



Digital Scriptorium

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2023 Annual Meeting

Free Library of Philadelphia & Zoom

Philadelphia, PA

12 September 2023

Director's Report

2023 marked a new chapter in the history of Digital Scriptorium with the beta launch of the DS Catalog earlier this June. The launch concluded the three-year DS 2.0 project to reconceptualize and rebuild the platform that for twenty-five years had given students and scholars around the world instant and online access to manuscripts in collections across the United States. The redevelopment effort began at a planning meeting at the Beinecke Library in 2019, where a group of member representatives and other stakeholders outlined a renewed vision of DS as a platform for an online national union catalog of premodern manuscripts representing global manuscript traditions. We sought a platform that leveraged new and more sustainable technologies that would lower barriers for participation and increase sustainability. Nearly four years later, that vision has become a reality thanks to the efforts of many people in this room and online and to the support of our increasing membership base. Today we will officially approve the membership of the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Boston Public Library, and we welcome many new prospective members in attendance today.

Based on Linked Open Data technologies and practices, the DS Catalog has the potential to connect researchers around the world to every manuscript held in North American institutions and to networks of information beyond the platform existing in the wider world of linked open data. By many measures, the changes to the platform represent a radical departure from the previous platform, but our decisions have always been led by our founders' vision, conceived in 1997, to build a platform for creating an online national union catalog of manuscripts for North American institutions.

The success of the DS Catalog project can be attributed to the people and institutions who have contributed to the redevelopment project. This report therefore begins by acknowledging the many people and institutions involved in getting DS to this turning point in its history.

In the first place, I must acknowledge the contributions of the members of the first Board of Directors, which was formed in 2015 at a critical time when the organization was grappling with sustainability issues complicated by a technical platform built on aging software that was increasingly difficult to maintain. We also faced changing practices among member institutions for cataloging manuscripts that were no longer in sync with traditional cataloging practices upon which the original DS platform was based. Under Debra Cashion's (Saint Louis University) leadership, Janine Pollock (Free Library of Philadelphia), E. C. Schroeder (Beinecke Library), Vanessa Wilke (Huntington Library & Museum), Cherry Williams (Lilly Library, Indiana University/University of California-Riverside), David Faulds

(University of California-Berkeley), and myself worked to stabilize the organization by codifying governance structures, establishing DS as a 501c3 institution, and building financial health and accountability. These organizational efforts allowed DS to gain footing necessary to begin working toward redevelopment. In 2020, DS, in partnership with the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies at University of Pennsylvania Libraries, submitted a successful planning grant proposal to the Institute of Museum and Library Services that allowed the team at the Schoenberg Institute the time and space to design and prototype a new data model for the DS platform.

As the project director, I must give credit to my team at the Schoenberg Institute and Penn Libraries who brought exceptional expertise and brilliance far exceeding my own capabilities to make the DS Catalog possible. Mikko Koho (Aalto University), the DS 2.0 Data Model Designer; Doug Emery, the Technical Development Director; L. P. Coladangelo, the current Project & Data Manager, and Emma Thomson (Project Manager from 2020-2021) are responsible for building the technical platform and establishing workflows for data entry. Throughout the DS 2.0 project, we benefited from the wise counsel of Amey Hutchins, Penn Libraries' Manuscript Cataloger; Jim Hahn, Penn's head of Metadata Research; and John Mark Ockerbloom, Penn's Digital Library Architect. We have also been assisted this past year by two excellent graduate students, Mario Sassi and Justin Blair, whose work was supported by a Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation grant awarded in 2021. We were also fortunate to find Ben Bakelaar, who with his team at Human Experience Systems, is responsible for the beautiful design of the current website and search interface. As the Project Director, I have been incredibly fortunate to work with this team and have learned much from their collective wisdom and experience.

Throughout the redevelopment project, the DS Catalog project team's work has continued to be supported by the DS Board. Newer board members Susan Steuer (Western Michigan University), Tamar Evangelistia-Dougherty (Smithsonian Libraries), Emily Runde (Columbia University), and Aaron Pratt (Harry Ransom Center, UT-Austin), have equally contributed their time and expertise to the continued governance and development of DS as an organization. Similarly, the DS Advisory Council, composed DS power users and manuscript scholars, has been a terrific sounding board, and its members have generated of some of the best ideas over the last 3 years behind DS 2.0 and its practical implementation: Lisa Fagin Davis (Medieval Academy of America; Simmons College), Ray Clemens (Beinecke Library, Yale University), Consuelo Dutschke (Columbia University), Elizabeth Hebbard, (Indiana University), Andrew Hicks, (Cornell University), Eric Johnson (The Ohio State University), Daniel Gullo (Hill Museum & Manuscript Library), Kivilcim Yavuz (University of Leeds), and Evyn Kropf (University of Michigan).

Last but certainly not the least to acknowledge are the DS member institutions and stakeholders who have supported the redevelopment project in so many critical ways, not the least of which was by their patience as we moved through ever lengthening deadlines for the beta launch. Your faith in our work and willingness to contribute data and feedback throughout the process has been critical to getting DS to the sustainable point that it is now. I am especially indebted to those member institutions who came together at a critical juncture in 2021 to provide financial support to continue the implementation of the DS 2.0 prototype. These institutions include the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Beinecke Library, Yale University; Columbia University Libraries, Houghton Library, Harvard University; The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens; Princeton University Libraries, and the Special Collections & University Archives at the University of

California, Riverside. Inspired by Aaron Pratt's offer to have Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas to contribute a little bit more than its scheduled fees in support of the DS effort, many of these institutions followed suit and became Supporting Members by voluntarily increasing their dues by \$1000. We have also benefited from the generosity of an anonymous donor whose financial contribution at a critical time allowed us to detach financially from our host organization and begin to manage and grow our own financial strategy.

In addition to expressing my gratitude to the many who have contributed to the successful launch of the DS Catalog and the renewed Digital Scriptorium, my other intention behind this litany of gratitude is to hold it up as a testament to the fact that DS is first and foremost a community of member institutions, administrators, librarians, curators, scholars, and students who recognize the central and centralizing role that DS and the DS Catalog play in bringing researchers and manuscripts together to advance knowledge of our shared intellectual heritages. As we move forward into the next year and the next phase of DS's history, the DS will continue to need the support of this community to ensure the longevity of DS.

Our work is far from done. In the coming months, the DS Catalog team will aim to add at least 8000 manuscript records by the end of this calendar year from current member institutions to the DS Catalog. We have already started to reach out to our current member institutions to ask for data contributions. Thanks to a second Delmas grant awarded to DS this summer, Rose McCandless has joined the team as the 2023-2024 Manuscript Data Curation Graduate Student Fellow. Rose, currently an MLIS student at Denver University with an already impressive background in cataloging, describing, and researching manuscripts and fragments, will be providing data management support to L. P. Coladangelo to ensure that we meet our data ingest goals. She has also been tasked with developing an outreach plan to provide cataloging support to current and prospective member institutions without sufficient staff or onsite expertise to catalog their collections. She will be working with the Harry Ransom Center to prototype a methodology for cataloging in situ manuscript fragments for contribution to DS. We have also submitted a proposal to the NEH to support the next phase of implementation by increasing the Project and Data Manager position to full-time and supporting a full-time Manuscript Data Curation Postdoctoral Fellowship, ideally awarded to scholar with expertise in a non-European manuscript culture to help us develop more inclusive and culturally-sensitive description practices. We will find out if we were successful in March. Until then, we continue to plan according to our current resources.

We will also continue over the next year to review the functionality of the DS Catalog to identify and resolve technical problems or to consider additional functionality and continue to refine workflows for data contribution. As L. P. will mention later this morning, we will also be working on a process for contributing DS IDs and associated metadata to Wikidata, the world's largest freely accessible knowledge base to further enhance discovery of member data.

As the DS Catalog team continues to refine and build up the new platform with more data, the DS Board of Directors will be turning its attention to strengthening DS's organizational framework, focussing in particular on increasing membership and developing a forum for members to seek advice, contribute to conversations about best practices for manuscript description in a linked data environment, and build cross-institutional networks of support. Finally, and perhaps not as exciting to hear but nonetheless a necessity, a newly

established Finance Committee (Lisa Fagin Davis, Sue Steuer, and David Faulds) will be reviewing the current dues structure and the weighted fee schedule and making recommendations for a new dues structure that will help DS build a financial strategy to support the required project and data management needed to support the DS Catalog for the long term while maintaining our commitment to broad inclusivity for all manuscript-holding institutions in North America.

We have our work cut out for us in the year ahead, but we proceed with the confidence gained from the same kind of support of the DS community that we've experienced over these past few years. We are equally confident that you will come to see DS as a worthy investment, returning dividends in multiple forms of new research and discovery related to your collections. We will continue to keep you up to date on our progress. If you are already a member, we encourage you to submit your data soon. If you are not a member, please do reach out to any member of the Board to find out more about membership and its benefits.

Respectfully and gratefully submitted,
Lynn Ransom
President & Executive Director