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Digital Footprints: Freedom on the Move at the University of Kentucky

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During the late 18th through the mid-19th centuries, the Commonwealth of Kentucky saw significant movement of self-emancipated people seeking freedom from bondage. Often referred to as "runaways" or "fugitive slaves," in historical texts, self-emancipated people defined freedom in many ways. These migrations were widely documented in newspaper advertisements known as fugitive slave advertisements and runaway ads in local newspapers published throughout the state. Access to these materials (often buried in databases or on microform) has been problematic at best. Enter the Self Emancipated and Enslaved People in Kentucky (SEEK) Project, a partnership between faculty in the University of Kentucky Libraries (UKL) and the Central Kentucky Slavery Initiative (CKSI), housed in the Commonwealth Institute for Black Studies (CIBS), combining subject expertise and the Libraries' deep archive of historical Kentucky newspapers to finally bring these ads to light for research and instruction. Building on collaborations with the National Digital Newspaper Project (NDNP) at the Library of Congress and the national Freedom on the Move (FOTM) project based at Cornell University, over the past two years the SEEK team has developed a student-focused evaluation and clipping workflow that has resulted in

hundreds of ads seeking self-emancipated people, often called runaway ads, published in Kentucky newspapers being made available for analysis and research.

This paper offers an overview of Kentucky's role in the migrations of self-emancipated people and its documentation in newspapers of the day; archival concerns with digitized and microfilmed historical newspaper collections; best practices for involving undergraduate and graduate students in project development, including metadata organization and a web-based workflow process; and the development of pedagogical opportunities for students and researchers to learn more about this topic and to contribute.

Keywords: Newspapers, Digital Humanities, Slavery, African American, Kentucky.

Introduction: Why Kentucky?

The University of Kentucky Libraries served as the institution of record for the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) and is now home to the Kentucky Digital Newspaper Project (KDNP). Through these programs, UK Libraries (UKL) is able to make thousands of pages from historic newspapers available to researchers around the world, and thus plays a key role in the Self Emancipated and Enslaved People in Kentucky (SEEK) Project, a partnership between University of Kentucky faculty with the Libraries and the Central Kentucky Slavery Initiative (CKSI), housed in the Commonwealth Institute for Black Studies (CIBS).

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Dr. Vanessa Holden serves as the director of the CKSI, whose mission is to develop and support research that expands our understanding of slavery and enslaved people's lives in the Bluegrass region. She is also a lead faculty member for the Freedom on the Move Project (FOTM), a digital humanities project that began in 2014 and is currently housed at Cornell University. FOTM aims to collect and transcribe every extant advertisement for a self-emancipated person in US historical newspapers. However, to date FOTM does not include a single advertisement from a Kentucky historical newspaper.

Beginning in the fall term of 2022, UKL and CKSI partnered to address the need for expanded access to the advertisements in Kentucky's Historical Newspapers. Drawing on subject expertise and UK Libraries' deep archive of historical Kentucky newspapers, the SEEK team has developed a student-focused evaluation and clipping workflow that has resulted in the collection of hundreds of escaped slave ads published in Kentucky newspapers. For the past year, we have successfully developed an enhanced workflow process using the workflow management tool Notion, which allows undergraduate student employees to efficiently identify and contribute clipped advertisements. These ads provide a wealth of information on a segment of life for Africans enslaved in Kentucky or escaping through Kentucky. The first cohort of UK student employees located and clipped 700 ads found in nearly 6,000 newspaper pages spanning over 1,400 newspaper issues; the abundance of information in these ads is not available in other sources.

Kentucky played a significant role in the early history of the United States and the history of American slavery. The Commonwealth of Kentucky sits below the Ohio River and west of the

Appalachian Mountains. Before the arrival of European colonists from Spain, France, and eventually England, Indigenous peoples lived in the region we now know as Kentucky for thousands of years. After the American Revolutionary War, white American settlers took advantage of changing colonial dynamics west of the Appalachian Mountains that reduced violent resistance from Native peoples in the region and began to flood into the Ohio River Valley intent on occupying Native lands and expanding the reach and control of the United States. In the 18th century, Kentucky, then a county of Virginia, was considered the West by Euro-American colonists. There was some resistance to legalizing slavery in Kentucky from Euro-American settlers both on religious grounds and sincerely held Revolutionary ideals. When Kentucky became the first US state West of the Appalachians in 1792, though slavery remained legal, the Commonwealth was still a site of contention between the interests of wealthy planters who relied on enslaved people's labor and poor to middling subsistence farmers. By the turn of the 19th century, it was clear that the planters and enslavers won. What began as a trickle at the end of the US Revolutionary War would become a flood of Euro-American migrants and Afro-American enslaved laborers.

In the early 19th century, Kentucky's access to the Ohio River facilitated its rise as a major site of commerce in the Upper South. While wealthy European settlers had hoped to establish sprawling plantations, a cash crop monoculture centered on tobacco, and social structures much like those found to the east in Virginia, this pathway to prosperity was available to very few. Most Euro-American Kentuckians could not afford to own the enslaved laborers, or the amount of land needed to make a large scale plantation profitable. Instead, they enslaved smaller numbers of African Americans who worked a diverse rotation of crops like hemp, corn, and other grains. Most Kentuckians assumed that land was wealth. But by the arrival of the steamboat in the 1810s, it was clear that enslaved people were not only valuable because they were laborers, but they were also valuable property who appreciated in value.

When the United States closed the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, many Euro-Americans of the Revolutionary generation hoped that the close of the trade would signal the gradual death of slavery as an institution. What their generation could not have predicted was that in 1793, the year just after Kentucky statehood, a tutor for a wealthy family in South Carolina would invent a cotton gin that could process upland short staple cotton. They also could not have known that the War of 1812 would significantly change Euro-American access to some of the best cotton land in North America in the Mississippi Territory. Rather than squash slavery, the close of the Atlantic Trade forced slave traders to adapt and orchestrate a vast internal slave trade. After the War of 1812, they used lessons learned at the close of the Atlantic Trade to begin rapidly moving enslaved people from the Upper South into the Cotton South generating previously unimaginable profits.

Planters in Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana looked to the upper South for a ready supply of enslaved men, women, and children. Given its location, Kentucky was an ideal crossroads between Northern free states and Southern slave states. By the early 19th century a bustling trade in enslaved people developed where slave trading firms purchased and then forcibly moved enslaved Kentuckians to the Deep South. The domestic slave trade was indeed an economic boon for Kentucky; over time, enslaved people became more valuable on the slave market than the land in Kentucky that they worked.

The movement of enslaved people in Kentucky went both ways. The state was a hotbed of resistance to slavery; its geographic location, its proximity to important Southern waterways, and its relatively high number of abolitionists when compared to other slave states facilitated the escape of thousands of enslaved people from bondage. Enslaved people self-emancipated by fleeing north over the Ohio River and into states where slavery was illegal and, after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, all the way to Canada. Kentucky was also a place that enslaved people sold further south attempted to return seeking family. Kentucky was not only a site of flight and resistance for enslaved Kentuckians. Enslaved people from other southern states often moved through Kentucky on their way north.

One of the best resources for examining this type of resistance to slavery lies in Kentucky's historical newspapers where enslavers placed thousands of advertisements seeking the return of their human property. These advertisements appeared in Kentucky's historical newspapers before Kentucky statehood and persisted into the Civil War Era of the 1860s. Enslaved people were not just laborers. Enslavers used them as collateral for debts. They relied upon enslaved women's reproductive labor to profit from their "natural increase": enslaved children who appreciated in value as they grew up. They leased enslaved people to others in a system called "hiring out" and benefited from the fees paid for their labor. They gave enslaved people to their children to help them start their lives as adults with a nest egg held in human property. When an enslaved person stole themselves and self-emancipated, enslavers were intent on getting them back. They provide thick descriptions of self-emancipated individuals, potential locations they may flee to, and lists of the goods they took with them. From the text of these ads, we glean a fraught but illuminating snapshot of a life, of a full person courageous enough to attempt escape. Kentucky's Historical Newspapers are a significant repository of these important historical sources.

Kentucky's Newspapers & Libraries' Role in Providing Access to Newspaper Content

The *Kentucke Gazette* was meant to spread support for statehood when Kentucky was still a far-western Virginia county. The American frontier was expanding, and the convention of Western leaders charged John Bradford with starting a newspaper to turn up the heat for secession among the frontiersmen. With no printing experience, Bradford bought a press and supplies in Philadelphia, floated them down the Ohio River to Limestone (Maysville), and then transported them on horseback to Lexington. Bradford's *Kentucke Gazette* became the first newspaper west of the Allegheny Mountains. It was August 1787.

Kentucky celebrated statehood on June 1, 1792. The following year, the *Gazette* had its first competitor, and by 1800, every town in Kentucky had a newspaper, and growth continued for sixty years. These early newspapers often lacked national and international news because communications were sparse. Even local news was too mundane to print for the small populations. Instead, the pages were filled with advertisements, anecdotes, and editorials that reveal nearly every facet of early Kentucky life in unique detail like no other primary resource. Many newspapers became "political weather vanes," and their proliferation increased as Kentucky's political power on the national stage grew until the American Civil War decimated The Commonwealth's political power, economy, and press, much of which did not survive. A

handful of larger newspapers consolidated during Reconstruction and created news giants like Louisville's *Courier-Journal* (1869) which many historians today consider Kentucky's newspaper of record.

Thousands of Kentucky newspapers were printed between the *Kentucke Gazette* and the *Courier-Journal*, and those historic pages offer a glimpse into an unrecognizable yet frighteningly unchanged state. Kentucky was a highly conflicted state of haves and have-nots, landed gentry and mountaineers, enslaved and enslaver, devoutly religious, politically charged, and often violent. No one understood the value of newspapers in Kentucky's history or their role in American history more than Kentucky Historian Laureate Dr. Thomas D. Clark, Jr. In the 1940s, along with the UK Libraries' director Lawrence Thompson, Clark shepherded Kentucky's earliest efforts in preserving its invaluable newspapers. The pair traveled around Kentucky with a portable microfilm camera, an archaic machine with a single light on each side, all folded into a suitcase. The images were rough by any standard, but this microfilm became the seed of the University of Kentucky Libraries' (UKL) collection of newspapers on microfilm. By the 1950s, Clark and Thompson had established a modern, multi-camera microfilming operation at the University of Kentucky. Microfilming standards improved.

In 1980, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) launched the United States Newspaper Project (USNP) and what was to become the precursor to the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP). The UKL was fortunate to be an initial awardee in both programs. USNP sought to catalog and microfilm as many state newspapers as could be found during the twenty-year program, and each state awardee worked with publishers, local libraries, historical societies, and individuals to catalog and preserve on microfilm their newspapers. When the USNP ended in 2000, the UKL continued microfilming most of Kentucky's contemporary newspapers as before.

The near-30,000 reels of microfilm produced at UKL played a key role when technology made newspaper digitization possible in 2005, and the UKL became one of six NDNP inaugural awardee institutions. The UKL team proposed the ambitious albeit insane idea of doing all the work in-house, a unique approach at the time. This allowed the UK NDNP team to perform newspaper digitization from start to finish, an experience that ultimately resulted in the creation of *meta | morphosis: microfilm-to-digital institute*. This on-campus two-day hands-on workshop instructed others in everything from microfilm inspection to NDNP batch validation. In 2012, the program transitioned to self-paced online video tutorials that are still heavily used today.

Simultaneous with the NDNP newspaper digitization, UKL built its own Kentucky Digital Newspaper Program (KDNP) to make accessible newspapers that, for one reason or another, did not meet NDNP criteria. UKL also began efforts to harvest born digital print-ready PDFs from Kentucky publishers and partnered with others around the state to digitize their newspaper source documents, such as the Lexington Public Library's earliest issues of the *Kentucke Gazette*. Between 2005 and 2013, the UKL digitized over 700,000 newspaper issues for NDNP and KDNP, and the early 19th-century newspapers digitized during this era became particularly valuable to the SEEK project.

In 2015, soon after the end of UKL's fourth NDNP award (2013), there was a change in library administration, and after nearly 70 years, the newspaper preservation microfilm operation closed permanently. Even the born-digital print-ready PDF harvesting efforts folded as the staff were redirected elsewhere. Despite the closure, researchers' need for newspapers grew as digitization

of other historical materials made their way online. UKL continued to scan on-demand newspapers from microfilm for researchers, adding an estimated 700,000 additional pages to the digitized newspaper cache (this scan-on-demand data was not accessible online).

It wasn't until 2023 and another change in administration that UKL reemerged in the NDNP with its fifth award. Simultaneously, UKL reached an agreement with Newspapers.com to digitize all newspaper holdings on microfilm. Both of these developments coincided with the SEEK project. Suddenly, after a decade-long hiatus, UKL was once more fully engaged in newspaper digitization, and most significantly, UKL faculty were in dialogue with experts outside the library and preservation fields to harness the intellectual power of millions of Kentucky newspaper pages.

The years of UKL efforts in providing free online access to Kentucky's historical newspapers at the University of Kentucky have widely opened the door to discovering a much deeper history of the people of Kentucky. It has all been part of directing and educating patrons about newspapers as a primary historical resource. This includes updating the adage that newspapers are much more than a first draft when it comes to African American history, newspapers are often the only draft. The newspapers provide a bridge to missing pieces surrounding the early lives of African Americans in Kentucky in the form of names, personal letters, slave sales, escape slave ads, biographies of enslaved persons, power of attorney papers, emancipation notices, and other documents that may be published in the newspapers verbatim.

Ads seeking self-emancipated people are more than a brief mention of an attempt at self-emancipation because it was just as likely the escaping person was seeking to be with family members in the next county, desperately trying to maintain family connections while legally being chattel property. The ads widen the framing of freedom in defiance of the times' psychological, economic, and social expectations. These accumulating knowledge packets continue to help more accurately present the narrative of slavery and freedom in Kentucky.

Archival Concerns with Digitized and Microfilmed Historical Newspaper Collections

The ultimate SEEK project goal is to identify, clip, and make accessible ads seeking self-emancipated people from every relevant historic Kentucky newspaper. Newspapers played an important structural role in reinforcing slavery's legitimacy and bolstering enslavers' prerogative to hold human property from the earliest days of Euro-American settlement through slavery's end. Beginning with the *Kentucke Gazette* and looking at titles up through the end of the American Civil War and the ratification of the 13th Amendment, it is hard to overstate how ubiquitous slavery is in these important historical sources.

Advertisements seeking self-emancipated people asked *all* white readers regardless of status to police the movement of African Americans. Ads invited anyone who read them to scrutinize the appearance of the African Americans they encountered each day to assess if they fit the description of a "fugitive" an enslaver described. They reinforced racist associations between African Americans and criminality. Ads also promised monetary rewards to those who aided enslavers and upheld their property rights. Any white Kentuckian could benefit from

participating in the slave system even without enslaving a single person themselves. Ads placed by jailors, demonstrated in issue after issue that the law was firmly on the side of enslavers.

Contributing to the process of re-enslaving self-emancipated people was not the only way that historical newspapers supported the system of slavery. Newspapers also printed ads for "slave goods," a term that included everything from clothing to food stuffs that were considered suitable for enslavers to use to provision enslaved people. Ads for local slave auctions and for slave traders looking to put together coffles to sell further south were also a stream of ad revenue. Like the ads this project clips, ads for auctions and slave traders employed language that likened African Americans to animals and reduced them to their laboring capacity. Individual enslavers seeking to purchase enslaved people with specific skills also placed advertisements. Much of the business of slavery is right there, in newsprint, issue after issue in almost all of Kentucky's Historical Newspaper Titles printed before 1870.

Kentucky's history as a border state during the American Civil War (1861-1865) also impacted the content of Kentucky's Historical newspapers. Famously, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 began the long road to legal emancipation across the nation. Kentucky, a border state, did not secede from the United States. As such, the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to Kentucky and slavery remained legal in the Commonwealth throughout the American Civil War. Enslavers in Kentucky expected that their loyalty to the United States would spare them from losing their human property. African Americans disagreed. Kentucky is home to one of the most significant mustering locations of US Colored Troops, African American units in the US Army. These units inspired self-emancipated people, called contrabands by the US Army, to flee bondage and take up residency near where units were formed. While enslavers in Kentucky expected slavery to last forever, Black Kentuckians and self-emancipated people from other areas set about living freedom.

In January of 1865, the US Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery in the United States and sent it out to the states for ratification. Kentucky refused to ratify the amendment. It was not the only holdout. Three states rejected the 13th Amendment and did not ratify it until the 20th century: Delaware (February 12, 1901), Kentucky (March 18, 1976) and Mississippi (February 7, 2013). Still, in December 1865, when enough states ratified the amendment, emancipation became the law of the land and Kentucky and the other detractors had to acquiesce.

Enslavers, local officials, and those involved in the domestic slave trade relied on newspapers to do business and to enforce the laws that bolstered slavery. Advertisements for self-emancipated people were printed in newspapers at least through the end of the American Civil War era. We expect to see advertisements placed after the war's end. Keeping this in mind, the team aims to find every ad in Kentucky's newspapers seeking a self-emancipated person, from the very first advertisement to the last.

The first foray of ad discovery was treated as a pilot project within the larger SEEK undertaking. With over one million digitized newspaper pages, the team concentrated on only the digital data, abstaining from microfilm or source documents. This concentrated workflow and tool development on one format rather than three. The team then selected titles published online in the KDNP with content in the date range of 1787 through 1866. This nimble data set included the *Kentucke Gazette*, which included the first published fugitive slave ad in the state on March 15, 1788: "Isaac - Three Dollars Reward. March 15, 1788"[2]

In all, sixty-seven (67) digitized KDNP newspaper titles fell within the date range and provided 15,128 issues or approximately 60,532 pages to work with. Some titles were very small - a single issue - but others were significantly larger, like the *Kentucke Gazette* and preceding titles of the *Courier-Journal*. Most of the newspapers were published in Central Kentucky, and since Lexington - the heart of Kentucky's Bluegrass region - was home to one of the largest slave markets in the South (it was the largest market in Kentucky to be sure), the team was comfortable with the geographic limit for the pilot project.

The team developed workflows and standards specific to the SEEK project. The national Freedom on the Move project has focused its efforts on developing a searchable database, a crowdsourcing platform for advertisement transcription, and educational projects for K-12 students. The initial collections of digitized ads included in the national project came from previously digitized collections of ads, published ad collections, and partnerships with other ad collecting projects. The SEEK team designed workflows and standards to maintain the consistency of the original high-quality image capture, archival file names and storage, and OCR transcription, metadata, and organization. This built-from-the-bottom-up concept is flexible and can withstand future platform migrations, personnel and programmatic changes, and future technical challenges. It is a technologically and philosophically robust system that the SEEK team hopes other institutions interested in doing similar work with their own state historical newspaper collections can easily replicate.

Two major areas of work were developed for SEEK. The first was for organizing the metadata and batch assignments (discussed in the next section), and the other, discussed here, is the technology for finding, clipping, storing, and preserving the advertisements.

The KDNP images are currently stored on the Internet Archive. This platform does not have clipping functionality, but it does allow the download of a multi-page TIFF-wrapped PDF with OCR text of an individual issue in its original DPI measurements (for Kentucky, that is a true DPI of 300 or 400). The PDF issues are then separated into individual page images, and from these, the clips are cropped and saved as JPEG images with unique filenames. Photoshop performed all the functionality needed - from multi-page PDF page image separation and retention of the original DPI and embedded OCR to saving a new OCR-embedded JPEG image file. No other application was found to do it all.

The original DPI and the embedded OCR of each newspaper page image are mission-critical for SEEK. Retaining the original DPI preserves the visual quality of the scan for enlargement and printing, and the OCR text can be harvested and used for discovery in a content management system. The OCR is often "dirty" (i.e., misspellings and special characters), but cleaning up the OCR is faster than transcribing the ad from scratch. Yes, it would be faster to take screenshots of advertisements, but computer screens are a standard 72 or 96 DPI (modern LCD screens are only marginally better at 120-140 DPI), and resizing up would produce a pixelated image. Plus, the OCR text cannot be captured in a screenshot. It would have to be generated by an external OCR program (an additional step with costs) or through manual transcription. The worst-case scenario would be to present ads with no text, thus preventing keyword searchability. Since the KDNP images were digitized at the highest true DPI possible and carry embedded OCR on download, it was only logical for SEEK to take advantage of these assets.

Enrolled students at the University of Kentucky are licensed to use the Adobe Creative Cloud Suite software, which provides free tools like Photoshop and Acrobat to find, clip, and save ads.

This license comes at no cost to SEEK. The newspapers were already digitized, which also did not bear a cost. Notion, the platform selected for the database that tracks the title and the issue metadata and batch assignments, is free with an educational account. Even the cost of image storage on the Internet Archive is without a fee. Student wages notwithstanding, the only money spent to make the SEEK project work thus far has been a small amount of Google Drive storage for easy access and sharing of the ad files, currently $20 per year.

Students place their clipped ads in a Google Drive directory assigned to them and await quality control (QC) review by the SEEK team. QC includes checking the image quality for uncropped text and appropriate DPI and that the image filenames match the corresponding metadata, which is also created by the students for each assigned issue, even if an issue has no ads. The data on Google Drive is periodically downloaded to a local hard drive as a backup, and the QC'd files are stored on a UKL server for preservation with the University's tape library system.

The filename of each clip is one of the most important elements of the SEEK project. Each filename corresponds to one line of metadata in the database. The file naming convention was adapted from the NDNP and the national Freedom on the Move (FOTM) project to create a unique identifier for each SEEK ad file. This unique identifier prevents duplication and overwriting of files and enables growth over time. It is formatted for automation processes but is also intelligible to humans. The database and file naming convention are discussed in-depth in the following section.

Self-Emancipated and Enslaved People in Kentucky (SEEK) Workflow

Locating, analyzing, and recording data for thousands of pages of newsprint is a daunting task, to say the least. A robust workflow requires that the project team records the newspaper title, city and state, year of publication, page number, number of ads on a page, the presence of duplicated ads across different issues, and so forth. To facilitate this complicated process, the SEEK workflow design is based on two main goals:

- Automatically constructing unique advertisement identifiers (filenames) based on NDNP and national FOTM bundling standards; and
- Developing a complete inventory of issue metadata for all newspaper issues published during the time period of interest to SEEK, including issues not containing slave advertisements.

The workflow is structured around three main databases (Newspaper, Clipping Assignments, and Metadata) built in the Notion knowledge management system (https://www.notion.so) although a similar implementation can be replicated in any spreadsheet or database program such as Microsoft Access, Excel, Google Sheets, etc.

The general steps in the workflow cycle, each of which will be discussed in turn, involve:

1. Compiling and maintaining a complete list of relevant newspapers;
2. Organizing newspaper issues into "batches" for assignment and quality control;
3. Assigning newspaper issues to students;
4. Harvesting ads from completed batches and conducting quality control; and

5. Bundling ads and submitting them to the local SEEK platform and FOTM national project for transcription and research.

Step One: Compiling and maintaining a complete list of relevant newspapers (Newspaper Database).

The project team identifies all newspaper titles of interest to the project (from the late 1700s to 1866) and assigns each newspaper a unique newspaper code. These codes are based on National Digital Newspaper Project (NDNP) conventions and are composed of three parts: a two-character US Postal Service State Code, a two-character city code, and a 3-character NDNP Newspaper Code. For instance, the SEEK code for the Louisville Daily Democrat (1843-1855) is **ky** + **lv** + **ldd**.

Assigning specific metadata to the newspapers themselves is crucial given the tendency of early American newspapers to change ownership, editorial focus, and titles frequently. The first newspaper published west of the Allegheny Mountains, Lexington's *Kentucky Gazette*, went through several iterations each requiring its own unique code due to title changes:

- Aug. 11, 1787 - Mar. 7, 1789: *Kentucke Gazette* - **KYLXKGG**
- Mar. 14, 1789 - Jan. 11, 1803: *Kentucky Gazette* - **KYLXKEG**
- Jan. 18, 1803 - Apr. 4, 1809: *Kentucky Gazette & General Advertiser* - **KYLXKEZ**
- Apr. 11, 1809 - 1848: *Kentucky Gazette* - **KYLXKEE**
- 1866 - 1907: *Kentucky Gazette* - **KYLXKTT**
- 1907 - 1910: *Kentucky Evening Gazette* - **KYLXKVG**

Other data recorded in the Newspaper Database include the Library of Congress Catalogue Number (LCCN), a link to the corresponding title's Library of Congress *Chronicling America* U.S. Newspaper Directory page, whether the title is available online or in microfilm only, a link to digitized pages in the Internet Archive, and other information.

Step Two: Organizing newspaper issues into "batches" for assignment and quality control (Clipping Assignments Database)

While organizing newspaper clippings by year and title is a straightforward approach, it does not address the problem of missing issues coming to light after a full year is already read and clippings made. In the interests of accommodating "orphan" issues and keeping the size of clipping assignments relatively consistent, SEEK uses a batch approach.

A "batch" is an internal structure for local team use only and allows for flexible metadata control. The batch number consists of the SEEK newspaper code and an arbitrary three-digit number (001-999). Any number of issues can be assigned to a batch. For instance, the *Kentucky Gazette* changed the spelling of the word "Kentucky" in March 1789. Rather than reading all the 1789 issues, clipping ads, and manually changing the NDNP code from March onwards, one batch contains the metadata for KGG and the second batch for KEG:

- kylx**kgg**001: Aug. 11, 1787 - Mar. 7, 1789
- kylx**keg001**: Mar. 14, 1789 – Dec. 26, 1789
- kylx**keg002**: 1790-1791

- etc.

If a stray issue appears after a particular year is completed, a new batch can be created to accommodate it. For instance, if missing issues of the 1788 *Gazette* are identified and digitized, they can be processed in a new batch *kylxkggXXX*. Batches can then be sorted by newspaper code and by date to group all instances of a particular title.

Further, some newspaper titles have hundreds of issues (the *Kentucky Gazette*, for example), while others only have a handful. Batching allows the project team to assign the same number of issues to student reads for ads to clip at one time.

The Clipping Assignments Database pulls some metadata directly from the Newspaper Database, for instance, the newspaper code, title, and link to the digitized paper. It also allows the project team to assign a specific student to the batch and track the current stage of the workflow.

Step Three: Assigning newspaper issues to students (Clipping Assignments and Metadata Database)

Project staff assign students one or more batches in the Clipping Assignments database and a corresponding record is then created in the Metadata Database. Fields such as newspaper title, assigned years, unique filename and paper code automatically populate from the Clipping Assignments database. Students access their assigned issues through a student portal, in which they see only their assigned issues.

- In the individual record, student clippers first modify the title to reflect the year and month of the issue (this makes issues easier to group later).
- They enter the month, day, page number, and the number of the ad on the page. As they enter this data, the unique filename builds automatically.
- There are also checkboxes for duplicate ads and returned notices (ads regarding enslaved people who have returned to their enslavers).
- Students clip advertisements using the standards mentioned earlier in this paper, and save the clips in a Google Folder using the unique filename created by the system.

Step Four: Harvesting ads from completed batches and conducting quality control (Metadata Database)

When a student reports that a batch is completed, project staff move all clips in the batch from the student's Google Drive SEEK Newspaper Clips folder to a Harvested Clips folder, which is accessible only to the project team. Numbers of records are matched to the number of clips, and unique filenames are compared against the records list to ensure accuracy. Each ad file is opened and checked to verify clip quality.

Step Five: Bundling ads and submitting them to the local SEEK platform and FOTM national project for transcription and research.

At this point, clipped ads are ready for bundling to be ingested into the local Kentucky SEEK platform (currently under development) and for eventual upload to the Freedom on the Move portal.

Best Practices for Involving Undergraduate and Graduate Students in Project Development, Including Metadata Organization and a Web-Based Workflow Process

From the beginning of the project, the faculty team focused on involving undergraduate and graduate students in a meaningful way that would not only further overall project goals, but more importantly, enhance student research and digital humanities skill development. Involving undergraduate students as student workers is not a new practice in a university setting. Students work at a variety of campus jobs at most institutions of higher learning in the United States. At the University of Kentucky, many of our undergraduate students come from socioeconomic backgrounds that necessitate employment at the university to make their education possible. We have a significant population of first generation students, students who are the first in their families to attend university. In the interest of equity and accessibility, our project employed undergraduate students at a rate of more than double the University and Federal minimum for student workers. First, our team believes it is unacceptable to have students work on a project without compensation, particularly given our focus on enslaved people in Kentucky. Second, offering good wages signals to students that we value them, their work, and sets the tone for a collaborative work environment. Hiring students was made possible by funding from the Commonwealth Institute for Black Studies (CIBS) and the Central Kentucky Slavery Initiative (CKSI).

We found student workers using the university's employment portal. Our first cohort of students, eight in total, interviewed with our faculty team. We experienced some attrition in that initial group and ended the first semester of the project with six active student workers. We then transitioned into a team of four students and finally, in fall 2023, our team became a team of two. We selected students who had experience with historical research, who had experience managing data, and who had specific subject area knowledge. Some were history majors or had experience working in the University of Kentucky Library (UKL) system. Others had experience with spreadsheets and data collection but came to us from majors outside of the humanities in fields like neuroscience. Some of our students had significant financial need and relied on campus employment opportunities to make the financial burden of a university education manageable. Others sought meaningful employment that would provide them with extra money and hands-on research and digital humanities experience. At least one student noted that she valued the study of enslaved Kentuckians, but due to the rigid nature of her program of study, could not fit African American history courses into her class schedule. She expressed that her work on the project was her way of contributing to our knowledge of Black Kentuckians' history and a way for her to use her data management skills at the same time. Offering a competitive wage allowed us to attract students who wanted more than a campus job and who wanted to lend their skills to a project they valued and could be proud of.

Our team's goal was to include students in our project and not simply employ them. Our first cohort knew from our initial training that they were expected to collect data and metadata from historical newspapers. We set the tone for critical engagement with historical newspapers by providing them training sessions to help students acquire background historical knowledge of the time period and the content of runaway advertisements. The history of American slavery is very violent. Enslavers physically, mentally, and sexually abused enslaved people and were not shy

about openly acknowledging their violent actions. Historical newspapers hold a public record of this violent reality. The archive has an effect. The emotional toll of reading story after story, advertisement after advertisement, and notice of sale after notice of sale that mark the abuse, family separation, and dehumanization of enslaved people in historical newspapers is emotionally taxing. Providing both contextual knowledge to students and opening up a dialog about the emotional effects of engaging with historical documents allowed students to reflect on their experiences openly with the faculty team. This also allowed the faculty team to open up a conversation with student workers about critically assessing how to best prepare future teams to work with these historical documents.

We invited undergraduate workers to consider a meta-project of teaching other teams how to collect data and metadata. We asked them to critically evaluate our workflow and held check-ins to ask them about their experiences with data collection and metadata extraction. We asked them to evaluate the Notion platform. They would then see the result of their critique in the changes we made to our workflow. Treating undergraduate students as research partners and not simply workers opens up meaningful opportunities for mentoring, collaboration, and the development of new research questions.

Pedagogical Strategies for Working with Students and Other Researchers

Supervising both a project *and* a meta-project required careful and intentional planning on the part of the faculty team. Our goal was for students to experience a well compensated employment opportunity that maintained a seamless balance between a data collection workflow and regular check-ins with the faculty team who approached them as research partners. But for students to have that experience on the front end of the project, the faculty team had to carefully manage workflow design with both data management *and* pedagogy in mind.

In addition to offering contextual knowledge and focused discussions on the content of the historical documents students would process for us, the faculty team had to design workflow to accommodate a range of student levels of familiarity and competency with data collection. We had to offer training sessions to help students acquire the necessary digital skills to use the project's tools and methodologies. We designed tasks that are scalable in complexity to accommodate both beginners and those with more experience. This approach allows students to contribute meaningfully regardless of their starting skill level. We also had to remain open to generative failure.

We joked at our student training that we expected our student team to “break” our system. We got a laugh from the students and set up the expectation with them that failure, “breaking” the workflow, and mistakes *would* happen and that we considered those as valuable as the ways the workflow operated smoothly. Students initially found this approach a bit surprising but with regular check-ins that lead to meaningful changes to the workflow as the result of both spreadsheet “wins” and spreadsheet “fails,” students were energized by their contributions to the meta-project and to the project in ways we came to look forward to as a faculty team.

The student teams we’ve worked with approached our workflow as users and provided evaluative feedback and experiential feedback. For example, most of the student’s we’ve worked with are of traditional college age, 18-22 years old. This means that overwhelmingly our student workers were born in the 21st century. Their knowledge of print media was uneven. It was not

unreasonable to expect that our students had very little experience with print newspapers before our project. Their formative years aligned with the expansion of digital news media. Imagine reading through an entire issue of a historical newspaper when your primary experience with news media has been in the form of hyperlinks, BuzzFeed headlines, and social media commentary. Some of our student feedback included the unexpected joy of following news stories across issues in their assigned batch they'd been assigned, noticing running jokes, and noting subtle changes in newspaper organization over time. Others told us that reading runaway advertisements in context and not disaggregated from the issues in which they appear, provided a more relational understanding of slavery. In short, the business of slavery permeates Kentucky's historical newspapers, and linking to the full newspaper issues in the SEEK content management system is imperative. The ads are one glimpse of how ubiquitous and visible the system of laws, economic forces, and day to day transactions that made slavery possible really were for Kentuckians in the past.

This experiential feedback came with evaluative feedback. The faculty team carefully designed a system to minimize human error when students created individual files with unique filenames. Knowing our file names both included critical metadata *and* were long and cumbersome, we really thought we had a system that would be easy for our students to use. When we spoke with our students it became clear that we'd been a bit myopic in our workflow design. Yes, creating a file name automatically through Notion spreadsheets was great. But what about the experience of reading newspaper issues, collecting ads, coding metadata, and then, finally, distilling all of that data into one file name?

Students reported that having moved through the workflow once or twice, they almost immediately developed their own idiosyncratic ways of managing all of the steps. Only one or two students followed our workflow from point a to point b for each individual advertisement. In one case, a student developed her own separate spreadsheet to manage our workflow. In another case, a student began adding annotations to the file names of the ads they collected. They incorporated everything from data about how many times an ad appeared to additional dates significant to the ad. Others adapted the workflow in a less drastic way. One or two collected advertisements by the issue, recorded their metadata, and then created individual files before moving on to the next issue. Most eventually settled on a system in which they collected all of the metadata we requested and then made their final step clipping each ad and assigning it a unique filename.

Incorporating the students in the process of testing our workflow and developing effective training methods was an intentional part of our project sustainability strategy. Bringing students together to check-in about their progress, ask questions, and to share with the faculty team and each other allowed our team to develop a set of best practices to communicate to future students working on the project. This gave students a sense of their role in the long life of the project past their tenure at the university. Their batches are parts of a larger whole. Their feedback has already worked with how we work with new student worker groups and colleagues at Arkansas State University. Most importantly, student workers are not simply cogs in our project, they are research partners.

As a team, we also wanted to begin to offer professional development opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students. In Spring 2024, SEEK ran our first Digital Humanities workshop using SEEK materials. Students who work for the project during the regular semester earn

valuable experience with data collection, data management, and pedagogical design for upcoming workers and cohorts. But they do not spend time on the analysis of historical sources. They do not do interpretive work beyond that needed to code metadata. We wanted to offer students an opportunity to take up interpretive work and to contribute to teaching users on the front end of the project how to use and navigate the archive we are building.

One best practice for student involvement in diversifying opportunities for them to be involved. Students who work collecting advertisements and working with us on our workflow work independently and keep their own hours. They are not tied to paying for credit hours for a course, another way that some projects involve students. For our workshop, we wanted students to have an even shorter time commitment. They worked mostly independently over the course of one month in April of 2024. We had two in-person meetings, one at the start of the workshop and one in the workshop's final week. We had two independent email check-ins with a faculty team member, one in the second and one in the third week of the workshop. Students who could not commit to working for an entire semester or, as in the case of graduate students, have limitations on the work hours they can take on beyond their fellowship assignments were able to participate in the project.

A group of three graduate students and three undergraduates worked to produce simple OMEKA page exhibits. We provided students with small groups of advertisements from Kentucky's historical newspapers that were collected as a part of the SEEK project. They then read through their ads and chose a theme to investigate. For example, one student wanted to think about the way that ads catalog injuries and disabilities among fugitives from slavery. Another student noticed how enslavers offered different reward amounts based on the distance a self-emancipated person had fled from slavery. We asked them to develop exhibits that functioned like encyclopedia entries. We wanted them to teach new users *how* ads could be used to answer historical questions. We asked our group to think about how to teach others to make exhibits *and* how to teach visitors to our project how to engage with our content.

We emphasize that we are not simply working with data or content, we are working together to make the lives of enslaved people more legible. Each advertisement is often all that remains in our archives of an entire human being with a life, with kin, and with experiences that the advertisement cannot capture. Our students have always taken up our ethic of care and taken seriously the charge to not reify historical violence by reducing individuals to data points. For the students in our workshop, this became more than just an academic exercise.

Conclusion: New Directions for SEEK

The SEEK project has ambitious future plans for expanding the scope of its resources and research opportunities. In addition to expanding its corpus of Kentucky newspaper advertisements, it aims to expand its research and educational opportunities. Areas of interest include archival concerns with digitized and microfilmed historical newspaper collections, best practices for involving undergraduate and graduate students in project development, and increased pedagogical opportunities. By doing so, the project seeks to foster a more collaborative environment and encourage scholars and students to contribute to the research. The SEEK team plans to conduct training sessions to equip more students and other researchers (including those in other states) with the skills to contribute to this ever-growing archive.

While materials will be made available locally, the Kentucky team is also anticipating the development and implementation of digitization, description, and submission processes for not only Kentucky, but other state partners through the national Freedom on the Move (FOTM) database. Our hope is that SEEK can help the FOTM project expand its database. This collaboration will not only streamline the process of incorporating new data from other states but also ensure the uniformity and consistency of the information added to the database.

In conclusion, while the SEEK project has already made significant progress, there are still many opportunities to explore. Moving forward, SEEK is committed to fostering a supportive, intellectually rigorous and collaborative research environment to support this important work.

References

[1] A note on language: Our project team practices an ethic of care when using historical sources and speaking about our historical subjects. In a move to affirm the humanity of enslaved people, this paper will use the term "self-emancipated person/people" instead of the historical term "runaway." Occasionally we will use the term "fugitive from slavery" and "fugitive slave advertisements" to denote the violent legal structures used to re-enslave self-emancipated people. Historical newspapers and their editors were active participants in this violent system. The African Americans whose lives we study were full human beings that should be defined by more than their legal status as enslaved people.

[2] "Isaac and the First Newspaper Escaped Slave Reward Ad in Kentucky," Notable Kentucky African Americans Database, accessed May 24, 2024, https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/300004791.