

# **Digital Library Review 01**

*The Making of America*

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**Spring 2011**

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ILS655 Digital Library Project Review Paper 01

2/2/11

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to review the *Making of America* digital library from the University of Michigan. The goal is to define: the project's background, the organization of resources, its service features, the technologies that helped create the library and then add my own comments.

## **Project Background**

The University of Michigan's [Making of America](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/) (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/>) began in 1995 as a collaborative effort with Cornell University. The purpose of the digital library is to preserve publications that are old and fragile while providing a searchable library of primary sources from the antebellum period through to the Reconstruction Era (1850-1877) of the United States. The project's goal and mission is to, "involve research institutions and national consortia to develop common protocols and consensus for the selection, conversion, storage, retrieval, and use of digitized materials on a large, distributed scale" (Making of America, 2007). The project has been touted as a huge success.

The project was funded in the beginning by a grant from the [Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#). In 1998, the foundation gave \$430,000 to the University of Michigan towards the, "costs of *Making of America IV*, a project that will digitize 19th century books, conduct a study of costs of digitization and use of electronic monographs, and prepare a handbook for use by

other digitization projects” (Andrew Mellon Foundation, 1998). The Foundation has and still is a major benefactor to higher education.

The project was implemented in phases. The first phase began with the University of Michigan (U of M) and Cornell University working together to select materials to be digitized. At the time, there were approximately 1.5 million images scanned. Preservation of old, fragile items was not the only reason for the project but also because scholarly interest in the era was high. According to Maria Bonn, an Interface Specialist at U of M, “User reception of the searchable pages available at the site has been overwhelmingly positive: materials previously unused and in storage are now being searched as many as 120,000 times a month” (Bonn, 2009). Additionally, anything that had been published throughout this time frame is no longer covered under copyright protection.

The second phase started in 1999 and it was the actual implementation into a searchable online library. The U of M spent over a year and half creating guidelines and benchmarks for this endeavor. U of M’s Digital Library Production Service (DLPS) is responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the digital library.

The Library of Congress is using the contents from the MOA project to supplement its digital library. The LOC’s *American Memory* collection *The Nineteenth Century in Print: the Making of America in Books and Periodicals* has enabled the, “cross-collection searching that will provide users integrated access to MOA materials at both institutions” (Making of America, 2007). Because the LOC is a high profile reference, the MOA is sure to only gain more exposure through the LOC end-users.

## **Organization of Resources**

The collaborative collection of the MOA's digital library contains both scanned monographs and journal articles. Currently there are 3,535,566 of scanned pages and 10,281 volumes from main subject headings are of American History, education, psychology, religion, sociology, education, science and technology.

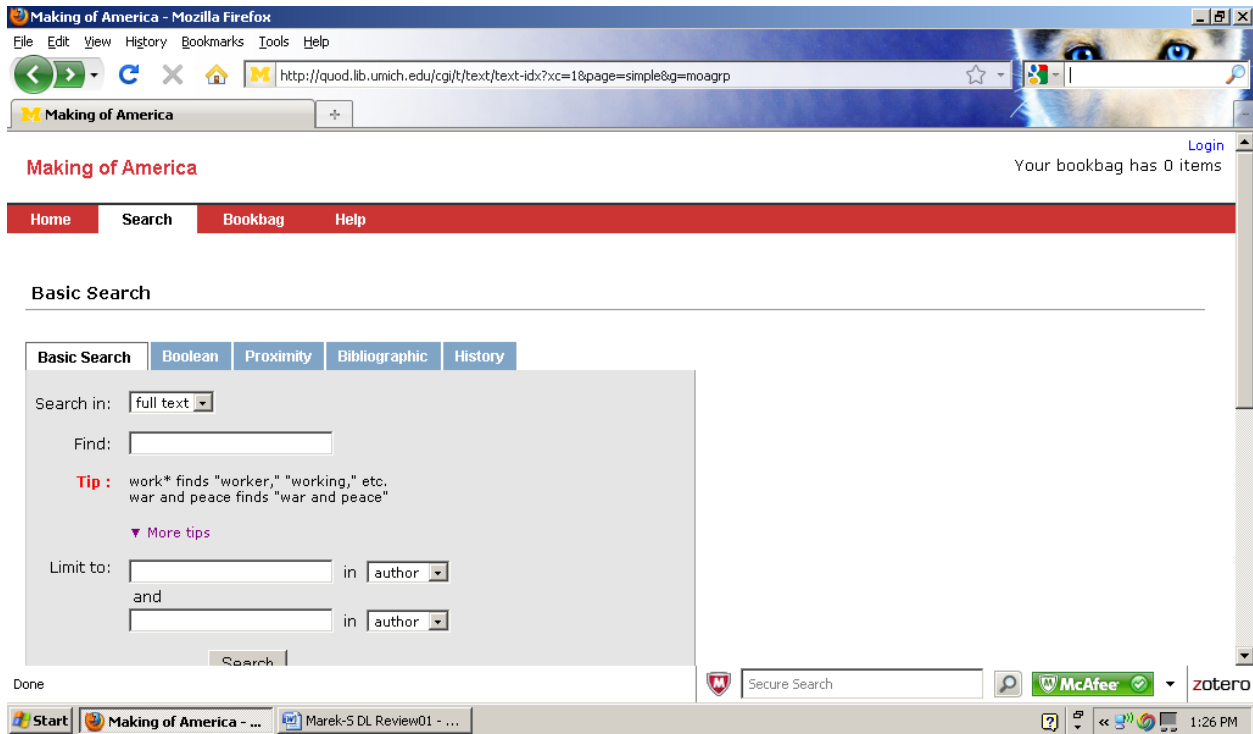
“The system architecture of MoA has three guiding principles. First, we are intent on developing a system that can accommodate further treatment of the materials (such as full encoding) and better access processes, as they become available. Second, there is a strong commitment to a system that can scale as we include more materials. We hope to add thousands of volumes to the system in the next few years and the access and delivery mechanisms must be able to grow with the content. Finally, we are committed to a high degree of usability. We facilitate behavior that is consistent with the existing use of paper journals and monographs, aiming to make the digital copies an acceptable surrogate for the print counterpart” (Bonn, 2009).

The organization of resources came from the University of Michigan's contribution of 1,500 books and 50,000 journal articles during the first phase. Librarians were charged with locating the materials to be scanned. Cornell University actually has its own digital library of the contents that were contributed to the project. Their collection contains 267 books and over 100,000 journal articles (Cornell University Library Making of America Collection, 2010). Cornell's MOA webpage can be accessed via <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/m/moa>.

## **Service Features**

The MOA is easily searchable. A person can search the site by keyword, subject, title, author, citation, proximity and use Boolean strings. There are limiter options that help retrieve target searches. Once results are found, there are features that let a person further refine the search, view the details of the result, and view the first page of a particular result. The MOA

offers its visitors the option to create a personal account and then a person can add items of interest to their ‘bookbag’ to review later. This is a valuable feature to those who are doing a lot of research.



As shown by the above image, the interface is easy to manage. This enables any user, no matter their level of technical expertise, to use the site. Bonn says that, “Like a physical academic library, we have had to work on maintaining a sense of balance: between dedication to defined primary users (e.g. "research faculty") with serving the general public (e.g. "citizens of the state of Michigan") and between anticipating user needs and avoiding limiting the possibilities for use of the material” (2009). This quality adds to the success of this project.

## Technologies

The MOA's website is powered by the [University of Michigan's Digital Library eXtension Service](#) (DLXS). DLXS provides the framework and tools for developing the digital library. Some of the tools include, "a powerful search engine and an array of class-based middleware" and they are open access tools (Digital Library eXtension Service, 2006).

The U of M Digital Library Production Service (DLPS) implemented the MOA project while the actual conversion of most materials is outsourced through [Northern Micrographics, Inc.](#) . The images are scanned at, "600 dpi in TIFF image format and compressed using CCITT Group 4" standards (Making of America, 2007). The U of M itself has scanned around 685,000 pages using, "both optical character recognition of the page images, and SGML-encoding of the ensuing textual information" (2007). Librarians at both U of M and Cornell provided low-level indexing and reference tagging after the scanning was done. Also, after each scanned page was returned to U of M, their Preservation Department examined them for clarity and proper skew. Clarity of scanned images is very important. End-users will not want to view images that are blurry or are cut off because of skew.

"Cornell has recently made a decision to adopt the U of M access model and has contracted with DLPS for the OCR of their page images and for implementation of an access system" (Bonn, 2009). "This new software allows [Cornell] to re-index without taking the entire *Making of America* offline, and gives [Cornell] additional functionality as well. The look and feel were updated to meet current usability guidelines within the parameters of the new DLXS software" (Cornell University Library Making of America Collection, 2010). Collaboration between the two institutions can continue to expand now that they are in line with the same technologies.

**Comments**

In my opinion I agree with the assessments made by Maria Bonn that the MOA is a successful digital library. This digital library offers a wealth of primary sources from a targeted era that can aid in researcher's work or simply for the casual browser. My experience from working in an academic library has shown that digital libraries such as this are so helpful to students, especially History majors who specifically need primary resources. These resources are otherwise hard to locate. The collaboration with Cornell University and the Library of Congress expands the use of these precious resources.

The technology that is used is easy to maintain and guarantees that this library can continue to grow for the future. The University of Michigan has a dedicated staff to this and other digital library projects. I believe that this is an important concept to point out because the books and periodicals from this era will not be around forever. There is always the risk of losing these items so digital preservation is a perfect solution.

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