

CREATING CITIZEN HISTORIANS

JOHN HERBERT AND KAREN ESTLUND

Historical newspaper research has become increasingly straightforward with digitization and has allowed historical research to be more accessible for the general public. The Utah Digital Newspapers program is a seminal project that has led the way for libraries and archives to digitize their historical newspapers. With over five million newspaper articles online, first-hand reports of historical events are at the fingertips of anybody with an Internet connection.

NEWSPAPERS ARE THE FIRST DRAFT OF HISTORY, primary sources of historical information used by scholarly and lay researchers alike. Researchers typically access historical newspapers in central locations like libraries, and they must be diligent enough to browse reels of microfilm or read aged originals. With time and effort, these methods can be effective, but they have never been efficient. They simply are too slow and tedious to create a broad audience for newspaper research.

The advent of digitized newspapers, available and *searchable* on the Internet, is fundamentally changing this paradigm. With a growing number of historic newspapers coming online, anyone with an Internet-connected PC can conduct thorough newspaper research. Consequently today, in the twenty-first century, newspaper digitization is exploding.

The J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah (U of U), partnering with Brigham Young University (BYU) and Utah State University (USU), runs a pioneering state-wide program that is changing the face of newspaper research. Since its inception in 2002, the Utah Digital Newspapers (UDN) program quickly became a model for other academic libraries across the country and federal agencies in Washington, D. C. We have been, and remain, on the leading edge for newspaper digitization, especially within the public sector.

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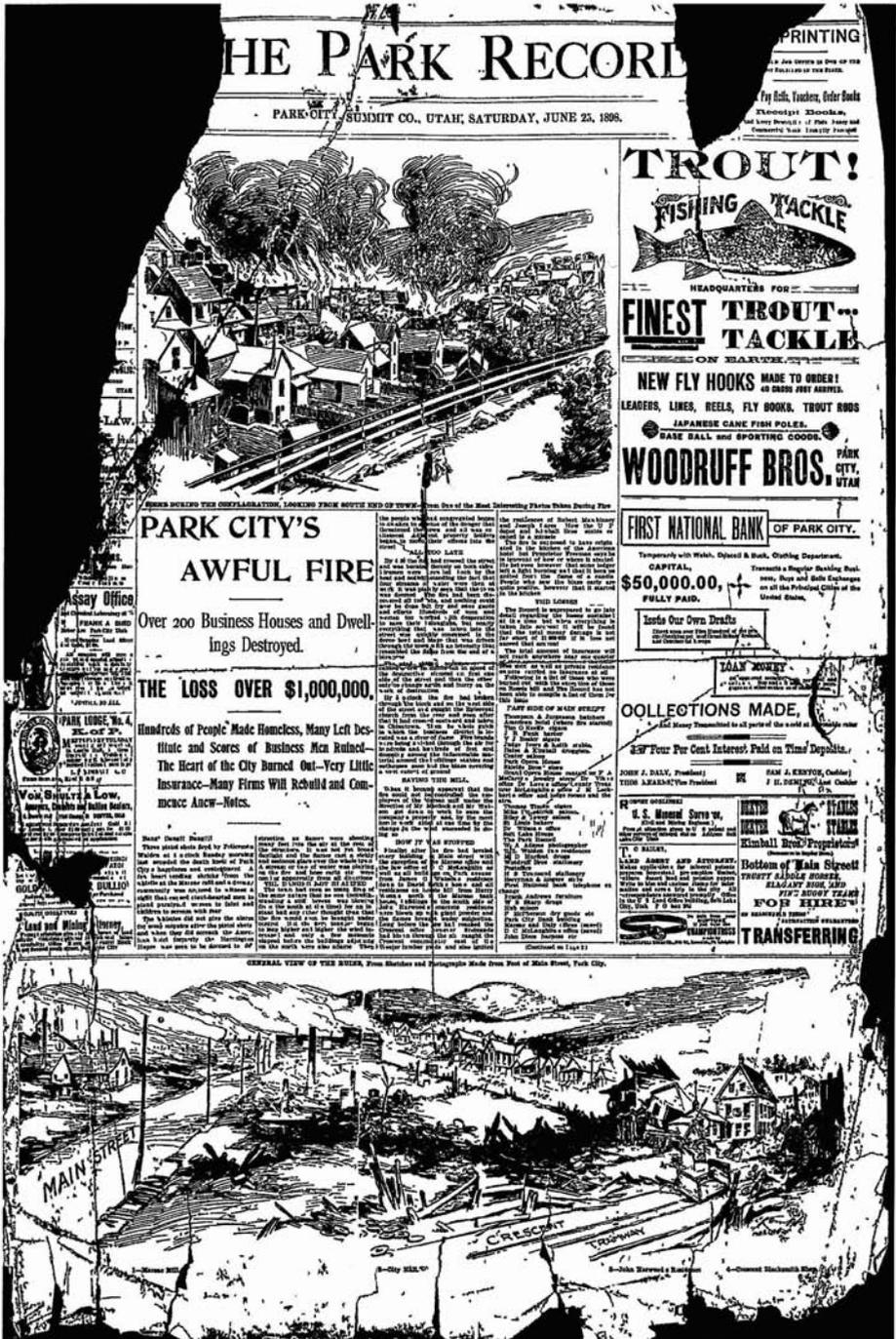


Figure 1. Park (Park City, UT) Record, describing "Park City's Awful Fire" on 25 June 1898. This article can be found in the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library's Utah Digital Newspapers Collection at http://udn.lib.utah.edu/u/park_39400.

Our program loads digital copies of historic Utah newspapers onto our Web site, making them available to the general public over the Internet. Anyone with an interest in history can search them by keyword or browse them by title and date, all from the comfort of their PC. UDN is easily accessible, easy to use, and is beginning to make reading newspaper microfilm obsolete. You can find our Web site at <http://digitalnewspapers.org>, or you can search Google or Yahoo for "digital newspapers." We should be the first hit.

In 2001, the Marriott Library received a \$93,000 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant to digitize thirty years of three weekly Utah newspapers. In December 2002, we launched the UDN Web site with ten thousand pages each from the *Wasatch Wave* (Heber City), the *Times Independent* (Moab), and the *Vernal Express*. This was our very humble beginning.

In 2003, the library received a second LSTA grant of \$278,000 to continue digitizing newspapers. The library hired a project director and added 106,000 pages. Later in 2003, in a watershed event, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) awarded the library a two-year, \$1 million grant. With this grant we demonstrated that newspapers could be digitized and served over the Web to a wide audience on a large scale. We added more than 268,000 pages, distributed content to BYU and USU, and expanded coverage of Utah to include 27 of the 29 counties.

In 2004, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), in conjunction with the Library of Congress, announced a national program to build a digital repository of historical newspapers, called the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP). In 2005, the Marriott Library, along with five other institutions across the country, received a two-year grant for NDNP Phase 1. With that grant we added 105,000 pages from 1900–1910. More recently, in 2007, the library received another two-year NDNP grant for Phase 2, through which we will process another 100,000 pages.

Along the way, several Utah public libraries, assisted by UDN, donated funds and/or obtained other LSTA grants to digitize their local newspapers. Just to name a few: in 2003 the Weber County Library provided \$50,000 to digitize the *Ogden Standard* and its predecessors; between 2004 and 2006, the Park City Library and Historical Society raised \$15,000 for the *Park Record*; and in 2007, Myton City with the Duchesne County Library raised \$20,500 to digitize nine titles from Duchesne County. The Davis County Library established a relationship with the *Davis County Clipper* to fund the *Clipper's* inclusion in UDN and continues to fund its digitization, narrowing the gap to the present day issues. In total, we have raised \$2.5 million over the past five years. We have been and will remain an entirely soft-money program.

In the early days, we were among a small group of states actively building digital newspaper collections. Our friends at the University of Denver were experimenting via the Colorado Digitization Project (CDP), and the University of Florida was active as well.¹ At the same time we received our National Leadership Grant (NLG) from

¹ The Colorado Digitization Project has evolved into the Collaborative Digitization Program, which, not coincidentally, has the same CDP acronym.

IMLS, the CDP and the University of Richmond received similar National Leadership Grants from IMLS to launch/expand their collections.

Dissemination of our model was an important component of our IMLS grant. Accordingly, we presented our model to many groups across the country and encouraged them to initiate their own projects. Among the places we presented were the American Library Association conference in San Diego; the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago; the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administration, the Society of American Archivists, and the Council of State Archivists joint conference in Washington, DC; IMLS's WebWise conference in Los Angeles; digital newspaper forums in Denver, Colorado, and Portland, Oregon; statewide digital "summits" in Pierre, South Dakota, and Boise, Idaho; and numerous locations across Utah. We presented twice to the NEH and Library of Congress in Washington, D. C., demonstrating that large digital newspaper collections could be successful. Within six months of our second presentation, NEH announced the NDNP program. Today we are the only program to receive both an IMLS and NEH grant for newspaper digitization.

UDN has also emphasized training as an important part of our program. In July 2005, we hosted a three-day training program on how to launch a digital newspapers project. Twenty-three people attended from twelve different states and Trinidad and Tobago. Two future NDNP participants, the University of Kentucky and the University of California, were also in attendance.

We have won several awards as well, including an Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History and the John E. Jones Award from the Utah Press Association.

In May 2006, we were invited to host the annual conference of the Newspapers Section of the International Federation of Library Associations, as well as the annual meeting of the NDNP by the Library of Congress and NEH, respectively. We had a full week of intensive newspaper sessions at the University of Utah. One hundred people from ten countries attended the International Federation of Library Associations Conference, where noted speakers presented the latest ideas and developments. UDN was among the national and international programs that were featured.

At this writing (late 2007), UDN houses 570,000 newspaper pages, containing over five million articles. It holds fifty titles, including the first issues of the (*Salt Lake City*) *Deseret News* (1850) and the *Salt Lake Tribune* (1871), which today are the two leading newspapers in the state. The time period covered in the various papers is 1850–1969. We remain very active, with plans to expand the collection by 40 percent to more than 800,000 pages by the end of 2008.

Web site usage increased fourteen-fold from 60 visits per day in 2003 to 830 in 2006, when the program grew for eleven consecutive calendar quarters. It is amazingly popular with those who use it; 88 percent of readers rate us as "good" or "excellent."

Included in the collection you can find the (*Salt Lake City*) *Broad Ax*, an African American newspaper run by Julius Taylor around the turn of the twentieth century.

