhaps it was the production of Mosher's book - to this day the only published account of SOP and MED - that initiated and stimulated discussion. And since the research was inconclusive, neither establishing nor refuting an association between the schools, the former dump site and the patients, locals continue to argue amongst themselves - vehemently at times<sup>5</sup>. Whether or not the controversy was a contributing factor, the decision was to "err on the side of caution." It was decided to take action, close the schools, and clean up - again (for archival reports contain memoranda indicating that decontamination did take place in the years immediately following the war).

The Marion Public Library was a logical location for the repository, given the close connection between the repository and the community. Strictly speaking it is a "city-school district" library, serving the city

of Marion and its associated school district. Unofficially (that is, without dedicated funding from the county), it also functions as a library for the whole of Marion County. Other options that might have been chosen are the Marion County Historical Society and the Ohio Historical Society (OHS). Some related documentation is available via OHS. But the choice of the library was a good one, because it has greater ease of access in terms of both location and hours of service. It also has the advantage of substantial technical support, as well as ample shelf space in the Reference area.

### **Decisions in Document Processing**

Beginning in 2003 Fairclough began to process donated materials that had accumulated during the past several years. Dawn McCleery, at that time Adult Services Librarian with responsibility for the River Valley materials, served as contact person for negotiation and receipt, and together with Fairclough made a set of general decisions for processing to be applied to the whole collection. These decisions were:

- To use full cataloging according to Anglo-American Catalog rules, 2nd ed., revised (AACR2R)
- To assign Library of Congress subject headings
- To provide a full Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) number
- To prefix the DDC number with notation specially for the RVC
- To provide a series added entry, River Valley collection, in each local record
- To provide local subject added entries for the high and middle schools respectively
- To make the bibliographic records available internationally using OCLC WorldCat.

The decisions are far-reaching. Their importance is best illustrated using the alternatives as points of comparison. AACR2R cataloging mandates a uniformity of treatment for materials, in particular in the choice of the source of information from which the record is prepared. Most materials had a title page, or suitable substitute, with a title that the document author had prepared. In contrast, non-AACR2R cataloging might have been derived from an unknown and unspecified source, or the cataloger might have invented the data. Such invention is permissible under circumstance preventing use of the prescribed source; when done, AACR2R requires the cataloger to enclose the supplied information in brackets. Furthermore, full cataloging is contrasted with the preparation of brief records, which might have little information other than a provided title. Such records, regrettably, abound in the bibliographic universe. Marion Public Library, through assigning the task to a professional cataloger, avoided the pitfalls that inadequate documentation can create, such as the inability to properly and uniquely match a bibliographic record in the catalog with an item in hand.

Use of Dewey Decimal Classification has many benefits. It allows the records to be treated on a par with other materials in the collection: For nonfiction and reference materials, MPL is a DDC-classed library. It facilitates shelving of like materials - known popularly if not totally accurately as the primary use in public libraries. A better understanding is available in terms of scholarly organization. Researchers can use the DDC to retrieve information to a high degree of precision - again, provided that the job is done properly, in terms of the full number available built according to the DDC schedules and tables. Creation of this number is a professional job, not to be undertaken lightly. In contrast, many libraries content themselves with a modified DDC number, usually by truncating after an arbitrary number of digits. Pressure from circulation staff can even be a deciding factor in such a policy!

Table 1 is a conspectus of DDC numbers used with the RVC, as assigned locally. It illustrates concisely what the collection is about.

**Table 1: Dewey Decimal Numbers in the River Valley Collection**

363.17	Hazardous materials
363.1763	Monitoring, surveillance, reporting
363.179	Specific types of hazardous materials
363.1791	Toxic chemicals
363.1799	Radioactive materials
363.7	Environmental problems
363.73	Pollution
363.735	Social action (class here remedial actions)
363.7356	Government action
363.7358	Community action
363.736	Control
363.7363	Monitoring, surveillance, reporting
363.7364	Inspection and testing
363.737	Measures to prevent, protect against, limit effects of pollution
363.738	Pollutants
363.739	Pollution of specific environments
363.7392	Air pollution
363.7394	Water pollution
363.7396	Soil pollution
363.73966	Control (elimination and reduction of hazards, of sources and causes of difficulty)
363.739664	Inspection and testing
616.99419	Leukemia
658.4083	Social responsibility of executive management - protection of environment (class interdisciplinary works in 363.7)
917.71514	Marion County (used for maps, etc.)

One additional element in the call number, the prefix, allows for separate shelving from the rest of the collection. It contains two parts, the letter R to indicate it is part of the Reference collection, followed on the next line by RIV VALL to uniquely designate the RVC. Depending on the online system in use locally, prefix data can be included in the filing order (as at present) or omitted and processed separately (the result being to display other materials the library holds in the same subject area). Separate processing is advantageous but regrettably not available in MPL's current integrated library system. Without such notation materials in the collection would be interspersed with other works on the same subject but not referring to the River Valley situation - although other materials on that subject having to do with Marion County might be accommodated by use of the full DDC number.

By way of illustration of the structure of a DDC number: This title, *Soil, Air and Particulate Monitoring Data Package : River Valley School Site Investigation, Former Marion Engineer Depot, Marion, Ohio*, has a number built thus:

- Base number for Hazardous materials<sup>6</sup>: 363.17
- Further notation for " Monitoring, surveillance, reporting" added to base number 363.17 as instructed there: 63
- Notation to indicate subsequent addition of a geographic subdivision: 09
- Geographic number for Marion County: 771514
- Built number: 363.176309771514

This number was retained in the OCLC WorldCat master record for the benefit of all users of that database. Locally, notation for Marion County was removed as redundant and the prefix was added to form: R RIV VALL 363.1763

By browsing the local catalog, using the search key R RIV VALL, one can retrieve a full list of all titles in the RVC, arranged in order of the subjects represented in the DDC scheme. If the decision had gone differently, that is, not to use DDC numbering but simply to lump all materials together, no such ordering would be available.

We further decided that another unifying feature, identifying locally all documents in the collection, would best be served by the presence in each bibliographic record of a searchable data field. In order to be distinct from all other fields in the records, and to avoid confusion with data actually present in the items, we used a series added entry for this purpose. A user of the MPL catalog<sup>7</sup> can thus search for the series "River Valley collection" and retrieve a list of all titles in the collection. Properly - and this depends again on the display capabilities of a local system - this display will be in alphabetical order by main entry (that is usually for these materials the document title). This added entry provides a different perspective to the aforementioned browse by DDC number. It is provided locally, since the "River Valley collection" is a locally created entity rather than a published series. A local researcher wishing to know if a particular document is in the collection but unsure of the exact wording of the title can retrieve the records and peruse them. Had the decision not been made to include this field, no such capability would have been built into the records.

Local subject added entries were also created and added in most cases to the records. Since MPL is not a contributor to the Name Authority Cooperative Project (NACO)<sup>8</sup> and no other agency had already provided a heading in a name authority record for either the River Valley High School or the River Valley Middle School, these names were used as the bases for the headings in the records. In assigning these subject added entries, we followed a fairly liberal application. Strictly speaking the documents for the Scioto Ordnance Plant - and even some from Marion Engineer Depot - had no direct connection with the future schools. But in order to facilitate access to the documents locally, the subject headings were provided in local records. So someone searching in the MPL catalog for the schools and not already aware of the existence of the RVC will, it is hoped, discover the collection. Again, had no such decision been made, the capability would have been omitted.

The last decision listed, to make the bibliographic records available using OCLC WorldCat, was not the last one made, but is the most significant in terms of bringing awareness of the materials to a wider audience. Many institutions collecting such materials might decide that they are purely of local interest, and catalog them only using their local system. Had MPL done so, it is a foregone conclusion that the library would have received no requests for these materials outside our local community. But scholars working on environmental concerns elsewhere in the United States have discovered MPL's resources, and librarians have requested selected materials.<sup>9</sup>

A corollary to using WorldCat is that the records were cataloged using the *MARC21 Format for Bibliographic Data*, as implemented in WorldCat and locally. This was not so much a decision in itself as a consequence of having the records in WorldCat and in the MPL local catalog. Not only is use of MARC required for the records to be included in the MPL catalog, it also has more granularity than some of the other metadata options, such as Dublin Core, currently being applied to institutional repositories. If encoding in another metadata scheme should prove necessary, other agencies with such requirements can use a data crosswalk scheme with an appropriate processing tool such as MarcEdit to get the bibliographic record into the locally preferred format.

In part the use of MARC also arose from the fact that the bulk of the collection at the time processing began was in print format - and remains so today although some of the materials are now electronic. Within the profession of librarianship and in scholarship in general, the phrase "institutional repository" is in transition: Increasingly, though that phrase does not necessarily signify that it is in electronic format, it has that connotation. A similar semantic shift took place with the word "database" a generation ago. But the RVC is truly a repository although only part of its contents is electronic.

### **Telling the Story Through the Documents**

The RVC consists of materials occupying approximately ten shelves of the MPL collection. An exact figure of the number of items is unavailable: In fact, documentation is still in process, and the collection continues to grow. Some bibliographic records, such as those of the agendas and transcripts of the hearings of the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB), cover several items.

Thanks to the judicious choice of wording for the titles of documents that Montgomery Watson (MWH)<sup>10</sup> produced, we can review the collection by title and get a pretty good overview of the activity of the whole project. Here are selected titles, with the dates of production. Initial investigations took place between 1994 and 1997:

- Ordnance and explosive waste, archives search report for the former Scioto Ordnance Plant, Marion, Ohio (1994)
- Final limited site investigation report for radiological contamination at the former Scioto Ordnance Plant, Marion, Ohio (1995)
- Documents prepared for preliminary investigation of former Marion Engineer Depot site, River Valley schools, Marion County, Ohio (1997)
- River Valley High School, Marion, OH, sampling ... in response to public concerns about leukemia and cancer incidence. (1997)
- Environmental investigation at the River Valley local school property : final report (1997)

- Work plan for River Valley local schools (1997)

It was at about this time (the late 1990s) that matters began to escalate. Whereas it appeared that local concern would soon be resolved, the reverse happened. A four-year study led to a conclusion that no significant association could be made between the incidence of leukemia and the River Valley schools. But far from quieting people's opinions, they became further inflamed. After a lull, documentation began again in earnest with titles such as:

- Marion Engineer Depot and Scioto Ordnance Plant Restoration Advisory Board agenda. Transcripts provided by Hammond Reporting Services. (2002)
- Soil, air and particulate monitoring data package : River Valley school site investigation, former Marion Engineer Depot, Marion, Ohio (2001)
- Draft revisions to the River Valley school property, operable unit 1 - former disposal area, draft remedial investigative report, Marion, Ohio. (2001)
- Analytical report for 204087 for DLZ Laboratories, Inc. Accompanying CD-ROM has text of base report (file: lims.pdf) plus other files. (2002)
- Public hearing held at the ... Marion, Ohio on ... at ... / Marion Engineer Depot, Scioto Ordnance Plant and Army Reserve Local Training Area Restoration Advisory Board. Transcripts provided by Florine I. Varner & Associates, Inc. (2003- )

It is interesting that the RAB documentation is based on transcripts. The original sound recordings, produced only to facilitate keeping an accurate if not necessarily verbatim written record, are of interest for a variety of reasons, some quite tangential (a study of regional accents and pronunciation, for example, can draw from it). Whether or not the sound recordings continue to exist is not immediately known. The laboratory report is an early example in the collection of the provision of information in CD-ROM format: Much of what was documented in supplementary files is data that would require many reams of paper to print, and which would be unusable in that format. The term "draft" is a recurrent one within the collection, as is "draft final." In fact it is the norm rather than the exception for the most recently deposited version of a document to be designated as "draft." It seems that in many cases the authors lacked the nerve to assert that a document is "final." An exception which "proves the rule" is the radiological report of 1995, which illustrates the notion prevalent at that time that the project was a small matter and would soon be over. In the same vein and as another side of the same coin: When documenting laboratory reports and the like, a "chain of custody" is recorded as security against tampering with specimens.

#### **Document Formats**

In the first instance, the agencies responsible for the clean-up conducted archival studies, made available in 1994 and 1998, to discover what is now available about the establishment of SOP and MED. These studies, drawing upon resources much of which were formerly confidential but now have been declassified, contain copies of material retrieved from archival sources. Whether or not the archival search was exhaustive, and successfully so, the benefit to users is substantial. One does not have to visit the National Archives in order to access at least some of the information: It can be found in the Marion Public Library. Much of it is photocopied from the original, and the copy that winds up in the binders on the shelves at MPL might be a third generation copy if not even more remote from the original - which

was itself perhaps a carbon copy. These materials, then, constituted the initial foundation upon which the research into the local situation during the 1990s and 2000s was based. From half a century ago, materials whose present-day use in this context was not likely to have been foreseen emerged as the beginning of the story that the River Valley Collection tells.

It is not the objective of this essay to delve in detail into the document texts themselves. That project awaits the attention of a historian, and it is hoped that such a person will assume interest. This essay marks the status of the documents as grey literature and their migration from archival material to a local repository.

It is the various circumstances under which the River Valley Collection documents were produced that give it such a range of characteristics. The archival documents, created long before the electronic era, likely were dictated: An army officer - who probably never touched a typewriter - would have his secretary take a memo. Such a process constituted transcription of an oral message formulated according to stylistic conventions signifying rank, sub- and superordination, and so forth. By the 1990s this hierarchical situation was likely long gone, as all military and commercial ranks of personnel adopted the keyboard as the primary means of written communication. The secretary's supporting role was replaced by that of information technologists whose task in maintaining word processing software, keyboards, monitors, printers, and the central processing unit functioning correctly and in a timely fashion was critical to the proper functioning of the organization. Given this infrastructure, and the availability of devices such as templates to expedite memo writing, the preparation of the written document underwent a significant paradigm shift. Yet it was still the preparation of the print product that was paramount in an author's thought. It took considerable time before transmission of a document could be effected otherwise than in the paper medium. The word printout is significant here: It indicates the beginning of the thought process that the electronic document is primary. To my knowledge, none of the documentation in the River Valley Collection was considered to be a "printout" until quite recently.

Montgomery Watson were exemplary in their production of documentation for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is not known at this time whether MWH have retained the original files: Whether they were retained on the original hard drives, moved or copied to inhouse archival storage, or other steps taken. One hopes that they were preserved, and moreover that the files can eventually be made available for public use. The company might regard their obligation to the public as fulfilled by provision of the paper copies, and decline to participate further. Or they might view the additional steps required to make documents available as an act of *pro bono* community service that is in the company's interests. All these ideas are avenues for possible pursuit.

It was during the middle of the first decade of the 2000s that MWH's documentation in print format began to be submitted with an accompanying CD-ROM. Whether the CD-ROM was created with the text document primarily in mind or secondarily is a question. An example is this title, from 2006: *Closure Report, SOP-F : Artillery Fuse Load Line F4, Underground Storage Tank Removal Program, Former Scioto Ordnance Plant, Marion, Ohio*. A bibliographic note reads "CD-ROM contains full text of document plus appendices of analyses by Kemron Environmental Services, etc." Thus the question is whether the agents supplying this material were doing so primarily in order to transmit the appendices, which contain data not suitable for reproduction in print format. If so, then the actual text of the document

might have been provided as an after-thought, as if to say, "Since we're providing the analyses in a CD-ROM we'll also provide the text."

Three years later (2009) this document appeared:

*Former Scioto Ordnance Plant, Marion, Ohio [electronic resource] : Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis : Final Report for the Burning Field (SOP-M) and the Incendiary Fuel Disposal Area (SOP-Z).*

From the general material designation "electronic resource" presented after the title proper, one knows immediately that the record describes an item not in paper format. Later in the record it is stated that the item is a CD-ROM. When printed out, the text comes to approximately 85 pages (irregular pagination prevents an exact statement). Tables, attachments, appendices, and photographs bring the total to approx. 200 pages.

The ultimate irony is that such documents are indeed printed out! McCleery herself makes a printout and places it in a binder. That such a practice is expected is a feature of the document, for it contains a cover sheet, intended for insertion in the outside pocket of the binder. That the practice is done at MPL stems from two concerns: Usefulness to the community, and preservation of the material. MPL users of the RVC want to come into the library and peruse the documents. Having to use a computer to do so would be, for them, an inconvenience. Plus, it would be very easy for the CD-ROM to be (illegally) removed from the collection.

The next stage of development for such documentation is to use online electronic media for storage and transmission. It was noted that scanning might take place. Judging from the quality of the documents from the 1940s it is unlikely that a scanning project would successfully transcribe these texts at first pass and without human intervention. It is likely to be a labor-intensive task. In mentioning quality, we intend not the historical worth of the texts, but their typographical and photoreproduced condition. Whether scanning of more recent documents is necessary remains to be determined. If the cooperation of MWH and other agencies can be engaged, those developing and maintaining the collection can avoid scanning. Perhaps another agency will collaborate with MPL to serve as a host site for the electronic materials, providing access via the Internet. The Ohio Historical Society already has an interest in the subject, and is a possible ally.

### **Conclusion**

The "official" history of World War II, as written from the perspective of the United States army, is recorded in an extensive series<sup>11</sup> of books published in the post-war years, many of which have been reprinted in the early 21st century. One might think that the title, *The Ordnance Department: Procurement and Supply*<sup>12</sup>, a volume of over 500 pages, would contain information about the Scioto Ordnance Plant. It does - a one-word mention (p. 218) documenting its closing in 1943. This paucity of information is not so much a presumption of the comparative insignificance of SOP as a reflection on the vastness of the scale of operations of World War II. This scale of operations is such that a site so large and productive as SOP is but a drop in the ocean. It is provocative that half a century later so much documentation has been generated on a matter that is considered so tiny in the grand scale of things.

What this documentation calls for is further attention. The documentation itself records the attention that was given during the site investigations, lab testings, plans of action, and reports of completion. Now it falls on the current generation of librarians and scholars respectively to preserve the documentation and to optimize its exploitation in order to contribute to the body of human understanding.

### Author Information

A native of Liverpool (England), in 1975 Fairclough moved to Toronto to study musicology and in 1977 to New York City, getting an MLS from Queens College, CUNY in 1989. Since then he has served in numerous positions in a wide range of libraries across the United States - academic, public, and special; large, medium, and small. From 2001 to 2008 he was Catalog Librarian at Marion Public Library.

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<sup>1</sup> Dawn McCleery (Head of Reference, Marion Public Library) advised on this presentation and related matters. Fairclough gratefully acknowledges McCleery's generous use of her time and support.

<sup>2</sup> Mosher, Charles D. *The Scioto Ordnance Plant and the Marion Engineer Depot of Marion, Ohio : a profile after forty years.* -- [Marion, Ohio] : C.D. and D.R. Mosher in cooperation with the Marion County (Ohio) Historical Society, c1987.

<sup>3</sup> Mosher, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Mosher, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> A septuagenarian county resident once engaged me in such a conversation. I had to plead that, as a librarian and not native to the area, I simply do not know anything beyond what is recorded!

<sup>6</sup> In DDC number building the "base number" is *not* the three numbers to the left of the decimal point, but rather, all numbers that together have a particular significance and to which the classifier can add others to bring out additional facets.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.marion.lib.oh.us>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/naco/naco.html>

<sup>9</sup> Since RVC materials do not circulate outside MPL, when loaning them it is stipulated that the borrowing library must also restrict their use to on the premises.

<sup>10</sup> During the course of the project, Montgomery Watson, an engineering company specializing in wetlands infrastructure, changed its name to Montgomery Watson Harza as the result of a merger, and then began also using the form MWH Americas, Inc. Inconsistency in company representatives' application of these names in the documentation has resulted in chronological overlap in their application in bibliographic records. Their website <http://www.mw.com/> simply uses MWH.

<sup>11</sup> Stetson Conn, general editor. *United States Army in World War II. The Technical Services.*

<sup>12</sup> Washington, D.C. : Center of Military History, United States Army, 1960, reprinted 2003.