Chicago Public Library Digital Collection

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I will be looking at the Chicago Public Library’s (CPL) digital collection which includes items from Chicago’s history including: Millennium Park, Chicago Theater, Chicago’s sewers, the first African American mayor of Chicago Harold Washington, the Chicago Public Library, and many other categories. [http://digital.chipublib.org/](http://digital.chipublib.org/) (See Figure 1)

Administration

CPL set up the digital library to provide historical resources with equal access of this information to all inhabitants of the Chicago-land area as well as any individual, worldwide, searching for information concerning Chicago’s history. : “We welcome and support all people in their enjoyment of reading and pursuit of lifelong learning. Working together, we strive to provide equal access to information, ideas and knowledge through books, programs and other resources. We believe in the freedom to read, to learn, to discover” is the mission of CPL. Their goals, as of the 2015-2017 strategic plan, include nurturing learning [digital materials can maximize learning (Burkey 52)], supporting economic advancement, and strengthening communities. (See Figure 2)

CPL serves the city of Chicago with 72 branch libraries located throughout the city as well as two regional libraries. Due to the diversity of the community, all types of users are considered in the collection management process. The digital collection is managed by Michelle Frisque who is Chief of Technology, Content, and Innovation as well as Andrew Medlar who is Assistant Chief of Technology, Content, and Innovation. Partners of CPL include the Chicago Public Library Federation, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation, and U.S. Equities Realty. These partners, along with others such as local, state and federal governments, provide grants and donations to fund the digital collection as well as the library as a whole.

Collection

A collection development policy could not be found but judging from the contents of the library, all items must be relevant to the history of the city of Chicago and fall under the categories of the established collections. The scope of the collection is very broad as it deals with many different aspects of Chicago history. Digital objects include photographs (which is the primary type of object) as well at texts in the form of the digitization of the newspaper *Chicago Examiner* and theater play bills. Multiple institutions have contributed
objects in the digital collections as they pertain to the history of Chicago neighborhoods, history of the Public Library, the historical transformation of Millennium Park, and many other topics of historical interest. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the collection is part of a regional consortium or interoperable with other library systems. “Today interoperability is recognized as a key step in the shift from isolated digital libraries toward a common information space that will allow users to browse through different digital libraries within a single integrated environment” (Innocenti et al. 29).

**Information Organization**

Content is organized by subject. The Dublin Core descriptive metadata standard is used for digital objects. “Metadata, as a consistent, logical manner to keep documents accessible and usable over the long haul, need to be widely accepted and implemented, and the use thereof promoted to creators of digital objects” (Groenewald and Breytenback 246). The digital library also uses ContentDM as its host. (See Figure 3)

**Collection Storage and Preservation**

The collection does not appear to contain any digital born objects, rather only objects that have been digitized. The original items are housed in the Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation Division. File formats for digital objects include JPEG and TIFF.

**Collection Access**

As stated earlier, Content DM (a proprietary software) is the technology used to run CPL’s digital library. Software and content are housed internally at the Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation Division. The interface is user friendly and easy to navigate. All of the objects in the various collection are displayed on a rotating wheel. One just need press the arrows to make the wheel turn and get a quick view of an item. Hovering over the item will bring up the title of that object (See Figure 4). In this way the entire collection can be displayed in an interactive way. If a particular object is of interest, clicking on it brings up a closer view of the object as well as pertinent descriptive information. Each collection has “suggested topics” links at the bottom of the page. This feature aids in content discovery, an important aspect of library services (Parandjuk 124). There is also a search bar at the top of the page as well as Advanced Search functions where Boolean Operators can be used. Search results are displayed in a horizontal list of pictures and titles along with search narrowing options on the side of the web page (See Figure 5). Records are displayed below individual items when clicked on. There is a privacy policy in place for the library as a whole but not one specific to the digital collections nor is there a statement about special needs accessibility.
Technical and Service Aspects

There is no access policy in place, though this may be due to the fact that the digital collection is open access. There are no conditions for access. There is a help button on the top right corner of the home page which display a brief “how to” in terms of searching within the collections. There is also a “contact” button at the bottom of the main page which opens up an email program to email the library with any queries or comments. Providing online help services is “fundamental to information service delivery” (Berube 41). Each object is available for download and/or printing. Within the metadata is a “Rights” heading. Each contains a link to library policy and rights holders however, clicking the link strangely uses the link as a search term. Obviously, the search result brings back zero hits. I tried to copy and paste the link in a new tab but that only resulted in a broken link with an Error 404 display, how embarrassing (See Figure 6). This goes against suggested best practices as Bodnar et al. state “The legal aspect of creating digital collections should also be clear. The collection developments are highly dependent on copyright and its legal issues. The libraries will face difficulties providing quality service, because a considerable part of the digitization requests from the users are for copyrighted materials” (28).
References


Appendix

Figure 1

Figure 2
Figure 3

Object Description

Based on 0 rating(s)

Title of piece: Powers' Theatre, Rip Van Winkle (October 6, 1902)

Type of performance: Rip Van Winkle

Theater: Powers' Theatre

Theater address: North side of Randolph between Clark and LaSalle Streets

Playwright: Boucicault, Dion, 1820-1890

Performers: Jefferson, Joseph, 1829-1905

John, Jack

Reynolds, John

Peppe, John

Others: Powers, Harry J., 1859-

Date of performance: 1902-10-06

Regarded as: Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation Division

Gift of: Plays--Illinois--Chicago

Figure 4

Remembering Harold Washington

Mayor Washington listening to Claude Pepper at a press conference

About this collection

Harold Washington was the first African American mayor of Chicago, serving from 1983 to 1987. This collection captures Mayor Washington at community, political, and charity events and demonstrates his importance in the history of Chicago.