Published by the Society of American Archivists

July/August 2012
www.archivists.org

3 Job Search Tips
8 Selling Souvenirs at Archives
16 Survey Results Are In!
World War II Voices in the Digital World

Nicole Milano, Archives of the American Field Service and AFS Intercultural Programs, and Anthony Cocciolo, Pratt Institute’s School of Information and Library Science

Some lucky graduate students last spring in the Projects in Digital Archives course at Pratt Institute’s School of Information and Library Science helped create a digital archive documenting the history of a voluntary ambulance organization in World War II. They worked with the oral history collection and original archival material in the Archives of the American Field Service and AFS Intercultural Programs (AFS Archives). It was a win-win situation all around—the Pratt students gained valuable on-the-job experience and the AFS Archives benefited from their enthusiastic assistance.

Organizational Background

The AFS emerged shortly after the outbreak of World War I, when young Americans living in Paris volunteered as ambulance drivers at the American Hospital in Neuilly-sur-Seine. By the time the United States entered the war in 1917, 2,500 AFS ambulance and camion drivers had participated in every major French battle and carried more than 500,000 wounded.

AFS was reactivated as an ambulance corps at the start of World War II, when American volunteers drove ambulances in France with the French military until the establishment of the Vichy Government. As the war progressed, AFS volunteers served with the British military and Free French Forces in North Africa, Italy, Germany, India, and Burma. By the end of the war, 2,196 AFS volunteer ambulance drivers had carried more than 700,000 wounded combatants from both sides of the war.

Following the war, AFS drivers from both World Wars assembled in New York City to discuss the future of the organization and eventually launched the secondary school student exchange program that is now referred to as AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc. Today, AFS is a global community of more than 50 partner organizations that support intercultural learning, principally through exchange programs. In 2011, nearly 13,000 individuals participated in AFS programs in 110 countries, with the support of more than 44,000 active volunteers around the world.

Providing Access

The AFS Archives was founded in 1980 to serve as a center for research and as a repository for the records, photographs, and memorabilia from the organization. In the last few years, the AFS Archives has greatly increased access to its archival collections, due in large part to the success of the 2010–11 National Historical Publications and Records Commission basic processing project that allowed for basic intellectual and physical access to all the World War I and World War II archival material. This increased access to and preservation of the archival material—as well as the promotion of AFS history—is very timely, as AFS will celebrate the centennial of its founding in 2014–15.

Since the 1980s, the AFS Archives staff has launched several initiatives to document the rich history of the organization through audio and visual oral history interviews with AFS ambulance drivers, present and former AFS Intercultural Programs staff, and student exchange program returnees. As part of the recent efforts to create more access to the AFS Archives, AFS participated in a project with Dr. Anthony Cocciolo at the Pratt Institute to digitize the oral histories of the World War II ambulance drivers. As a small archival institution with limited resources, this collaborative effort was extremely significant and will allow for unprecedented access to the stories of AFS drivers.

Creating a Digital Archive

The goal of Pratt’s course, Projects in Digital Archives, is to provide students with the practical and theoretical know-how needed to create a digital archive. This is accomplished by placing students in the role...
as their painstaking work to evacuate the Bergen–Belsen Concentration Camp after its liberation by British troops in April 1945.

Through the hiss of audiocassette recordings, students could hear the physical and emotional weight this event had on the drivers more than a half-century ago. This created a context that inspired students to honor the memories of the ambulance drivers by preserving and making their spoken words available. The context was reinforced by visits to the class by AFS Archivist Nicole Milano and the AFS Branding and Marketing Coordinator Raquel Martinez, who explained the history of AFS, the activities of the AFS Archives, new branding initiatives for the organization, and their approach to web-based projects.

In developing the digital archive, students had to engage in a multitude of tasks, such as digitizing archival material (audiocassettes containing the interviews as well as historic photographs), designing and deploying a digital presence, creating standardized metadata, and conducting research. Individual class sessions were organized around a problem-based learning approach, where students would have to address a series of problems required to move forward with the digital archive.

The course components, such as discussions, course readings, and collaborative work, were oriented toward solving the week’s problems. For example, the course readings on topics such as digitizing audio material or creating metadata became crucial to completing the project in a way that coincided with professional practices. Thus, students could readily see how neglecting to keep up with course readings was not only a detriment to themselves, but could disappoint the collective effort, with a

Continued on page 29

of designers, where they create a tangible product in a meaningful social environment. The AFS oral histories were critical in shaping the social environment in which the students worked this past spring semester.

Students were able to hear the AFS ambulance drivers speak about their personal involvement during the war, such as their work to evacuate the Bergen–Belsen Concentration Camp after its liberation by British troops in April 1945.

The context was reinforced by visits to the class by AFS Archivist Nicole Milano and the AFS Branding and Marketing Coordinator Raquel Martinez, who explained the history of AFS, the activities of the AFS Archives, and their new branding initiatives for the organization, and their approach to web-based projects.

In developing the digital archive, students had to engage in a multitude of tasks, such as digitizing archival material (audiocassettes containing the interviews as well as historic photographs), designing and deploying a digital presence, creating standardized metadata, and conducting research. Individual class sessions were organized around a problem-based learning approach, where students would have to address a series of problems required to move forward with the digital archive.

The course components, such as discussions, course readings, and collaborative work, were oriented toward solving the week’s problems. For example, the course readings on topics such as digitizing audio material or creating metadata became crucial to completing the project in a way that coincided with professional practices. Thus, students could readily see how neglecting to keep up with course readings was not only a detriment to themselves, but could disappoint the collective effort, with a

Continued on page 29

Get your head into the CLOUDS

Earn your Master of Archives and Records Administration (MARA) degree at San José State University School of Library and Information Science and prepare for the future of electronic records management in the cloud. The fully online MARA program will teach you the skills and knowledge you need for leadership roles in the rapidly expanding fields of information governance and corporate archives.

Applications for Spring 2013 Admission Accepted August 1 – October 1.

Let the learning begin: slisweb.sjsu.edu/saa
related impact on the quality of the project and the community being served.

**Division of Labor**

Students were divided into one of four groups (research, metadata, design, and technology) based on interests, and teams addressed important questions on how to proceed with the project. For example, the metadata team decided what metadata to create, what standard to use, and how metadata should be assigned. The technology team had to figure out which content management system to use and how to incorporate the design into the technology. The design team considered how to make the site useable and visually appealing. Finally, the research team analyzed digital rights management and utilized the resources in the AFS Archives to augment the oral histories with historical information found in the records and photographs created during the war.

Claire Agni, a member of the research team, found her time spent in the AFS Archives particularly appealing. "For me, using the archive and going through the materials added so much more to the project. . . After spending hours going through photographs, I began to feel like I knew some of these drivers, and even began to recognize them as I went along. That experience not only solidified my interest in working in archives, but also provided an example of how powerful and important archival materials can be."

Although not every team was able to be hands-on in the archive, all the students listened to select oral histories and had to work together to deliver a coherent final product. Heidi Ryti, a member of the technology team, noted she was both “surprised and impressed” at how much she learned about technology and archives within the semester. Ryti echoed Agni’s sentiment about the World War II oral histories. "After listening to their stories, the task of building an archive worthy of such amazing stories became all that much more important," said Ryti. "Due to the content, the website ceased to be a class project in my mind . . . I think the entire class wanted to build a website that would honor these heroes as we participated in the preservation of their stories and with Dr. Cocciolo’s guidance and input from the AFS, I think we accomplished our goal," Ryti added.

The finished archive includes 35 digitized oral histories augmented with archival photographs and Dublin Core metadata, all integrated into a user-friendly website based on the Wordpress platform. While the website the students created is currently password-protected, the content will be migrated to the AFS Archives website (www.afs.org/archives) and made available to the public in a similar format before the end of the year.

Reflecting on the entire semester and the final product she helped create with her fellow students, Agni noted that the project “not only created a tool that people will someday use (giving a sense of accomplishment to those who worked on it), but also is a great example of how archives can be applied in a digital format, in an ever-expanding digital world.”

Photos by Loftus Cuddy, Jr.  Courtesy of the AFS Archives.

**World War II Voices in the Digital World**

The finished archive includes 35 digitized oral histories augmented with archival photographs and Dublin Core metadata, all integrated into a user-friendly website based on the Wordpress platform. While the website the students created is currently password-protected, the content will be migrated to the AFS Archives website (www.afs.org/archives) and made available to the public in a similar format before the end of the year.

Reflecting on the entire semester and the final product she helped create with her fellow students, Agni noted that the project “not only created a tool that people will someday use (giving a sense of accomplishment to those who worked on it), but also is a great example of how archives can be applied in a digital format, in an ever-expanding digital world.”

- AFS ambulance in Tunisia, ca. 1941–1944. Photograph by Loftus Cuddy, Jr.  Courtesy of the AFS Archives.
- AFS Ambulances at a Regimental Aid Post in Tunisia, ca. 1941–1944. Photograph by Loftus Cuddy, Jr.  Courtesy of the AFS Archives.