Playing Baseball at the Library of Congress: Strategies and Challenges for Curating Primary Source Collections

Katherine Walden, PhD + MLIS
University of Iowa, School of Library and Information Science

Project Overview

Based on a Junior Fellowship at the Library of Congress, this project highlights the challenges embedded in the process of curating a thematic collection of primary sources. The Fellowship project involved working in the Library’s Music Division to identify baseball-related print music titles, and the Fellowship’s final project was creating a bibliography of baseball-related titles that exist in the Library’s collection.

Research Questions

What is involved in curating a thematic primary source collection?

- Catalog migrations and catalog forms
- Collection development, description, and accessibility
- Copyright law
- Outreach and education

Findings & Recommendations

- An understanding of institutional collecting policies and practices is needed to navigate collections at large-scale archives and GLAM institutions. Institutional memory and staff expertise are invaluable resources for understanding how an organization’s collections, catalog, and classification strategies have evolved over time.

- GLAM institutions need a coherent, clearly-articulated policy for collection description and access. If organization staff have varying levels of familiarity with EAD best-practices, collaboration and/or ongoing professional development support is needed to ensure long-term collection accessibility is not negatively impacted by catalog and platform migrations and staff turnover.

- LIS professionals working with popular culture materials need a detailed understanding of how national copyright law shapes material availability and collecting policies. Scholarship that addresses this intersection should be considered in terms of its LIS practice implications.

- GLAM institutions need to consider how curated primary source collections can support or enhance outreach and education initiatives. Curated primary source collections designed solely for niche research communities have minimal impact on larger organization goals. Collaboration across departments can maximize collection impact.