

ABSTRACT

Virtual Motor City: Web Access and Preservation of Endangered Images From America's Industrial Giant, 1918—1940

The Virtual Motor City Project seeks to digitize and provide electronic access to images of a crucial epoch in American history. The United States was redefined as an automobile culture in the period between the two World Wars. Detroit lay at the heart of this transformation. As captured by photographs in *The Detroit News*, the Motor City emerged as the national model for industrialization, unionization and urbanization. The city was home to Henry Ford, Walter Chrysler and Alfred P. Sloan, but also to Father Coughlin and Walter Reuther. *Detroit News* photographers immortalized those major personalities, as well as recording the activities of their city's 1.5 million people. The Motor City had become a focal point not only for tens of thousands of immigrants from Eastern Europe and pioneers from the Middle East, but for rural migrants across the Midwest and a powerful tide of African-Americans from the South.

The Detroit News retained ownership of its 800,000 photonegatives until 1997. At that time the paper transferred them with copyright to the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Analysis during the Fall of 2000 revealed that approximately 8,250 5 x 7 and 8 x 10 negatives from the key period of the Twenties and Thirties are threatened with imminent self-destruction. Many images rest on nitrate-based film, which is chemically unstable and very hazardous. Others are on acetate-based film, that is beginning to exhibit "channeling," in which emulsions shrink and buckle from their base.

The Virtual Motor City Project of the Reuther Library and the combined Wayne State University Libraries is a pilot to guide the digitization, cataloging and electronic access of the 800,000 image *Detroit News* Collection. It seeks funding for:

- Digitizing 8,250 selected nitrate and channeled acetate negatives at low resolution for JPEG thumbnails and access images on the Web and at high resolution TIFF files for archival storage;
- An emergency preservation contract to strip the emulsions from 800 acetate-based channeled negatives, enabling them to be duplicated for digital scanning;
- Cataloging the 8,250 negatives by upgrading an existing electronic database to AACR2/ MARC bibliographic and authority records for each item;
- Providing access nationally and internationally on the World Wide Web to low resolution digitized images and cataloging records through Wayne State University's Horizon software, which is used for the Detroit Area Library Network's (DALNET) Im@gine information hub. The cataloging records will be submitted to OCLC's CORC database and the Project will be registered with the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Digital Initiatives;
- Providing alternative Web access through an innovative database effort (dynamic-HTML) and dedicated Web site by the Reuther Library.

In-house work calls for two grant-funded, full-time catalogers and two part-time scanning and data entry assistants. Stripping and duplication of channeled acetate negatives will be contracted to a reputable laboratory. Web promotion will be provided by a consultant. Existing professional staff in the Reuther and Wayne State University Libraries will provide coordination, training and technical support; including management of the Project by the Reuther Library's Audiovisual Reference Manager at half of his time.

Historic Costume Collection | Virtual Motor City**Virtual Motor City Demonstration Project****Goals****Revised: 1/10/02****Purpose:**

To demonstrate how access to and preservation for the Detroit News photo collection can be improved by digitizing, cataloging and providing Web access to approximately 400-500 selected negatives.

Goals:

This demonstration project will achieve these goals:

1. Capture the images in digital form and set a baseline for future preservation treatment.
2. Test the digitization lab in the Reuther Library.
3. Test the process of building SGML files from the existing FileMakerPro database, and to begin use and MrSID Geo software to provide access to the digital collection.
4. Enable cataloging staff to obtain experience working with metadata for images.
5. Enable Reuther Library staff to obtain more experience digitizing images.
6. Obtain useful data and experience, and develop a demonstration site that will strengthen future grant proposals to fund the rest of the Project.

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
VIRTUAL MOTOR CITY
DIGITIZATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
PROGRESS REPORT FOR DALNET

June 30, 2002

January to March 2002 --

Project Design Phase 80% completed – There are still some tasks related to documentation of standards that need to be completed by Reuther staff.

March 2002 to September 2002 --

Project Implementation Phase approximately 50% completed as of date of this report.

Details follow:

- Reuther staff is currently selecting and digitizing images from the collection. Some monies from the grant have been transferred to Reuther to fund student assistant hours to help with these tasks.
- Work on Web site design and content (e.g. help pages, introductory text, etc.) with input from all project-associated parties to create an alpha test site for the project is still ongoing. See starting point at <http://www2.lib.wayne.edu/web/vmc/>
- We received and are currently installing Digital Library Extension Service (DLXS) software and MrSID Geo imaging software on servers. Configuration and testing will begin in late July.
- Cataloging of the metadata in Reuther's FileMakerPro database is ongoing, but metadata scheme and associated elements have not been finalized yet.

Submitted by
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