Baker: Review of World Digital Library

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Christine Baker (chbaker@mines.edu)
Arthur Lakes Library, Colorado School of Mines

Access: http://www.wdl.org/en/

In 2005, the Library of Congress introduced the concept of "an Internet-based, easily-accessible collection of the world's cultural riches that would tell the stories and highlight the achievements of all countries and cultures, thereby promoting cross-cultural awareness and understanding." This was presented to the U.S. National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The end result is the freelyavailable World Digital Library (WDL) launched in April of 2009, a highly educational and culturally rich resource for "educators, scholars, and general audiences." Along with the Library of Congress, numerous partner institutions and financial contributors have supported the development of this site by providing content, funding, or services. The "About" section, accessible from the WDL homepage, provides more information regarding its development and mission. The collection's content currently represents all UNESCO member countries and encompasses full-text primary sources and materials.

Items in the WDL are available in a variety of formats and include books, maps, photographs, musical scores, and much more. Some examples include a short motion picture entitled, Emigrants [i.e. Immigrants] Landing at Ellis Island (1903) in MPEG format and a Japanese book entitled, Gifts from the Ebb Tide (ca. 1789) that features woodblock prints and poems. Items in the WDL include unique and consistent metadata and thorough content description. These descriptions, authored by experts, are highly informative and, as noted in the "Background" section of the web site, not only explain what the item is but why an item is important. There are also some interviews with curators as well as opportunities for advanced image viewing for items within the WDL. While the content descriptions and metadata as well the navigation

tools are available in seven languages, the item itself is presented in its original language.

Locating content and navigating the site are very user-friendly. There are five initial browse categories that cover "Place," "Time," "Topic," "Type of Item," and contributing "Institution." Once a category is selected, users are able to further narrow their search by using these various categories again as well as "Language" and "Additional Subjects." As the search continues to narrow, more options within a selected category are presented. However, search results within all categories are listed in descending order from most items to least items in any category, rather than in alphabetical order. Despite this, the browse feature is very effective in locating relevant materials. There is also the more commonly used "Search" box available at the top of each screen for finding items within the collection.

Another useful feature is the bar toward the top of the screen that displays the path of a particular search by listing, in order, the Browse options that have been selected by the user, thus, enabling users to backtrack and adjust their search without getting lost in the process. Additionally, a "similar items" or "related items" feature is available for each search result that promotes further discovery. Much of the metadata for each item is also hyperlinked so that digital files by the same creator, or the same topic, or where other metadata are shared, can be located quickly and easily.

The WDL uses "state-of-the-art tools and technologies" and it shows in the quality of the digitized materials in their collection. The collection continues to grow – currently there are nearly 6,500 items. A "Recently Added or Updated Items" section on the homepage helps to present the database in fresh and new ways. The WDL also utilizes Twitter with almost 13,000 followers at last glance.



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As part of its mission, the WDL strives to "promote international and intercultural understanding." One could spend hours exploring the material within this expansive digital collection and achieve a higher level of cultural awareness in the process. The World Digital Library is a wonderful example of a collaborative effort involving many organ-izations. It will be exciting to watch both its collection and capabilities grow over time.

