

The Wisconsin Idea Goes Digital

↳ “As a researcher far from major library collections, I really appreciate the effort and time that has gone into digitizing *Foreign Relations of the United States*—it’s a wonderful resource.”

↳ “Thank you for creating the *Icelandic Dictionary*. I am astonished and profoundly grateful that such a valuable resource should be made available to the public, free of charge.”

Such comments would make former University of Wisconsin president Charles Van Hise proud—proud to know that 100 years after he first challenged the UW to “make the beneficent influence of the University available to every home in the State,” one small university unit, quietly tucked away in UW–Madison Memorial Library, has embraced and carried forward this principle with great enthusiasm and commitment.

The University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center (UWDCC) creates and publishes online digital resources that fulfill and build upon the “Wisconsin Idea,” as championed by Van Hise. Internet technology and its pervasive use have allowed the digital collections staff to extend this guiding belief further than Van Hise or his contemporaries ever imagined, delivering an array of varied and valuable educational resources to a worldwide audience of lifelong learners.

Many important works digitized by the center also will be made available by Google Book Search as part of a recent agreement with the UW–Madison Libraries. The agreement expands access to hundreds of thousands of public and historical books and documents from more than 7.2 million holdings at the libraries and the Wisconsin Historical Society Library. UW–Madison is the eighth institution to join Google’s ambitious effort to digitize the world’s books and make them searchable.

Since its founding in early 2000, the Digital Collections Center has worked collaboratively with faculty, staff, and librarians on UW System campuses to create digital resources that support

instructional and research needs of the UW community. The project uniquely documents the university and the state of Wisconsin and provides access to rare or fragile items of broad research value.

These resources are publicly accessible online and are organized into collections spanning a range of subjects, including art, ecology, literature, history, material culture, music, natural resources, science, and social sciences, as well as the university and state as subjects in their own right. Digital resources within these collections include books, journals, archival collections, photographic images, art and illustrations, historic maps, music, oral histories, and video.

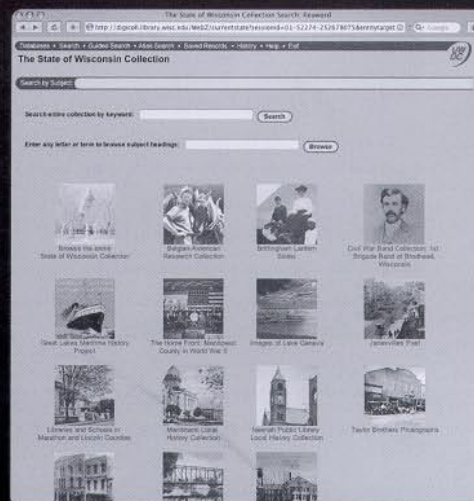
“One important objective of the center is to create collections that have a direct classroom application,” says Patrick J. Wilkinson, director of the Forrest R. Polk Library at UW–Oshkosh. Faculty members across the state, Wilkinson says, have reported using these digital collections in assignments that introduce students to archival and other primary research materials. Wilkinson serves as chair of the digital collections center advisory committee, sharing oversight of the center with UW–Madison’s Nolan Pope.

Over the past five years, the UW digital collections have grown at an exponential rate, from 150 photos and 35,000 text pages in 2001 to a staggering total of 42,000 photos and 1.3 million

Our Digital State

The center’s State of Wisconsin Collection presents published and archival materials such as books, correspondence, sound recordings, maps, and photographs presenting an in-depth examination of Wisconsin’s unique cultural heritage and history. Resources include oral history recordings of Belgian American immigrants, documents relating to agriculture and rural life in Wisconsin, correspondence detailing local experiences during the Civil War and World War II, audio recordings of regional folk music, historic photographs revealing the Great Lakes maritime industry, and a wealth of other materials that superbly document the history and development of Wisconsin communities. These resources include the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, now known as *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, as well as the Wisconsin Academy’s peer-reviewed journal, *Transactions*.

Visit our state online at <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI>



text pages as of fall 2006. Collection use, too, has skyrocketed from 290,000 hits in 2001 to more than 5 million in 2005. In all, the UWDC has logged more than 10 million hits since its first year. And the Google Book Search partnership is expected to provide the most massive user influx yet.

"We've fielded reference inquiries from people all over Wisconsin, the United States, and several foreign countries—questions that we've been able to answer by using or referring patrons to our digital collections," says UW archivist David Null.

An example of this global sensation is work done by UW-Madison German professor Marc Silberman, who collaborated with the center to develop a tool to help researchers and instructors locate translations of works by the German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht.

Says Silberman, "I have received grateful comments from researchers, writers, and translators throughout the world, including an inquiry from Spain asking for advice about setting up a similar bibliographical database for Spanish translations of Brecht's works based on the UWDC model."

The Bibliography of Bertolt Brecht's Works in English Translation (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/BrechtGuide>) includes more than 2,600 entries.

Another example is work done by Dick Ringler, a UW-Madison professor emeritus whose digital projects with the center include a collection of poems and prose works by the Icelandic poet and naturalist Jonas Hallgrímsson. He's also done a collaborative project with the University of Iceland to develop a course in modern Icelandic and an audio and text project presenting his own new translation of *Beowulf*.

"The Jónas Hallgrímsson project was described in a *Times Literary Supplement* [London] review as 'outstanding,' and has since been used at both UW-Madison and the University of Iceland for instructional purposes," notes Ringler.

The University of Iceland continues to use the modern Icelandic course site to teach the language to foreign students both in Iceland and abroad. And, as evidenced by user feedback from around the country, the *Beowulf* project enjoys use beyond the university.

In the past year, the digital collections center has partnered with UW System faculty and librarians, public libraries throughout Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the Wisconsin Historical Society, and other institutions within and beyond Wisconsin not only to create digital resources but also to share their expertise in digital library project devel-

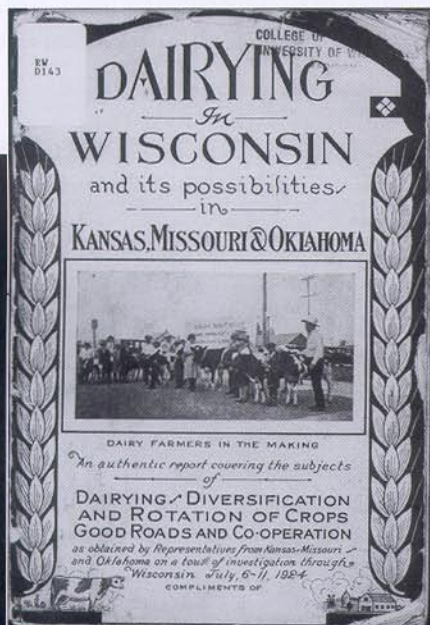
opment, technologies and standards, and digital preservation.

According to Sally Drew, the reference and loan library director with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the UWDC provides significant consultation, training, and technical support for librarians and educators who are developing digital collections. That support covers everything from content selection, metadata creation, and image scanning to infrastructure development and preservation.

"I have worked with the UWDC to assist Wisconsin public library staff in digitizing local historical materials for use by the general public, K-12 students, and scholars," says Drew. "This has been an excellent experience—one that created a valuable and persistent learning environment for all participants."

From works by William Shakespeare and James Joyce to exquisite images capturing daily life in Africa, China, and Thailand, the UW digital collections make the world's riches accessible at the touch of a fingertip, and promise to engage audiences and inspire scholarship for years to come.

For more information about the UW Digital Collections Center, visit <http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu>.



From the UW digital collections: "A Goodbye Kiss" from the *Manitowoc Herald-Times*, 1940, and "Dairying in Wisconsin," a report from 1924.