

**National Archives Researcher Forum
Friday, September 16, 2011, 1:00 p.m.
Room 105, Archives I, Washington, DC**

Welcome

Jennifer (Jen) Nelson, Special Assistant to Chief Operating Officer Tom Mills, and Acting Executive for Research Services, welcomed participants to the meeting.

The Researcher Forum group decided to hold meetings every other month.

Jen provided updated information on NARA's project to reconfigure the space in the Robert M. Warner Research Center in the National Archives Building by confirming schedule and scope and reading a short article by Trevor Plante, Chief of Archives I Reference, on [The Temporary Move of the Finding Aids Room at the National Archives Building](#).

- There is no change to the planned sequence of events and the September 26, 2011, start date on Phase 1.
- The area to be soon affected in the Library has been cleared of books.
- The existing researcher desks in room G-18 are disassembled and will be relocated and installed in the West Research Room 202 this weekend (September 24–25), with no impact on researcher services.
- The Finding Aids/Consultation Room furniture, tables, bookcases, etc. will begin knockdown on Friday, September 23, at 3:00 p.m. (with researcher service continuing throughout Friday) and will relocate to room G-18 on Saturday, September 24.
- A construction barrier wall will be installed in the Library this coming week in preparation for the work to begin there as Phase 1 commences.

Meeting Agenda

There were two topics on the agenda:

- A brainstorming session on how to move forward with the Researcher Forum
- A discussion between NARA's digitization partners and participants

❖ Brainstorming Session

Jen Nelson led a brainstorming session with participants on how to move forward with the Researcher Forum. She began by asking researchers why they attend these forums. Answers included to:

- Provide input to all topics
- Influence policy decisions
- Provide feedback on issues/how things are working

- Ask questions/Answer questions
- Understand the issues/points of view
- Receive information

Two themes emerged from the discussion: a need/desire for information and a need/desire for engagement (listening and interacting).

Nelson then led an “assumptions check” exercise with researchers, NARA staff, and several of NARA’s digitization project partners. Assumptions held by each group about others’ needs were noted, and as each group commented to give voice to their own needs, distinctions and commonalities among the perceptions became more evident. This exercise was conducted in the hope that the insights noted will lead to fruitful conversations and help drive future meeting agendas. If you wish to receive a copy of the “assumptions” lists, please send your request to Jennifer Nelson by e-mail at jennifer.nelson@nara.gov.

❖ Discussion with NARA’s Digitization Partners

A discussion between three of NARA’s digitization partners and forum participants was led by Rebecca Warlow. Rebecca works in the Open Government office of Information Services and is responsible for coordinating digitization and description activities. The representatives from the digitization partners were

- Sabrina Petersen and Echo King from Ancestry.com
- Brian Hansen from Fold3 (formerly Footnote.com)
- Emily Schultz from FamilySearch.org

Warlow updated the audience on NARA’s digitization efforts. In 2013, NARA will be able to post the first digitized images from our online partners. Millions of images will be available in the coming years. NARA’s digitization strategy and principles for partnerships were discussed. Information can be found at <http://www.archives.gov/digitization>. A list of all microfilm publications and original records that have been either partially or wholly digitized by the partners is available at <http://www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners.html>. The list will be updated when additional materials are digitized. E-mail us directly at digitization@nara.gov with suggestions for new records to be digitized. For indexing errors involving a single entry, users may add correct indexing information directly to partner search engines on Ancestry and Fold3. For errors affecting multiple entries, e-mail us at digitization@nara.gov, and we will ask the partner to correct it.

Warlow then asked the partners to provide an overview of their companies and the records they are digitizing.

During the remainder of the meeting, researchers had an opportunity to raise the following topics of interest with NARA’s digitization partners:

Researcher 1: There are errors in the indexing caused by indexers miskeying names (e.g., keying “David” as “Fsbof”). The researcher provided statistics for some searches including the number of results she felt were erroneous on each partner’s site.

Responses led by Fold3 and Ancestry:

- The partners acknowledged that there will be some keying errors on the sites but felt that most of the results cited by the researcher were not for indexing errors but were “similar” results returned by the search engines.
- When running a general search, a search engine looks for both exact matches and close matches. This provides more results than an exact match search. (All sites do allow users to also search for exact matches only.)
 - For example, on FamilySearch, doing an exact match search on “Fsbof” (a possible miskeying of “David”) returns no results. Running a general (non-exact) search on “Fsbof” returns over 17 million similar names such as “Foughs,” “Faus,” and “Fusa.”
- User-provided family trees also show in search results and may include spelling errors.
- Some errors may also be caused by content, such as newspapers, that has been indexed using optical character recognition (OCR). Content that has been indexed with OCR is displayed at the bottom of search results on Fold3.

Researcher 2: How do you ensure quality and accuracy?

Responses led by Fold3/Ancestry:

- Partners have quality assurance procedures for both images and metadata that require 99% or higher accuracy level.
- Ancestry and Fold3 often use a double-blind indexing process. There are two indexers, so if there is a discrepancy, the third indexer checks the records to reconcile it.
- Staff composed of highly educated experts, paid for accuracy, must meet Ancestry’s standards and work with statistical tools.

Response from FamilySearch:

- FamilySearch follows digital archival standards and has done so from the beginning.
- FamilySearch also uses a double-blind process for the volunteers who do the indexing. Two volunteers index each record. The results are compared, and any discrepancies between the indexers are reconciled by a third volunteer, known as an arbitrator.

Researcher 3: The partner web sites do not display the digitized records in their original order (i.e., arrangement).

Responses led by Rebecca Warlow with input from Fold3/Ancestry:

Past/Pre-Partnerships

Ancestry digitized many NARA records before the partnership. These records are not necessarily displayed in original order, in the browse interface. Early records were arranged based on older technology decisions. Ancestry rearranged databases for inexperienced researchers so they can use multiple research paths. Ancestry could retrofit most records and put them in the order received.

Current Partnership

The partners are not rearranging original records. Ancestry offers researchers the option to browse the images of records in the original order for projects they have done through our partnership. NARA’s ideal is to have the browse structure under the original order.

Future

When records digitized by partners are displayed on NARA’s web site, they will be in original archival order. When NARA makes the 1940 census available on April 2, 2012, it will be arranged by enumeration district. Partners will look into always providing browse by original arrangements for records and sometimes providing other options for display.

Update: As a result of the discussion at the Researcher Forum, Fold3 is adding the microfilm roll numbers to the “About this document” panel for all NARA records for which they have a valid roll number. That would include all digitized microfilm publications, except a few of the earliest titles for which roll numbers were not collected at the time of digitization. Fold3 is investigating the feasibility of turning that roll number into a link so users can view the images in the order they occur on the microfilm roll in addition to the primary option of viewing the images in whatever way they’ve been organized in the Fold3 browse structure.

The screenshot shows the Fold3 website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Search, Records, Memorials, and Spotlights. The main content area is divided into two panels. The left panel, titled "Source information", contains the following details:

- Content Source: The National Archives
- Publication Number: A3355
- Publication Title: Miscellaneous Lists and Registers of German Concentration Camp Inmates, Originated or Collected by the International Tracing Service
- Content Source: NARA
- Content Partner: NARA
- Fold3 Publication Year: 2009
- National Archives Catalog ID: 586972
- National Archives Catalog Title: Lists and Registers of German Concentration Camp Inmates, compiled 1946-1958, documenting the period 1942-1945
- Record Group: 242
- Fold3 Job: 09-030
- Language: German, English
- Country: Germany
- Short Description: NARA A3355. Lists and Registers of German Concentration Camp Inmates, compiled 1946-1958, documenting the period 1942-1945.
- Roll: 0062A
- Location: Buchenwald

The right panel displays a document image from a microfilm roll. The document is a form titled "Konzentrationslager" (Concentration Camp) and "Art der Haft:" (Type of Imprisonment:). The form contains handwritten entries in German:

- Name und Vorname: *Alba Zholovskiy*
- geb.: *14. 11. 1924* zu: *Martovskarskly*
- Wohnort: *Martovskarskly Bronniedul. 53.*
- Beruf: *ohne*
- Staatsangehörigkeit: *Ungarn*
- Name der Eltern: *Frank, Irma*
- Wohnort: _____

At the bottom of the document image, there is a button labeled "Open Filmstrip".

Researcher 4: Digitized Images are Grey-Scale, but want color. Partners should be creating preservation quality digital products.

Response by Fold3/Ancestry:

Some older images have been digitized without the use of color, but original records digitized for current projects are scanned in color. At present, it is cost-prohibitive to re-digitize the records that were formerly done in grey-scale.

Response by FamilySearch:

We hear you. Color is not feasible immediately. We are working internally to make it happen as soon as possible.

Response by Warlow:

NARA has two digitization goals:

- 1) *Preservation*: Records that NARA wants to digitize primarily for preservation reasons are digitized in our digitization lab. We are not asking the partners to digitize records as a preservation method.
- 2) *Access*: Our partnerships are intended to increase online access to NARA's holdings and are part of our overall strategy to provide more online access to NARA's records.

When we started the partnerships, NARA asked for grey-scale images because of storage constraints. We have changed that decision, in part due to researcher requests, and are now receiving color images for original records digitized by the partners. We continue to receive grey-scale images for digital copies created from microfilm.

Researcher 5: What is the timeline for adding records digitized by the partners to *Archives.gov*?

Response by Rebecca Warlow and Mary Rephlo:

Per NARA's digitization agreements, NARA has unrestricted use of the digital images five years after receiving them from the partners. For any content digitized during a calendar year, the five-year clock begins on January 1 of the following year. (For example, for digital content created in 2011, the clock begins on January 1, 2012, and NARA will have unrestricted use of those records as of January 1, 2017.) NARA will place records digitized by the partners in its Online Public Access system (<http://www.archives.gov/research/search/>) when the five-year restriction elapses. We will put up a schedule of when series that have been digitized by the partners will be available on *archives.gov*.

One exception to the five-year waiting period is the War of 1812 Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files. These records are being digitized by Fold3 as a project sponsored by the Federation of Genealogical Societies. As part of the project, NARA is able to add the War of 1812 pension files to its online catalog as we receive them from Fold3. The pension

files are being scanned following the original alphabetical arrangement, and NARA is posting them online in that order.

Contact Information for the day's speakers is as follows:

- Rebecca Warlow and Mary Rephlo, National Archives: digitization@nara.gov
- Brian Hansen, General Manager Fold3: bhansen@fold3.com
- Sabrina Petersen, Director of Global Imaging Ancestry.com: spetersen@ancestry.com
- Echo King, Director of Content Management Ancestry.com: eking@ancestry.com
- Emily Stanford Schultz, FamilySearch Project Manager: Schultz@familysearch.org

Next Meeting of the Researcher Forum

Please join us for the next meeting of the Researcher Forum on November 18, 2011. It will be held at Archives II, Lecture Rooms D/E at 1:00 p.m. Agenda items can be sent to Susan Cummings by e-mail at susan.cummings@nara.gov or by telephone at 301-837-1636.

In the meantime:

- Please visit the Researcher Forum page at www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-users-group/ for meeting minutes and upcoming information on changes coming to the Robert M. Warner Research Center at Archives I.
- The NARAtions blog is available for discussion at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access>.
- If you have suggestions for questions we should ask our researchers and the public, please send them to us at socialmedia@nara.gov.

Thank you to our partners for participating in this meeting, and thank you all for coming.