

Editing Historical Documents

Their Place in Public History

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Using documents personalizes history

- Diaries
- Letters
- Family photos & newsletters

Using documents draws visitors into the action

- Expedition reports
- Maps
- Drawings
- Transcripts

First a little history

- First major collecting and editing projects in the US start with the Mass. H.S. and
- J Franklin Jameson
- Documents of the founding fathers and thinkers
- The Federal Government & Congress also collect historical records

Next came Statesmen's Papers

- Including Thomas Jefferson
- Benjamin Rush

Women, Ethnic Groups and others

- The documents of organizations, religious movements, and more have been collected and edited since the mid 1960s

Scholarship & Editing Schools

- Historians
 - Butterfield
 - Boyd
- Literature - Bibliography
 - Sir W W Greg
 - G Thomas Tanselle
- Now the field is really interdisciplinary

There are two types of editing

- Literary
- Historical

Literary Editing

- Transcribes & edits text
 - Interpreting / extrapolating the intent of the author
- Translates unknown words and terms
- Discusses the author's intent
- Presents the various versions throughout time

Here are a variety of types of editing projects literary scholars have embarked on over the past 50 years.

Take a look at Piers Plowman

- <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/seenet/piers/>
- <http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/20th/etudes/brittain/html/firstpag.html>
- These are examples of digital editing projects with hypertext links to annotations, glossaries and the original manuscript

Printed Editions

- **Facsimile edition:** *Piers Plowman: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 104*. Introduction by Derek Pearsall. D.S. Brewer Publisher
- **Plain Text with notes in volume 2:** Skeat, Rev. Walter W. *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman in three parallel texts...* Oxford UP
- **With Textual footnotes** Kane, George. *Piers Plowman: The A Version – Will's Visions of Piers Plowman and Do-Well*. University of London The Athlone Press, 1960
- **With Annotations** Pearsall, Derek *Piers Plowman by William Langland (C-text)*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1979
- **With annotation, textual notes & glossary** Schmidt, A.V.C. *William Langland The Vision of Piers Plowman*. NY: E.P. Dutton & Co

The second type of editing involves historical documents

- These are often used to decorate and elucidate exhibits in museums and historical societies
- You will definitely find displays of historical documents in libraries and archives.
- Display facsimiles of your historical documents whenever possible

Historical Editing

- Transcribes the text with minimal editing
- Sets the subject of the text in time and place through annotations & footnotes/endnotes

Let's look at an example of what the National Archives is doing

- They are mounting actual documents in a variety of resolutions and degrees of legibility for researchers, teachers and students to use. What are benefits of providing historical documents this way?

National Archives

- Teaching with Historical / Primary Documents

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons>

- Legislative Materials

<http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/>

- In both cases they provide original documents and images for both editing and enhancing exhibits of history.

Teaching with Primary Resources

- The Library of Congress American Memory Project also has lessons designed to teach students how to use primary resources. They are great documents to practice editing and see examples of digital projects
- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/index.html>

In summary

- Historical Editing Projects
 - take time
 - Immerse the researcher in the world of their subject
 - Require precision and dedication
- For a successful project you need to follow the steps listed below

Preparing for Editing Documents

- Reading the materials
- Reading background materials / research
- Justifying your project
- Collecting the materials & determining the 'best copy'
- Transcribing & editing
- Annotating the text depending upon your textual tradition and your audience

Editing the printed text

- Carefully comparing the printed / typeset text w/ the manuscript
- Creating Index, Cross References
- Access points
- Introductions to the project, the subject and the various chapters
- Captions for illustrative materials
- Bibliography & notes

Research

- Transcription
- Background information
- Other primary and secondary sources
- Prints, Illustrations, Maps