This paper examines the presence and quality of web sites of one hundred randomly selected local history repositories in the United States. Emphasizing elements of remote reference services, this survey reveals that of the seventy-three repositories with an Internet presence, only thirty sites did present substantial content pertinent to an archival space. Institutional constraints like funding, staff resources, and training, may put local historical societies at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in established resource-rich institutions. Staffing profiles of all repositories were examined to determine if repositories with few staff could demonstrate repository staff knowledge of user behavior, familiarity with other archival resources, command of digital projects, application of professional resources, and technical skills necessary to provide a high-quality Internet presence.

Headings:

Archives -- Reference services.

Archives -- Technological innovations.

Surveys -- Archival Resources.

Archival resources -- United States and Canada.
HISTORICAL RECORDS REPOSITORIES ONLINE: PRESENCE AND QUALITY OF ONE HUNDRED WEB SITES

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

November 2004

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1: Introduction

Local history repositories preserve and make available materials that document the regional and cultural backgrounds of individuals and communities. When asked which sources of the knowledge of their past they trusted most, Americans put museums and historical sites first; before grandparents, eyewitnesses, history books, college professors, movies, television programs, and high school history teachers (AASLH: 2002). In 1994, Britton and Britton posed several questions about historical organizations: “Who are the audiences and how are they most effectively reached?” “What is the role of the history profession in advocating good history in the public realm?” And, “How can museums attract visitors and impart an educational message?” With the advent of the Internet as perhaps the most widespread research tool, the answers to these questions are now entwined with organizations’ presence online. (Britton: 1994).

Although Americans rely on museums and historical societies for trusted sources of information, the repository and the information they seek may not be easily located. Users may not be familiar with the types of resources offered in a historical society, nor know how to begin research within a repository. Because the Internet is a beginning point of reference for many researchers, a web presence can help users to locate appropriate research resources within repositories. Internet sites, as a point of initial contact can be used to share certain types of useful information to researchers. The web pages of a
repository should contain information about subjects and formats of materials that are present in a collection, information about how to conduct research in collections of primary materials, and how researchers may best use that specific repository.

This paper examines the presence and usefulness of local history repository web sites. Using the American Association of State and Local Historical Societies’ *Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada* to gather a random sample of community and state-themed (local history) repositories, one hundred randomly selected repositories were searched using major Internet search engines. Internet presence is evaluated in terms of standalone web sites or having no discernable presence online. Metadata usage and repository relationship to a larger entity is also examined in the section on presence.

The usefulness of web sites is assessed in terms of the depth and breadth of information present that adds to a researcher’s archival literacy skills and provides researchers with good customer service information. The usefulness of repository web sites can be categorized as low content or high quality content. Low content sites do not offer much more than brochure-type information, whereas sites with high quality content deliver substantial user-focused professional and authoritative resources.

The web authoring skills of repository staffs are central to the discovery of an online presence. Web site presentation and organization often demonstrates repository staff knowledge of user behavior, familiarity with other archival resources, command of digital projects or use of professional resources. A survey of repository web sites can illuminate commonalities among public faces of state and local historical repositories. With disparate levels of funding, staff resources, and training, staffs of state and local
historical societies are charged with presenting information that is comparable to that of their counterparts situated within resource-rich institutions.

The first element of this paper, the literature review, will provide basic explanations of the characteristics of local historical repositories and historical materials in archives, archival research and the Internet, staff resources in archival repositories, and web design fundamentals. The methodology of the study will follow the review section. This will include the process of selecting the sample, the sample size and extent, definitions of concepts used in analysis, and systems of evaluation. The findings section presents results from the analysis of Internet presence and an evaluation of content of web sites located. Examples of positive and negative features, along with brief comments on selected sites are included in this section. This is followed by general recommendations for local history archives to establish a useful Internet presence that will promote archival literacy, provide basic customer service functions, and be soundly constructed and presented.

2: Literature Review

2.1 Local History and Archives

The term “local history” was borrowed from the French, who were students of demography and provincial records. A history was built from understanding people in an area, their system of work, and ultimately their culture. French historians made great headway in studies of trends and people by focusing on a limited geographic area. As new Americans settled, the historians and chroniclers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries focused on the settlement and development of individual towns,
usually with an upper-class perspective. “In the new nation, state and local historical societies began to gather records and present accounts of the past that were understandably self-centered” (Kyvig: 2000). Even after 1776, Americans continued to identify themselves in state and local terms rather than national terms. The first local history repository, the Massachusetts Historical Society, was founded in 1794. The next repository was established in New York in 1804 and other historical societies appeared in the east and west as communities settled. Local history repositories were largely used by scholars for research and to lend sources to the historical writing pastime of wealthy gentlemen throughout the nineteenth century (Kyvig: 2000).

By the 1950s, “two types of historians had developed in the United States: the professionals who were concerned with overall developments and interpretations, and the local historians with a summary of facts” (Kammen: 2003). Also, around the mid-1950s, heritage became one of the new buzzwords in American culture. Since then, the concept of heritage has accentuated a common core of values and lead people to history for a variety of purposes: informed citizenship, deepening of identity or appreciation of change over a period of time (Kammen: 1997, Walch: 2003).

By the 1960s and 1970s, a century of industrialization and nationally unifying events like social protest and minority rights colored and shaped the way Americans acted and situated themselves geographically. Works of history written by authors concerned with local stories increased in popularity. Experiences of “ordinary people” came to be seen as vital in capturing the full spectrum of community histories (Kyvig: 2000, Kammen: 2003). Also in the 1970s, particularly around the anniversary of the bicentennial anniversary of the United States, interest in local history surged and a
number of local history reports were produced and private and public historical societies began to gather records and papers of individuals, families and organizations (Wright: 1995). Historical studies shifted from focusing on named individuals and national events to statistical, even sociological, social patterns of non-elite communities (Kyvig: 2000). Such surges of interest in local history caused documents, records, and memorabilia to be assembled and used in various ways throughout America’s history.

The first unifying body for state and local historical societies, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), was formed in 1940. By 1946, the AASLH’s Plan for Additional Support and Expansion “identified its top priority as the need for enriching and vitalizing the average citizen’s appreciation of the American way of life” and reaching the public in the way the American Historical Association and the American Association of Museums had not (Britton: 1994). Means to accomplish this goal included encouraging cooperation between historical agencies, helping agencies improve their work, promoting a wider use of history in schools, improving efforts to preserve historic sites, and collecting and preserving physical and documentary records of the past (Britton: 1994). Over the past several decades, through its support and publications, the AASLH has advanced the cause of local history, especially supporting practitioners in historical organizations (Kyvig: 2000).

The ideals of preserving local history led state and local historical societies to nurture municipal, county, and town government archives. Business, religion, and other institutional archives have also been responsible for preserving, protecting or interpreting collections of many records necessary for understanding localities. By placing repositories close to their point of origin, record creators can develop a relationship with
a repository, and provide support and advocacy for the archives within their community. These local history repositories may be located in a county courthouse, local church, public library, private or public academic institution or a museum. Smaller community repositories have an image of operating solely with volunteer labor, on a shoestring budget, and out of a physically small or obscure space.

In 1998, Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC) conducted a study to determine the location, commitment to staff training, professional resources, and collection resources of archival repositories in the United States. The report, *Where History Begins: A Report on Historical Records Repositories in the United States*, presented in 2003, defines historical societies and archival repositories as county and other local historical societies, archival repositories (other than academic), such as state and city historical societies, presidential libraries (nongovernmental records), private research institutions, town historians and commissions, genealogical societies, specialized archival repositories, such as architectural archives and photographic archives. Of 3,508 repositories included in the survey, 36.2% were Historical Society/Archival Repository, 14.4% were academic institutions, 21.2% were public libraries, 19.5% were museums, and 8.7% were categorized as records creators. COSHRC estimated that their representative survey put them in touch with about one-half of the universe of repositories.

The mission of local history repositories is to identify, collect, preserve, interpret and disseminate raw written and unwritten information to their various user groups (Britton and Britton: 1994 and O’Toole: 1990). However, providing materials is only the
most basic function to users. Other benefits to users of archives are intangible; people can react to materials linking their present to their past in emotional and personal ways.

Anniversary celebrations of churches, social clubs, schools, neighborhoods and towns are all enriched by drawing on archival sources: original letters, photographs, reminiscences and other records. When individuals make contact with such archival sources—not only in the information they contain, but also the “real things,” letters and diaries written by real people—they transcend the bounds of time and realize in direct and personal ways that they are part of the larger whole (O’Toole: 1990).

Researchers look to archives for a wide range of materials such as deeds, marriage certificates, photographs, immigration records or census materials. The types of materials found in archives are as varied as the communities they represent, including primary and often secondary research materials. Primary resources are those that recount an event and may include original diaries, journals, state or federal census records, courthouse records such as deeds, will probates, birth or death records, baptism or marriage records, passenger lists and military records. Secondary resources, generally based on prior research within primary records, may include published records of family histories, indexes or compilations of census or marriage records, history, county, state, and cemetery inscriptions (U.S. GenWeb Project: 2002).

Users of archival repositories may include preservation groups, faculty members, students of all levels, historians, genealogists, biographers, documentary filmmakers or writers. Genealogy and local history are by far the most frequently reported types of use, but this is not surprising in that an estimated 19 million Americans are actively researching their family histories (Walch: 1998). Of those millions of Americans, use by high school and elementary school students is about 50% higher than by college undergraduates in historical societies, public libraries, and museums, and use for
publicity campaigns and public relations is strong in creator organizations as well as in academic repositories (where alumni relations are an important factor) (Walch: 1998).

A major concern of many local history archives’ has been to reach varied and often nontraditional audiences and to ensure that all groups of people within their communities are included in the organization’s programming. Through “lectures, traveling exhibits, oral history projects, historic preservation or cultural events, repository staff emphasize the importance of not being bound by the four walls of their institution” (Britton: 1994). The Internet provides a place for repositories to carry out many of these functions beyond “the four walls of their institution.” However, the number and variety of repositories in the United States, along with widely varying modern outreach efforts, will challenge even savvy researchers to find precisely the repository or unique items that meet their needs.

2.2 Archival Research and the Internet

People conduct research on the Internet because it is convenient, available in many locations, cost-effective, and quick to provide results. Ninety-two percent of users say the Internet is a good place to go for getting everyday information, 85% say the Internet is a good way to communicate or interact with others, 75% say the Internet is a good place to conduct everyday transactions, and 69% say the Internet is a good way to entertain themselves in everyday life (Fallows: 2004). The majority of Americans who go online use the Internet for checking the weather, doing their banking, communicating with friends and family, and playing games. People going online now expect that many types of transactions be available for their convenience. The Pew Internet and American Life Project data show that more than half of all Internet users who are online will use a
search engine, and 35% of those users will launch at least one search per day (Rainie: 2004). The expectation of customer service-oriented convenience extends into archives: users expect that reference materials be as accessible online as they would be for researching visiting a repository in person (Tibbo: 1995 and Wright: 1995).

Using the Internet as the main search tool for local history research is a relatively new concept. Local history researchers in the past have relied on printed works, footnotes in bibliographies, the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, and word of mouth to find appropriate archival collections, many of which required contact with a repository staff person, library or other institution. But, as archival collections move toward a greater presence on the web, more users with less direct archival experience will want to gain access to collections (Duff and Johnson, 2001). More users will be online as American society becomes more digitally-oriented, but that doesn’t necessarily translate into familiarity with the types of online presences they might find in the unfamiliar domain of archives. Managers of archival materials will need to provide not only the basic information about collections, but also context for users who have little or no experience with an archive, let alone their particular archive.

Advocacy for archival repositories is clearly evident. A number of web sites are completely devoted to the preservation and study of community and family memory or history. Many of these Internet sites enable researchers to locate historical record repositories, family genealogy contacts or even mention of a name of corporation or guides to their history. Even in the past decade, the historical researcher hobbyist has gained a reputation as another type of serious researcher. In 1995, an article in American Demographics noted that close to half of American adults are interested in their family
history (and millions were involved in their own genealogical research). As of 2004, 24% of all Internet users have researched their family’s history or genealogy online (S. Fox: 2004).

Directly connecting to history-specific sites is a preferred method for some users, but research shows that search engines are favored and used by the vast majority of Internet users. Eighty-four percent of online Americans have used search engines, with a volume of about 33 searchers per user per month (S. Fox: 2004). To maximize the convenience offered by the Internet, online researchers may use known names of repositories to begin a search within a specific collection or they may try keywords within a search engine or portal. Searchers need to know how to best utilize each engine for particular types of queries to optimize the relevance results. Even seemingly small changes in search query formulation, such as capitalization, truncation or searching words as bound phrases can produce dramatically different results (Tibbo and Meho: 2001). But, users do not have to know where records exist before they can query a finding aid to determine what resources might be potentially relevant or useful. Overall, search and navigation is becoming less centered on an individual repository. Web browsers do not distinguish archival resources from any other types of information on the web, and so provide the ability to search across some geographical and institutional boundaries (Hedstrom: 2002).

Online searchers face variables in search engines, search tools, web site construction, and databases in use. Portals, databases, and search engines each provide different paths of inquiry by local history researchers. Portals may be commercial or driven by a history consortium. Databases can be homegrown or integrated into a library
system. No two search engines function in an identical manner; and services are as varied as the companies’ interests those who offer them. Any Internet site may lead users to dead links, brief but helpful pages, extensive descriptions of holdings or even relevant resources in a nearby repository. Following a visit to these sites, a researcher’s next step may be determined by their awareness of research resources that meet their needs, ability or funds to travel or by knowledge of the location of repositories, and availability of staff and materials.

Portals such as RootsWeb.com, Ancestry.com, and MuseumsUSA each contain extensive interactive guides and research tools for tracing family histories or exploring cultural heritage institutions. RootsWeb, sponsored by Ancestry.com is geared specifically toward genealogical research. Both RootsWeb and Ancestry.com advocate the use of Internet resources for primary research, offer short tutorials on beginning genealogical research, and aim to exploit holdings of many historical organizations.

RootsWeb.com contains extensive interactive guides and numerous research tools for tracing family histories. It boasts more than 22,000 mailing lists, 25,000 message boards, and also hosts such high-profile websites as the USGenWeb Project, National Genealogical Society, and Genealogy.org. Users of RootsWeb can both gather and disseminate historical information via the web. This portal provides content and a standard format for the variety of materials it presents in databases, query results, and message boards. Ancestry.com provides searchable records of individual families and researchers (including US Census records). Users can search by record type, locality or simply view scanned images of original historical documents. These sites also reference
archival collections within some physical repositories. Ancestry.com offers direct links to repositories, but these links are only as current as repository staff updates them.

MuseumsUSA contains a searchable directory of more than 15,000 museums of all types and sizes throughout the United States. MuseumsUSA listings, provided primarily by cultural institutions and secondarily by MuseumsUSA, include historical sites, special libraries, and museums in a shared space. Searchers may browse listings by state, museum type, and collection keywords or limit a search by state museum association membership. MuseumsUSA has three main goals: “to provide the public with information captured by state museum associations about museums in the United States;” to “provide museums and museum associations with the technology-based tools that will enhance their operations and effectiveness”; and “to provide museums with an Internet presence if they don’t already have one and to promote their web sites if they do.” The site shows attention to information currency, content, and institutional cooperation in their presentation of information. In fact, their plans to update their site include adding searchable listings of museum events, special interactive features and services, helping repositories keep their stories current and accessible to the widest possible audience, services for museum professionals (including facilitating contact between colleagues) and a one-stop vendor directory providing a full range of museum resources. This portal makes use of the Internet to provide smaller repositories with a structured and reputable outreach forum for reaching researchers and extends connectivity and resource awareness between cultural institutions.

Other professional portals also exist. The National Library of Medicine offers a directory of repositories that have medical collections. NCECHO (North Carolina
Exploring Cultural Heritage Online), a statewide portal, offers a database of subjects, collection strengths, and location among repositories in North Carolina, whether they have a web presence or not. NUCMUC (National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections), maintained by the Library of Congress, offers free-of-charge cooperative cataloging and resource guidance to archival institutions and researchers. RLG Cultural Materials, “the result of an unprecedented collaborative effort from an international alliance of RLG member institutions,” brings together primary source materials in high-quality digital form through a web interface. The downside of some high-quality portals is their availability. Some, like RLG, require subscriptions coordinated through larger academic institutions.

In addition to plentiful content, some portals include suggestions for reference etiquette and appropriate use of staff time, using links to learn about page credibility and more resources, and gathering specific name and date information prior to investing much time or money on your project. These kind of guidelines show that researchers are still learning the differences (and similarities) between online and in-person research.

For either in-person or remote research needs, public libraries may have specialized or integrated databases or subject guides to support the study of local history. Better resourced repositories may be located within or have a relationship with, a major college or university, which may have made efforts to catalog collections or create formal finding aids for the library public access catalog. Such entries in a library’s public access catalog are standardized (to cataloging standards, perhaps not those of archival metadata content standards) and are able to be shared across larger databases extending beyond that single institution.
Popular and frequently mentioned search engines and directories in local history research guides are Yahoo and Google. Yahoo provides a directory structure that offers researchers many choices to drill down to the type of history they wish to research.

Google also provides a directory but is better known for its search engine. “The Learning Center” of the National Genealogical Society (http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/edu.htm) provides instruction and recommendations on how to begin a search for primary materials online and how to follow through in-person at archival repositories. More significantly, the National Genealogical Society serves creators of web resources by providing guidelines called “Standards for Sharing Information with Others.”

The accessibility of material depends on researchers knowing of its existence, and it is the repository's responsibility to inform researchers of the collections in its custody (Association of College and Research Libraries: 1993). To fulfill this charge in the age of online research, repositories should establish web sites that do something beyond merely existing as a passive presence. Repositories cannot just expect people to connect to their sites, they must provide an online experience that reflects and extends the institution itself. Web site creators, when presenting an online public face for an archival repository, should incorporate elements of remote reference service.

In a review of cultural institutions’ web sites, Paul Scifleet comments that the earliest web sites developed by cultural institutions were passive and reflected the practice of the dominant community by providing simple brochures for information services. Unfortunately, many sites remain in this condition. It is the contextual information about a collection or object that distinguishes and values items held in cultural institutions (Scifleet: 1999). Online experiences supporting remote reference
should reflect the institution, deliver descriptive information, address distant users, facilitate access to important collections, and be continuously evaluated to be sure that they are providing the appropriate amount of timely information.

For researchers interested in a myriad of historical subjects, going online can be an important first step toward locating materials. Portals, databases, services, search engines, as well as the web of links between sites all help people connect with the resources and services of historical records repositories. With such variety available on the Internet, users have come to expect a no-nonsense presence in the online business environment.

Repositories can answer the needs of researchers by understanding that they, as businesses, will be serving an increasingly savvy clientele. Yet, although savvier, researchers are still faced with selecting quality sources and using strategies that will meet their needs for conducting archival research (Tibbo: 1995). It is up to repository staff to use their staff knowledge of user behavior, familiarity with other archival resources, command of digital projects or use of professional resources to create an online presence that satisfies today’s users’ needs. Despite disparate levels of funding, staff resources, and training, local records repositories need to learn to use the Internet to fulfill what is core to many of their missions: providing expertise about, and access to, historical records.

2.3 Repository Staff Resources

To provide the breadth and depth of information that users seek in today’s online world, archives staff will have to have web-savvy employees, adequate training to sustain a meaningful web presence or resources to pay someone else for these services.
Archivists are now charged with designing and shaping interfaces for navigating, exploring, and interpreting archives (Hedstrom: 2002). Smaller archives, with significantly lower numbers of professionals or paraprofessionals, must tackle the same tasks often with staff with very different education, experience, and lacking any technology training. For many employees where history or archives is not their primary employment background, learning new skills is necessary and may be uncomfortable, time-consuming or frightening (Tibbo: 1995). Various combinations of limitations in staffing and training could strain the quality—or presence at all—of a repository’s web site (Walch: 1998). For smaller repositories, staff turnover and irregularities in volunteer work force affect the continuity of program and technological advancement within the repository, particularly if volunteer competencies are derived from diluted professional standards (McKay: 1994). McKay also comments that the range of abilities among volunteers, the oversimplification of diluting professional standards, the special expertise held at the local level, and the risk of focusing on the limitations of volunteers all contribute to the complexity of establishing standards that help volunteer local historical societies identify and reach their fullest potential (1994).

Virtually all cultural history organizations have been expected to do more with less to continue offering benefits to the larger society. A major factor contributing to the “more with less” problem is the number of staff with a full-time or part time commitment to the repository and the training of staff. Fifty-five percent of historical societies are all volunteer organizations while only 21% have one or more full-time professional employees (Walch: 1998). Strikingly different is the composition of college and university archives: 86% have some professionals on staff and in 65% there is also some
support from paid nonprofessional personnel. Ultimately, COSHRC found that the number of paid staff rises in direct proportion to the size of the collections, with more than 90% of the largest repositories reporting some paid staff.

Location and relationship to a larger entity can affect staffing resources too. While historical society libraries are usually local history collections with special reference materials for society staff, large historical society libraries are more likely to offer full reference and research services to users. Small repositories have few professional staff and only limited access to their local history materials. Small museums are generally endowed with rich collections, often housing local history collections, but lack staff to assist with reference services (Phillips, 1995). Additionally, archival repositories in an academic environment may have benefits such as dedicated technical support, a training budget, and more than one person on staff to permit absences of another.

Training for nonprofessional archivists ranges from pamphlets on running a local historical society to major association support or mentoring. Several toolkits and guides for archivists are available online. The Archivists Resource Center provides Web-based Training for Archivists and Other Historical Record Keepers (http://www.coshrc.org/arc/webeducation/) and General Web Development Tools (http://www.coshrc.org/arc/webeducation/webdevel.htm). The Archives Resource Center was developed by the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators in response to the call for a Web-based information clearinghouse, which was the highest priority in the Action Agenda developed at the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE). The Archivist’s Toolkit (http://aabc.bc.ca/toolkit.html), a compendium of
online resources on topics like reference service, physical maintenance of archival
collections, retention schedules, and managing digitization projects. NC ECHO
(www.ncecho.org), one of the first to build a statewide framework for supporting
digitization needs of state cultural history repositories, provides a number of workshops.
Recent NC ECHO offerings include: IT training for Practicing Archivists, Designing
Usable Websites, and Encoded Archival Description. Project members collaborate with
societies like the Society of American Archivists and the National Historical Publications
and Records Commission. Archival workshops show up most often as the type of training
received by staff, taken by 22% of the total and 36% of the academic repositories’ staff.
Eighteen percent of the total repositories reported staff having no specialized training
(COSHRC: 2002).

The greatest concentration of archives employees with formal training is found in
the larger institutions. More than half of the major repositories have staff with graduate
degrees in history or library science. Academic repositories staff have library science
degrees in about 46% of cases while only 32% report history degrees among their paid
staff. Skills learned during a graduate degree in archival or library science, on the job or a
combination of both include providing accessible sources and facilities, utilizing
appropriate reference interviewing skills, evaluating the integrity of resources,
constructing appropriate metadata for a variety of formats, using tools like catalogs,
indices, and databases to discover sources.

While the application of these best practices can be learned on the job, the culture,
literature and framework for their understanding may be most often fully realized during
graduate-level courses (Cox: 1998). While many skills will be expanded and refined
during employment in professional positions, archival educators opine that too much of a professional’s initial archival education is unstructured, and that piecemeal training and uneven prerequisites do not always guarantee the solid research skills and training needed to fulfill professional advancement potential. Professionals at the 1999 annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists forum were more interested in archival training being situated within library science programs (rather than in history programs), accentuating a shift toward teaching information management and technical skills and less focus on the historical, heritage, and cultural elements of archives (Cook: 2000).

Professional associations play a key role in archival work by facilitating these connections, which in turn help maximize scarce resources and ultimately help everyone in the field work cooperatively to improve the care of historical records. Professional development may also be related to archival web resources: users express frustration because resources are scattered all over the web and there is no one point of entry, there is not enough connectivity between web sites. These factors affect the ways that archival staff can learn to maximize their own resources through tools that promote efficiency or best practices in web development and presentation of resources. (COSHRC: 2002). As individuals in different types of repositories turn to so many different venues for assistance and training, the national, regional, and state-level associations and government agencies that provide educational services must continue to collaborate in developing programs and coordinate their schedules to maximize resources. (Walch: 1998).¹ To address archival education issues at the national level, the Council of State

¹ An education needs survey, A*CENSUS (Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the U.S.), is currently being conducted by the Society of American Archivists to define the universe of archivists currently in the workforce, determine the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs now and in the
Historical Records Coordinators developed the Archives Resource Center. Creating this Web-based education and training information clearinghouse was the highest priority in the Action Agenda developed at the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE).

In addition to archival education, National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE), archivist professionals discussed access to archival education resources online. The meeting was designed “to guide all of the organizations, individually and collectively, as they continue to work to improve the accessibility, content, and quality of education and information services for the historical records community.” The NFACE findings reflect archivists’ observations about learning how to use the web for facilitating access to collections. A remarkable variety of Web-based resources exist to help archivists, however:

- Users expressed great frustration because resources are scattered all over the Web and there is no one point of entry.
- There is not enough connectivity among archival websites
- Some of the most useful tools are products of individual initiative with no guarantee of long-term institutional support. They could easily disappear.
- Resource providers devote insufficient attention to promoting their sites so that many users remain unaware of what is available.
- It can be difficult to identify which sources of information are most trustworthy, especially for newcomers to the field.
- Website developers need to pay more attention to best practices for usability and accessibility. (Council of State Historical Records Coordinators: 2002)

A study of the relationship between preservation activities, archival repository funding, and information availability was conducted by Paul Conway in 1991. Conway found that meaningful patterns do exist between the level of ongoing preservation in the future, and provide graduate and continuing education programs with data to support recruitment and training of new archivists.
repository and the availability of information and advice about preservation issues. Preservation activities are likely to be undertaken by larger and better-funded repositories than by smaller units, no matter how well informed the small group was. Further, findings indicated that archives associated with government agencies were consistently above average on preservation planning and implementation. Constraints in staff time, monetary resources and proximity to larger institutions hindered the execution of preservation activities, no matter how able the small group.

Archivists recognize that there are disparate levels of ability and diligence on creating a web presence that works for archival professionals, let alone paraprofessionals or volunteers who need to learn skills to crate or maintain an online presence. Whatever the training, it is necessary for archivists to continue to learn new skills both for their repository to maintain and improve services, and for their business practices to be that of modern archives. Volunteer-staffed archival repositories should be exposed to training that will encourage expertise at the local level. A simplification of professional standards for care and management of archival repositories will not do for non-professionally staffed repositories. Standard training in ethics, access and processing should be as complex on the volunteer level as the professional level (Britton and Britton: 1994 and McKay1994). Staff must therefore put forth initial solid efforts to create access tools, as their re-creation costs can be prohibitive. Although challenging, it is possible to harness the right tools and technical training to maximize staff abilities for the purpose of providing appropriate services to the archival community.

2.4 Web Design Fundamentals and Recommendations
Sue Ann Cody’s survey of museum web sites, “Historical Museums on the World Wide Web: An Exploration and Critical Analysis,” found that even the smallest museums can establish a web presence at relatively little expense. Although they may not have the staff resources to devote to extensive online exhibitions, museums of all sizes and types can make up-to-date information available via the Internet. Cody also notes that there are more possibilities for repositories with a more robust staff. These larger or well-staffed museums are more likely to provide searchable databases, use the same artifact in different contexts, and provide extensive full-text writings linked to the exhibit. Cody’s findings break web presence into three levels. The first level is “brochure-like,” which provides users the same point of entry as a basic print publication that would be made available to visitors on-site. The second level is visual images with selected artifacts and related full-text documents. Finally, the third stage provides an interactive or multi-media experience for the user in addition to the visitor-ready information and the static full-text documents of the first two stages (Cody: 1997). No matter what type of business, placing customer service needs at the center of one’s web strategy will guarantee that a site is easy to use, and thus has a major advantage over its competitors (Nielsen: 2000). Both content and functionality are integrally important to a web site—one without the other will affect how much information a user is able to gather from a site.

Content is the focus of the web user’s attention and serves to both express ideas of a group, institution or agency, and to solve problems. But, attention to content can be compromised when the structure and construction of a page contains distractions like too much information, poor navigation or inaccessible features. For example, very nice-looking but meaningless sites, writing in the same prose used for non-web content,
disregarding the power of properly linking their site to other sites may cause users to lose interest, miss paths to key information, and ultimately move on (Nielsen: 2000).

The widely recognized Yale University *Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites* provides an online guide for creating web sites that meet requirements for good design, accessibility, and content. The Yale guidelines include the above-mentioned recommendations in a concise, authoritative source. Basic elements build the beginning of an identity for the repository’s web site. The presence of the above web site design elements show evidence of thoughtfully arranged and accessible sites that follow standard guidelines for construction. Well-constructed archival web sites will be useful and appealing and can provide great amount of information to many users with little effort.

2.4.1 Structure and Construction Elements

Web pages should make the process of seeking information easy and as distraction-free as possible for users. Nielsen, Lynch and Horton, Burbules, Fleming, Niederst and others, along with the NC ECHO web design guide suggest many guidelines for creating Internet site which are navigationally sound, attractive, and convenient for browsing and scanning. The following six broad recommendations are applicable to many different types of businesses, including libraries and archival repositories.

*General Recommendation 1: Web site pages should be constructed so that their pages are quick to load and the most important information is located at the top of pages.*

Users respond most immediately to information that appears first on a page. Even if the full page takes a bit longer to load, it matters that there is already some information that the user can act on. Jakob Nielsen suggest that the content of the top of the first page be
readily visible, as well as the alternate names of images. Layout data should be properly included (like height and width attributes), and tables should be simple (Nielsen: 2000). While a page is loading, the page’s useful information is present in the top four inches. A page that takes a long time to load, doesn't fit on the average reader's screen, and offers little or no functionality will repel most web users (Lynch and Horton, 2002). Even if users are willing to scroll down a page, many will make their selection from whatever options appear on the part of the page that is visible without scrolling. Generally, web authors should make pages relatively short so that the most important links and text will be visible without any scrolling (Nielsen: 2000).

*General Recommendation 2: Links within web sites should make contextual sense.* One of the most significant functions of the Internet is to facilitate linking between resources. Text signifying a link text should be unique and descriptive. The most effective and useful links are presented in context during the natural flow of a sentence. Accordingly, the wording of any links should be closely related to the subject of the linked page as well (Price, 2002). Expressions like “click here” or other non-descriptive “links to sites” interrupt the flow of a page’s content. Color for visited and unvisited links should be consistent throughout a site. Color inconsistencies will lead some users to select the same link option continuously, while others may perceive that they have visited all possible links and leave the site altogether (Nielsen: 2000).

*General Recommendation 3: Links from the web site should be thoughtfully selected and highly relevant in order to lend to site credibility.* It is the conscientious web designer’s duty to give users the best links to the most valuable information. “By carefully selecting good external sites to link to, you leverage the work done by millions
of content creators around the world.” (Nielsen: 2000.) Since users typically only make time to visit about 10% of links they encounter, it is a better service to provide small number of highly relevant links. (Nielsen: 2000).

Links to sites with known reliable information sources can both establish a web of relevant sources and reassure searchers that the sources they have encountered are indeed authoritative (Walthen: 2002). Evaluating a link’s credibility successfully demands a user to question the connections that other sites provide, and to interrogate what is or is not there. Users’ perception of their own web searching success is due in large part to a site’s credibility (Burbules: 1996, Walthen: 2002). For archives, the Web offers a means of representing information about archival holdings, arrangement or description. Content can be linked to other archives’ web sites to form broader multi-institutional archival resources available online for researchers (Piché: 1998).

General Recommendation 4: Writing for web sites should be succinct in content and scannable in form, utilizing multiple pages as appropriate. Sites should not be contained to one long page. Good writing on web sites can mean the difference between users deciding to go further into a site or abandoning it for a site that is more user-friendly. Jacob Nielsen’s three main guidelines for writing for the web are: be succinct, write for scannability, and split large amounts of information. Succinctness, wording, and page format all work together to provide information expeditiously in the small space of a web page (Price, 2002). Placement and proper division of information is more important than physical proximity of components: single page sites are not a sufficient structuring mechanism (Nielsen: 2000).
Users will incorporate many factors into their ultimate decision to spend time browsing a web site, but the decision is usually made quickly, with a scan of the first loaded page or home page of the site. (Nielsen: 2000). Scannability can be improved by structuring parts of page with heading and subheading, using bulleted lists and highlighting and emphasis to catch a user’s attention. Short blurbs and keywords will also grab the attention of the user. Users can scan for keywords, sentences and paragraphs of interest while skipping over parts of text that seem less relevant to their search (NC ECHO: 2001, Nielsen: 2000, W3C, 1999).

Web authors do not need to sacrifice depth of content for succinctness. Non-essential or secondary pages can be made available through a link without penalizing users who don’t care to see them right away. Further, linked pages should not simply continue a long linear story into multiple pages, but should split information into coherent chunks. Researchers may choose to further investigate these chunks. With the ability to ignore images, proceed in a nonlinear order, and skip over content, the structure and length of a complex presentation are controlled by the researcher’s preferences (Nielsen: 2000).

General Recommendation 5: *Web sites should be easily navigable.* The ease of getting around a site can be improved by providing a consistent homepage reference, short titles on all pages, and logically ordered information. With these basics in place, the strengthened navigation will improve the experience of the user.

It is up to the page creator to give users direction and context when they land at a site. Users may not always enter a site via the home page, but they will very likely click on the site’s “home” button or equivalent to begin to orient themselves to the pages. A
user’s current location should available at two different levels: relative to the web as a whole and relative to the site’s structure. This can be accomplished by placing a clickable logo on the page, using “home” links, employing a site search tool or sitemap. (Price: 2002, W3C: 1999, Nielsen: 2000). Further recommendations call for the URL to appear on the bottom of each page, along with the date, an e-mail address for concerns about the page or site. At the very least, a name and logo should appear on every page. These recommendations are especially helpful in locating a site when users have only a paper printout of a page (Price: 2002).

General Recommendation 6. Web sites should be accessible for users with speech, motor, auditory, and cognitive disabilities. The WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative) guidelines put forth by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guide web authors on site construction with best practice recommendations. The WC3’s commitment to lead the Web to its full potential includes promoting a high degree of usability for people with disabilities. Recommendations include providing a text equivalent for every non-text element, making pages style-sheet free, navigation independent of color, and using the clearest and simplest language appropriate for a site's content. Until machines can automatically read aloud the text equivalent of a visual track, web authors should provide an auditory description of the important information of the visual track of a multimedia presentation or link to an equivalent non-multimedia site. For users with disabilities, images used on the site should be labeled with alternate text or “alt text,” which allows either a reader to “mouse over” the image to read the label or a machine reading device to read aloud the content of the image presented on the page. (W3C: 1999). Even if authors cannot design fully accessible sites, they still have the responsibility to use as many
accessibility measures as possible (Nielsen: 2000). With the variety of information available a page should provide useful information in a natural hierarchy and visually appealing format. (Lynch and Horton, 2002).

2.4.2 General Business Content Elements

The general business content elements included in this study are already widely implemented among established business, including libraries and archives. Elements of general business content include providing hours of operation, easy-to-locate contact information, current information, and a concise mission statement. With the addition of highly selective links and succinctness from the General Recommendations for Structure and Construction section above, the General Business Content elements together provide basic information to searchers about the online domain in which they are present.

2.4.3 Archival-Specific Content Elements

In their writings about using the Internet to do archival research in records repositories, Cody, Menne-Haritz, Piché and the bring forth recommendations which for three broad categories, which each contain several elements concerning metadata, archival web space, customer service functions and archival literacy. The following four broad recommendations are applicable to archival and other research-oriented information provider web sites.

Archival Recommendation 1: For increased likelihood of discovery, use metadata within site construction. “Many archivists now believe that mounting finding aids on the Web makes them instantly, constantly, and consistently available to anyone with Internet access” (Tibbo and Meho: 2001). Since users are likely to view only the first screen
worth of results, which may not give best matches the most prominence, it is necessary to
learn about factors influencing user retrieval (Price: 2002). Description of online content
can be facilitated through the use of metadata. Plainly, metadata is “structured
information that describes and/or allows us to find, manage, control, understand, or
preserve other information over time” (Cunningham: 2001). Located in the source code
for web pages is designated space for metadata for the content of web pages. Metadata
may include descriptive information such as the person or organization responsible for
the page, phrases and key words about the site or page, an overview paragraph of the site,
date of last update, programming or code creation methods used, and other technical
notes about the pages or site that, among other things, allow a search engine to index it.
The better a web site author uses designated space outside of the body content of a web
page to describes a page in its meta-data and in submissions to web search engines, the
more likely a page is to be indexed (Price: 2002).

A search engine will index a web site either by “crawling” the web looking for
new sites or after processing a web author’s request for a page to be listed in the index.
Web site authors can send the page address and descriptive information to be sent to the
search engine company to request that their site be added to the directory. Crawler-based
search engines (search engine robots that methodically examine key words, headings, and
descriptive information contained in both the code and text) are more likely to find a site
and add it to their listings for free (Sullivan, 2002 and UC Berkeley Library, 2002). Meta-descriptions are most effective when written in the form of a short abstract, with most
important terms in the beginning. Spiders who read meta-descriptions will give these
short abstracts more weight than meta-keywords. To avoid deceptive listings, spiders
Archival Recommendation 2: Users should know they have entered into archival web space. Hedstrom (2002) writes about trends and challenges in archives and remote access. First, the transition from physical to remote access will profoundly reorient interactions between users of archives, archival institutions and their staff. Second, common interfaces (like search engines) permit users to search across archival holdings, regardless of which repository has physical custody of materials. Because of the myriad of results available from one online search, archivists will be expected to help searchers locate materials beyond their own archive. This may include materials that are described online, but not housed within an archival institution. The third trend concerns web browsers and archival space. Because web browsers themselves do not distinguish archival materials from any other type of materials, archivists must consider the necessity of creating archival spaces to differentiate types of materials. While archival spaces exist at a growing number of institutions, “without a clear sense of which distinguishing features of archival documents, archivists will not be able to design a new interface that tells users at the outset that they have entered into archival domain.”

Archival Recommendation 3: Sites should include archives-specific customer service functions. Archivists must possess a thorough understanding of the kinds of information researchers seek in archives, the types of terms they use in formulating questions, and the variety of tasks they carry out as they do research in an archives (Duff: 2001). One focus group revealed that library researchers desired one-stop portal shopping with like information grouped together, research-oriented news, reliable links and
databases, consistency and predictability in navigation, an immediate personal response
to inquiries, intuitive terminology (instead of vague “information,” which could mean
databases or hours open), and a frequently asked questions section (Crowley et al. 2002).
For archives and libraries alike, this especially means getting to know the body of
researchers who utilize the collections anticipating drill-down questions and providing
client-appropriate interactions. Reference and customer service options may include
publication and reproduction conditions, fees, access, scope of collections, finding aids or
exhibits, forms or donor information. Some business-oriented services may include the:
presence of a mission statement, staff directory, purchasing opportunities, relationship
with a larger entity, direct contact information, and the overall timeliness of the
information on the site.

Archival Recommendation 4: An archival repository’s site should contribute to
archival literacy. Archival repository sites have contributed to users’ archival literacy
skills by adding reference and instructional elements to existing basic customer service
elements. Some archival sites do provide instruction on how to conduct research in
archival repositories, how to conduct research at their particular repository, how to work
with primary source materials or how to expand search results. As the number of
materials and repositories grows, access should also make better-informed consumers
(Tibbo: 1995). Better-informed archival consumers will have the skills to evaluate
resources, understand key concepts, and familiarity with tools available to expand or
narrow their searches (like finding aids and databases).

Well-constructed and well-described web sites providing online access to
collection descriptions, general business information, and customer service functions will
enable users to become better prepared for archival research at the time of contact with a repository. Sites that expand with both users’ needs and staff training will contribute to the established network of high-quality archival information sources put forth by regional associations, professional organizations, library groups, and consortia.

3: Methodology

3.1 Choosing the Sample

This study examines the presence and quality of web sites of a sample of local history repositories in the United States. Using content analysis methodology, this study examines business-related content, archival space-specific content, and structure and construction elements to evaluate quality of presence online. The content of information presented in sites was compared to that recommended by best practices or guidelines for libraries, museums, and archives as discussed in the Literature Review section. Structure and construction elements in these sites were compared to best practices or guidelines recommended by web design authorities. This study will further examine the employee and volunteer staffing profiles of selected repositories to ascertain if there are similarities in those repositories’ Internet presence or site quality. The examination of web sites took place over a one-week period in October 2004. All content evaluated was present as part of the web site at that time.

One source known for presenting static information about repositories and providing an even snapshot of their collection foci and repository characteristics is the American Association of State and Local Historical Societies’ Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada (2002). Each entry in the directory provides repository-reported information including staffing, collection types, and size of
historical societies, libraries, cultural institutions, special collections, and archives in the United States and Canada.  

This study focused on repositories in the Community/State History section of the directory. To be included in this directory, repositories answered a detailed survey, categorizing themselves based on a multiple choice list of terms like historic site, research center, genealogical society, historical society, and alliance of historical agencies. While the *Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada* made efforts to retain mostly those institutions that were non-profit and non-commercial and discard those in pursuit of free advertising, the organization acknowledged that there might be accuracy issues due to their lack of fact checking. Over the course of this study, repository-specific information in the *Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada* was compared to repository web sites. On occasion, the content of the web site did not closely match the repository description found in the directory. This study assumed that the information found online was more current, however, discussion of the discord observed between both sources of information is beyond the scope of this study.

This study used a random number list to generate one hundred four-digit numbers, each corresponding to the entry identification code of a different repository in the Community/State History section. Repositories were then chosen from a list of 5,280 repositories in the United States and Canada. Repositories in Canada were excluded from

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2 The information presented in the American Association of State and Local Historical Societies’ *Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada* (2002) was wholly incompatible with the types of businesses described on web sites. On a few occasions, descriptions of historical sites or museums corresponded to country clubs, resorts, and vacation homes. While such businesses were kept in the study because of merits acknowledged by the editors of the *Directory*, the evaluation of these sites based on characteristics appropriate for historical records repositories was altogether unfavorable.
selection, and selection continued until one hundred United States repositories were identified. Each repository's listing included several descriptive components: entry identification code, state, city, name of repository, street address, type of organization, major periods of collections (or description of collections), hours and days open to the public, major programs, type of agency, year founded, governing authority, number of full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff, number of dues-paying members, and major publication titles. A list of all repositories selected for this study can be found in Appendix A.1: Repositories Included in the Study.

3.2 Locating Web Sites

The Google search engine was employed to search online for web sites of historical repositories. For each repository, the first term used for searching Google was the quoted name phrase of the repository as listed in the Directory of Historical Societies in the United States and Canada. If the quoted name phrase was unsuccessful, then the city and state were added to the search. Finally, as a last result, quotation marks were removed from phrases and the words became part of a free text search. Additionally, MuseumsUSA, a directory of museums and archives, (http://www.museumsusa.org/about.asp), was consulted for contact information to further check for a web site address.

All directory repository listings were grouped together according to major collection strengths as stated in the Directory of State and Local Historical Societies in the United States and Canada or inferred from their web site. The categories were: historical society or local history collection, research library, genealogical society or museum. Research library repositories are listed in the directory as Library and/or
Archives, and Research Center. They contain manuscript materials, corporate archives, war history collections, presidential libraries or act as official repositories for city or county materials. Repositories specifically connected with colleges or universities are included in this classification. Historical societies or local history collections are listed in the directory as Historical Society, Historic Preservation Agency or Heritage Area. According to their description, they contain primary research material supporting study of the local community. Genealogical societies are defined in the directory as Genealogical Society. Contains primary or secondary materials that support family research (family trees, cemetery records, immigration records, and collected family histories). Museums, historic homes or site attractions are listed in the directory as Art Museum, History Museum, House Museum, Historic Site, State Park, Garden or Living History/Outdoor Museum. Railroads depots and steamboats (acting as the museum) are included in this classification. These repositories aim to preserve homesteads and city buildings, often displaying collections, and offering guided tours. In some cases these repositories appeared to have no physical research materials, but for this study, but were not excluded.

3.3 Definitions

3.3.1 Site Location Definitions

Google searches resulted in four categories for Internet presence: no site, portal site, low content, and good content. A repository was categorized as having no site after all search combinations were exhausted and a site was not located. Institutions with no web presence at all were put into the category of “no web site”. However, “no site” is not quite the same as “no Internet presence”.
Some searches resulted in many “hits” among a variety of domains beyond the repositories themselves, usually leading to a portal-like presence such as Online Highways, MuseumsUSA, USGenWeb, and RootsWeb. Sites within portals like Online Highways (http://www.onlinehighways.com) results were discarded because they contained listings which were brief, commercial, and assembled for the purpose of providing tourism information to web surfers. Online Highways states of its selections: “To qualify for inclusion, a business or point of interest should be worth advance planning and for at least some people, making a special side trip.” Repository descriptions are included based on subjective Online Highways author opinions, rather than on their merits as an historical research resource.

Like Online Highways, MuseumsUSA provides a directory-type listing with some contact information. MuseumsUSA also categorizes repositories by type and allows for search capabilities across repository listings. Although the intent is to encourage archival research literacy, Online Highways is still a portal containing some information culled by a third party. For this study, repositories with only a presence in Online Highways or MuseumsUSA were categorized as having “no site”.

The USGenWeb Project (http://www.usgenweb.com/) provides space to document historical research projects and descriptions of collected materials, but exists more for information exchange between researchers that a place to gain archival literacy. RootsWeb (http://www.rootsweb.com/), “the oldest and largest FREE genealogy site, supported by Ancestry.com,” provide free or low-cost hosting for repository web sites. Additionally, RootsWeb provides space, guides, templates for repository staff wishing to create a site, as well as substantial contextual information for repository staff and
researchers (portions of RootsWeb require a subscription after a 14-day trial period.) The USGenWeb Project relies on web space and technical support from RootsWeb. For this study, searches for repositories resulting in RootsWeb sites as a primary web presence were retained because they contain sites created by repository staff.

3.3.2 Site Content Definitions

Sites presenting a minimal amount of useful information were characterized as low content or brochure-like. One-page sites were also characterized as presenting a minimal amount of information. A site of this type included perhaps a phone number and street address, hours, title of repository, one image, a statement about the collection or a listing of officers. While this information is certainly useful, the overall content of the site does not extend beyond that of a moderately informative brochure, nor does it capitalize on the Internet as a public relation presence. Regardless of site size, deficiency in content was the deciding factor to characterize a site as a one-page, low content or brochure-like.

Good content sites contained useful information comparable to what has been recommended by best practices or guidelines for library, museum or archival sites on the Internet. Some best practices and guidelines advocate for inclusion of information that is above and beyond what could be found in a brief print brochure. Sites will be evaluated for business-related general content (pertaining to organization and basic information about the repository as a business); and archives-specific content (pertaining to the use of a repository for accessing primary research materials). A conclusion of “good content” will be based on the experience of viewing many web sites over the course of the study and the list of content elements.
3.3.3 Structure and Construction Definitions

The structure of sites was evaluated based on recommendations from web style guides and web page creation tutorials. Navigation and color scheme were evaluated for their look and feel in presenting research information to users. Sites with unclear navigation schemes (including vague terms for navigating) or those with two versions of the same page present in a site would be evaluated negatively for structure. Metadata was observed by opening the source code of a repository’s index page and scanning for both meta-description and meta-keyword tag contents. For metadata to be considered good quality, both the keywords and brief site description had to be present and accurately represent the content of the site. Finally, quickness to load was evaluated by comparing the loading time of sites selected for this study.

3.4 Elements Studied

For business-related general content elements included in this study, recommendations and guidelines largely came from literature regarding effective web sites for libraries, museums, and archives and general business Internet presence guides.

The following questions were considered during this part of the evaluation:

- Are hours of operation are stated?
- Is general contact info present is easy to find?
- Are links to related resources thoughtful and highly selective?
- Is important information is located at the top of the index page?
- Is the content is presented in a logical fashion?
- Does the site have a “last updated” date present?
• Is there is a mission statement present?
• If there is a relationship to a larger governing entity, is this clearly stated?

To evaluate “Archives-specific content”, the following questions were considered:

• Is the online domain unique to the archival institution?
• Does the site contain user instruction or orientations to promote or contribute to archival literacy?
• Is there a statement of fees charged for services?
• Is a photocopy or reproduction policy stated?
• Are formats of collection materials stated?
• Are access restrictions stated?
• Are major subjects of collections stated?
• Is there a reference request form?
• Are there a search collections or search site capabilities?
• Are there finding aids present? Are any encoded in EAD?

Questions considered in the evaluation of the site structure and construction included the following:

• Are there text "alt" tags for images?
• Are pages quick to load?
• Are pages within the site succinct and scannable?
• Is there appropriate metadata in the pages’ source code?
• Is there a user-friendly navigation scheme?
• Is there a visually appealing color scheme?
A spreadsheet was used for tracking the presence and quality of web site elements (See Appendix A.2: Survey). Elements were rated as “better”, “average”, “worse” (than other sites studied) or “absent”. Elements rated “better” or “average” contributed to an overall positive impression. Elements rated “worse” or “absent” contributed to an overall negative impression. For some elements where an answer may be “yes” or “no”, “yes” corresponded to a positive rating and “no” correspondence to a negative rating.

4: Findings

4.1 Type and Location of Repositories

This survey of one hundred historical records repositories found that web sites were present for seventy-three repositories. Of the seventy-three repositories, the type of repositories that most frequently had an Internet presence was historical societies (and local history collections (49%) and museums, including historic homes, history museums, site attractions or historical activities (42%). This study also examined web sites of two other types of repositories: research libraries and genealogical societies or genealogical research centers, which comprised a much smaller part of the sample (about 8%).

Randomly selected repositories were found to be located throughout the United States, but had a definite concentration in the northeastern part of the country. This could be due to historical societies and records repositories taking root at these places earlier in the country’s history. Repositories were not all located within metropolitan areas. While there were some well-known repositories randomly selected to be included in this study, only about ten of them were located in either capitals or major cities in their state.

Each historical records repository is undoubtedly unique in its collections, policies, location, and activities. As unique entities, there are a myriad of possibilities for
relationships, whether managerial or financial in support. Over the course of this study, three types of governing agencies were discovered: Municipal (including city, county or state governments), Institutions (both academic and library), and Major Societies of Foundations. The relationships discovered were most often explicitly stated within a repository’s web site. Acknowledgements of ownership, policy creation, operational continuity, management, shared staffing or resources were typically observed. This study did examine all linked pages, actively searching for evidence of this relationship. Of repositories with web sites, a total of twenty-four were found to have relationships with larger governing entities. Of the repositories with the ten best web sites, there were only three discernable related governing entities: two municipalities and one academic institution. Municipalities were the most common governing entity overall, accounting for fourteen out of twenty-four governing entities. For a list the ten best repositories, see Appendix A.3: List of Repositories with Ten Best Web Sites.

Eighty-six percent of college and university archives have some professionals on staff and 65% have some support from paid nonprofessional personnel (Walch: 1988). As such, there is a presumption that that those college and university archives are benefiting from typical college and university infrastructure like established staff descriptions and work plans, management directives, a moderate budget that meets their operating needs, perhaps an IT specialist or consultant nearby or even directives that guide them to the next service level. While repositories connected to larger entities may have access to a wealth of resources, this study did not find any discernable benefits of these connections.

4.2 Repository Staffing Profiles
For the average numbers of staff working at all one hundred repositories examined in this study, part-time and volunteer employees are about evenly represented. The average total for workers at all repositories (with or without websites) is about forty-six. The average number of part-time workers for all repositories is about five. Full-time employees account for about three workers. There were sixteen repositories that reported having one hundred or more volunteers. (Two repositories with web sites reported having over 700 volunteers, one of which is included in the ten best repositories. By removing those two outliers, the average number of volunteers was adjusted to reflect only those repositories with 0-285 volunteers.)

An examination of the staffing profiles of repositories with web sites revealed a difference in the number of employees at volunteer, full-time, and part-time levels. The difference in staffing between repositories with web sites and those without web sites is notable. Of the seventy-three repositories with web sites, there are on average, about 6.35 more volunteers and 3.27 more full-time staff than repositories without web sites. However, there were about the same number of part time staff in all repositories sampled, whether or not they had a web site.

Figure 1. Summary of Staff Profiles for Repositories, Grouped by Presence of Web Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Repository</th>
<th>Average Number of Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repositories Without Web</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites</td>
<td>33.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repositories With Web Sites</td>
<td>40.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although it was outside of the scope of this study to determine which employees put how much time into developing and maintaining web resources, it is highly possible
that the more staff there are, the chance is there is a greater pool of skills and probably greater variety in work functions. Some of those functions and skills may be related to the repository’s online presence. However, with smaller repositories, staff is probably not hired to specifically manage an Internet presence. There are many other things in the repository that need to be done, like processing, collection development, and helping patrons. Experience and efficiency in those “other” areas may be more attractive to the person making hiring decisions for that repository.

While results do not show number of hours worked, there are definitely more staff hours occupied by full-time employees at repositories with web sites. Perhaps a reflection of the distribution of those work hours and skills, the ten best websites (of seventy-three surveyed) have on average 39.3 more volunteers and 5.3 more full-time staff than repositories without web sites. Part-time staffing remains about the same.

**Figure 2. Summary of Staff Profiles for Repositories, Grouped by Quality of Web Site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Repository</th>
<th>Average Number of Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Repositories</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Best Repositories</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 **Discussion of Sites with High-Quality Content**

Of the seventy-three web sites surveyed, ten of those web sites presented high-quality content within a site that was fairly structurally sounds and appropriate for presenting archival-specific information to online researchers. In all, forty-three, or 59%, of all web sites surveyed contained high-quality content. A list of the elements of
Archival-Specific content investigated, examples of commendable content, and discussion follows. See Appendices A.4: Percentage of Sites Employing Archives-Specific Content Elements, A.5: Percentage of Sites Employing Business-Related General Content Elements, and A.6 Percentage of Sites Employing General Structure and Construction Elements for a summary of element comparison between all web sites in the survey.

**Is the online domain unique to the archival institution?** All repositories included in the list of the top ten web sites do make use of vocabularies, images, and arrangements that are unique to both archives and to that particular repository. An especially unique presence belongs to the Maine Maritime Museum (Bath, ME). Their site includes a tantalizing section of writings by the curator, called “Notes from the Orlop: A Registrar's Ramble.” This section provides an insider’s commentary on the process of acquisition and historical research. Recent *Orlop* editions include writings about marginalia on all types of seafaring equipment from the past two centuries and life preservers, and seafaring. The *Orlop*’s curator author writes, “Welcome to a place where can be found curiosities from our store rooms that may surprise you with their diversity. Such revelations are part of the delight of my daily business among the collections.”

**Does the site contain user instruction or orientations to promote archival literacy?** Nine of the ten best repositories contributed to archival literacy through providing some directions on how to begin research in their repository, describing other types of resources for discovering historical research resources or defining primary research materials. The most complete example of this can be found within the Waseca County Historical Society (Waseca, MN). A portion of their explanation entitled “What is
an archive?" includes this definition, which provides definitions of the various forms of archive:

An archive is a collection of unpublished documents and other materials preserved for research use. An archive is a place where one-of-a-kind materials are kept. An archive collects, arranges, describes, and preserves records and papers of individuals, businesses, organizations, and institutions. An archive documents all aspects of society.

The remaining description of “What is an archive?” includes explanations of what happens to archival donations, lists nine archival classification categories, and explains why archival materials do not circulate.

The web site of the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History (Kennesaw, GA) provides an extensive eighteen-point set of guidelines for researchers in the Archives section of their site under “Procedures for Use of the Collections.” This section includes registration requirements, handling of materials, behavior in the reading room, and publication limitations. These procedures are very much like those observed at archives of academic institutions.

Is there a statement of fees charged for services? The Maine maritime Museum explains charges based on patron type: “There is no charge for brief answers, but for responses that take more than 15 minutes there is a minimum charge of $20. There is no charge for responses to members of Maine Maritime Museum, students, representatives of the press, and other museums and historical societies.” Other service descriptions for photographs, publishing, and duplication contain brief statements reminding users to expect fees for certain extended services.
The Tioga County Historical Society (Oswego, NY) explains their research policies depending on staff availability. Similar statements, especially concerning genealogical research, were observed over the course of the survey.

Volunteer genealogists respond to requests by mail only— for a fee of $25 for a two-hour research. All requests are handled in the order in which they are received and response time depends upon volume and volunteer availability. All responses are made in writing. Please provide all pertinent information including your full name and address to ensure thorough research and response.

Is a photocopy or reproduction policy stated? Maine Maritime Museum provides service descriptions for photographs, publishing, and duplication. Each description for a type of service contains a brief statement reminding users to expect fees for certain extended services. Such remarks were typical of sites that included any information at all. The most outstanding policies on photocopying and reproduction were found within the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History’s Archives section under “Duplication Services.” The museum provides a detailed price list of services based on size, desired format, and whether the user is a personal, commercial or non-profit patron.

Are formats of collection materials stated? Of all seventy-three sites examined, each of the ten best repositories did describe the format of materials available in their collections. By accurately describing collections, repositories will help researchers to develop a path for research and learn the vocabulary of research in primary materials, a detailed example of description of materials was found on the web site of the City of Rogers History Museum Site (Rogers, AR):

- Photographic images and postcards, including many important turn-of-the-20th-century scenes of early Rogers businesses, houses, people, events, and the Frisco Railroad;
• Archival materials, including documents, maps, blueprints, club records, books, newspapers, magazines, and programs providing important details of the area’s history;

• Flat textiles, quilts, costumes, and accessories, characterizing both typical and unique examples of Victorian fashion and industry, many of which were made or used locally;

• Furniture and household items, the majority of which create the scene of early Rogers middle-class home life in the Museum’s historic 1895 Hawkins House; and

• Paintings, drawings, and posters, many depicting Rogers subjects and scenes, including a large collection produced by local artist Elsie Mistie Sterling.

**Are access restrictions stated?** Collection access restrictions, when present, are generally brief. The Tioga County Historical Society’s web page does address restrictions on days permitted for in-person research, advance notice needed, and potential restrictions due to material conditions, legal issues, confidentiality, and donor requirements. This section also includes a statement, “Note: It is the researchers responsibility to cite their sources,” but fails to provide any guidance on how to properly cite materials and whether any may be reproduced for publication or are restricted to personal use.

**Are major subjects of collections stated?** Each of the top ten repositories included some description of major contents present in their collections. The Brookfield Museum (Brookfield, CT) lists their offerings by format of material and major subject. Books, videos, digitized collections, vertical files, newspapers, books and periodicals include information on home life, emigrants, genealogy, colonial life, Quakers, civil war, schools, bone china, and quilts from Brookfield, CT and surrounding towns.
The Des Moines Historical Museum (WA) offers a narrative about its collection strengths and highlights:

These objects and pictures describe historical events, work, entertainment, and everyday living from homestead dates in the 1870s to the present. See the tools and toys people really used when Des Moines was too small and remote to have electricity, bus service or shopping malls. Then move on to modern times, when power and the automobiles [sic] brought faster communication, mobility, and emergency services...

While collection subjects were not explicitly listed in forms like a catalog record or complex guide to collections, it was possible to grasp collection foci in many of the repositories surveyed.

Is there a reference request form? All of the top ten repositories offered an email address as part of their general contact information. However, only one repository, the Maine Maritime Museum, offers an online form for reference requests. The museum provides ample instruction to guide users to the right kind of form. There is one form for “any sort of historical question, including questions about photographs and vessel plans…” This form offers checkboxes for describing the type of information (artifact, artwork, boat or ship dates, general museum information, historic documents, people or family, locations, other historical research and photographs) and a place to enter free text for describing requests in detail. After the user receives a response to their inquiry and confirm availability of materials, they have the option of making arrangements to come to the museum or using yet another form (off-line) for purchasing materials.

Are there a search collections or search site capabilities? Of the top ten repository web sites studied, Maine Maritime Museum and Waseca County Historical Museums were the only repositories to offer search functions. The Maine Maritime
Museum offered a small box for a free-text search at the top corner of its index page. Search results were displayed on a new page with author (of the result) and short introduction of the page containing the search terms.

The Waseca County Historical Museum was the only repository to offer a collection search function. This repository included specific instructions for improving search results, including using keywords or synonyms. Their advanced search feature uses clickable categories to launch a search for materials based on subject and/or format. Some categories in the advanced search are artifacts, atlases, birth records, cemetery records, death records, and an index to a book about Waseca County. Especially unique to this advanced search feature are the field limitations. For example, the artifacts search offers users the option of searching by date entered, accession, object type, description or comments and history, Birth, census, and death searches allow users to enter either a first or last name, and cemetery searches add the option of including a cemetery name in the search.

_Are there finding aids present? Are any encoded in EAD?_ A total of six repositories were found to have any form of finding aid up online. All finding aids were either in HTML or PDF. Of the top ten web sites only the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History had finding aids. The museum offers eight finding aids in HTML and PDF format along with accompanying digital images.

**4.4 Discussion of Metadata**

The better a web site author uses designated space outside of the body content of a web page to describes a page in its meta-data and in submissions to web search engines, the
more likely a page is to be indexed (Price, 2002). A thorough example of meta-keywords and description can be found in the source code of the Berkshire Museum’s index page:

```
<meta name="description" content="The Berkshire Museum was founded in 1903 by Zenas Crane. At the heart of the museum's mission is a commitment to playing an active cultural and educational role in the community. Visitors are welcomed to the only art, natural science and history museum in Western Massachusetts. Fourteen galleries, an aquarium, a 291 seat fully equipped, air conditioned theater, classrooms and a museum store make up the Berkshire Museum."/>

```

In the first section, meta-description is the text search engines use to populate the area immediately below the page title. Usually only the first couple of lines of meta-descriptions appear on the engine’s results page. If adequate descriptions are provided, with relevant and catchy text placed at the beginning, online searchers will be able to quickly scan their search engine results for relevance.

The second section, meta-keywords, is a list of names, terms, and phrases that correspond to the information presented within the web site. Anticipating terms its audience may use to search, the Berkshire Museum included types of materials, personal names, counties, eras, patron ages, and artistic styles. If online searchers enter many of the terms above, their search engine results list will include the Berkshire Museum.
Metadata is a critically important, yet still underutilized tool. Findings in this study show that of all seventy-three web sites examined, only twenty-three used metadata to describe their web presence. Six of these were among the ten best web sites (which did all employ metadata similar in quality to the Berkshire example).

4.5 Discussion of Other Elements

In addition to including the recommended archival-specific content elements, many repositories provided examples of style and structure elements and/or general content elements that were sound according to recommendations presented in the Literature Review. Many repositories presented the definition of an archive and explained their mission, purpose or charge in an “About Us” section that highlights who they are and what they do. An example of such a mission statement was found on the site of the Brookside Museum:

As the home of the Saratoga County Historical Society, Brookside Museum inspires community memory by telling the story of Saratoga County through interactive and engaging programs and exhibits. We fulfill this vision by hosting school programs, exhibits, a research library, and through public programming.

Repository web sites also discussed preservation efforts and retention issues for donations. Many also explained the history of collecting materials at their repository and include reports of materials discovered during a survey of the collection.

Those sites having high-quality content were most often positively evaluated on Structure and Construction elements. Sites did not have image-heavy pages, and those sites having many images packaged them as a slide show or database, rather than within text or as a long scrolling document. The background color of sites varied with construction using multiple tables, but sections containing text were most often light in
color with dark text. Site navigation was not dependent on any color scheme and did have logical, sensible page breaks.

4.6 Discussion of Sites with Low Content

Sites with low content presented a minimal amount of useful information, and for the survey were characterized as one-page, low content or brochure-like. In other words, the overall content of the site did not extend beyond that of a moderately informative brochure, nor did it capitalize on the Internet as a public relation presence. Using presence of archival content as the deciding point of judgment on quality of content, thirty sites, or 41%, did present low content. The content on these sites was confined to one-line descriptions of the goals or policies of the repository, ambiguous terms (“just like Grandma’s attic”), user logs and guest books, weather monitors, bulletin boards, web counters, and other odd pieces that did not contribute to the online research experience of a potential researcher in the archives. In many cases, low-content sites provided such sparse information that it was truly unclear whether the repository had any research materials at all. In all, 41% of sites were low in content quality. One-page sites examined in this survey were found to be inadequate in all cases.

In almost all cases, those sites having low content also exhibited fewer positive construction and structure elements. In other words, they looked mostly as ill conceived as the content. A negative rating in style and structure elements was many times due to several sentences of all capital letters (difficult to read), overly busy borders, clip art, extraneous icons, and unrelated images. Pages clouded by the “Updated!” and “Click

---

3 This comment pertains to those repositories that did not describe themselves as offering primarily interpretive tours or historical activities. For these, the research substance was the site and/or related artifacts.
Here,” detract from the page’s natural flow and can detract users as they attempt to scan pages for information.

Some instances of web sites with the lowest of both the content and construction included:

- A site governed by a state museum and a state archives;
- A one-page site had both very large font;
- A one-page site with about two-third of the page devoted to a book for sale by the historical society;
- A “picture tour” through some of the “treasures” of the repository with only two images and no description at all; and
- A city site that claimed to be a “researcher’s dream,” but offered no guidance on how to conduct research with primary materials, there or anywhere.

5: Conclusions

Business-related general content and general structure and construction elements were present most frequently. At the bottom of the list of elements employed on repository web sites are metadata (from structure and construction elements) and five other archival-specific elements were least often present: access restrictions stated, finding aids for collections, search collections or site capabilities, a reference request form for researchers, and a statement of photoduplication policies. Of the three types of elements studies, only the following were present in 75% of all web sites: major subjects
of the collection are stated, there is a visually appealing color scheme, there is adequate contact information, hours of operation are stated and the page is quick to load (not bogged down by too many images).

Of all these results, the most troubling conclusion is that there is an absence of metadata in about 70% of sites examined in this survey. Twenty-three repositories used meta-keywords and meta-description in their source codes, and some of those repositories added other meta tags to describe their site’s content. Metadata understanding or application may be a technological leap for staff of some repositories, whether independent or well connected. Metadata inclusion is driven by skills and desire to keep up with evolving needs of online searchers. The 30% of repositories who did include metadata in their site’s source code chose terms that showed a consideration for how online researchers might try to locate materials in their repository.

Interestingly, the Waseca County Historical Society, with two full-time and three part-time staff, presented a site with some of the highest quality content. Smaller repositories’ technological outputs are not limited by the composition of their staff, but rather limited by the staff’s skills and expertise or resources affecting the distribution of staff time to spend on IT-related tasks.

Results for this study indicate that staffing may indeed have some bearing on abilities to present adequate web content. A thorough investigation of staffing at local history repositories demands interviews with staff and confirmation of the repository’s overall staff profile. Further, to determine the opinions and strategies of repositories when it comes to having an online presence, a study would need to investigate specific roles at work, perhaps investigating the amount time spent using online resources for archival
research, archival education, general educational seminars or workshops or IT courses. How many people on the staff are responsible for creating and/or maintaining web content?

Repositories with a related governing entity do not appear to be in better shape in terms of online presence or quality. Some repository/governing agency relationships were not explicitly stated and therefore not recognized in this study. However, web sites of repositories related to larger governing entities did not overwhelmingly suggest an advantage. Except for one repository, the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History (associated with The Smithsonian Institution), such sites were lackluster. Repositories might consider collaborating directly with their related governing entities to develop high-quality presence that represents both groups in a positive way.

This study found that only forty-three, or 59%, a small percentage of the repositories surveyed did provide a complete, useful, and high-quality web presence. This high-quality presence included information that beyond that of a simple brochure. The highest quality sites all provided contextual and substantial links to other repositories or historical resources. These direct researchers to other appropriate sites and help to create a web of authoritative information for historical researchers. High-quality sites contributed to archival literacy and provided unique online presences. Developing researchers’ archival literacy can lead to more effective interactions between staff and researchers. Online presences demonstrating “archival space” provide visual (and sometimes interactive) representations of processes or materials that make an archive unique. In the highest quality sites, information was not hidden behind distracting images or organized in such a way that navigation was not smooth. Finally, bringing the entire
site’s navigation, presentation, and content, information was organized logically throughout the site.

The best sites followed the repositories’ mission and vision statements, whether it was providing tangible materials for research or curatorial functions. In order to perform in the digital world, records repositories must follow established standards and recommended best practices for producing an online presence. As more repositories go online with substantive content and solid structure, their presence will contribute to a body of useful research resources. Repositories should continue to exploit the abilities of web presentation to provide guidance to new researchers. An online presence should add to anything others already know of a repository. Accordingly, repositories should recognize that posting a site is not the end of public relations. New information will attract repeat visitors and high-quality information will help to build a body of researchers with some archival literacy.

When researchers desire to go to “the source” for primary materials, they are confronted with a new public face for every kind of research facility. The potential variety presentation of online information offers local color and interesting historic expertise. However, archives-specific content elements, especially those concerning user orientation and archival literacy, were sorely lacking in sites overall. With an increasing number of researchers are forging their own paths online, they have the potential to be more prepared and informed of collections before they even contact a repository. Archival repositories need to present adequate information about their collections so that patrons can make the best use of resources available at the repository.
In conclusion, this study leads us toward conclusions validated many times before: “curatorial organizations—historical societies, museums, libraries, and others—which collect and preserve paper [and other cultural objects] all need more people, more training, better equipment, more money, and more space” (Walch: 1998). Local history institutions have opportunities to reach users by creating and maintaining an online presence. The degree of usefulness of such sites may have to do with infrastructure, staff skills or specialties or plain economic resources, but that is not always the most appropriate explanation for smaller repositories that, as discovered in this study, are indeed doing more with less.
Bibliography

The Web site addresses listed in this section were valid as of November 1, 2004.


“Web-Based Training for Archivists and Other Historical Record Keepers.” Archives Resources Center. 13 March 2004. Council of State Historical

Appendix A.1: Repositories Included in the Study

Abigail Adams Historical Society (CA)
Alexander Ramsey House (MN)
Alpine Historical Society (CA)
Amherst County Museum & Historical Society (VA)
Amherst History Museum (MA)
Ataloa Lodge (OK)
Belhaven Memorial Museum (NC)
Benton County Historical Society (IA)
Berkshire Museum (MA)
Brick Store Museum (ME)
Brookfield Museum and Historical Society (CT)
Carondelet Historical Society (MO)
Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum (WY)
Concord Museum (MA)
Cornelius Low House/Middlesex County Museum (NJ)
Crossroads Village and the Huckleberry Railroad (MI)
Des Moines Historical Society (IA)
Driftwood Family Resort Museum (NH)
Edmondston-Alston House (SC)
End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (OR)
Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum (MA)
Exeter Public Library (NH)
Farmington Historical Society (NH)
First Division Museum at Cantigny (MO)
Folsom Power House State Historical Park (CA)
Fortuna Depot Museum (CA)
Genealogical Society of Butler County (MO)
Gilsum Historical Society (NH)
Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society (MI)
Hidalgo County Historical Museum (TX)
Historic Palmyra, Inc. (NY)
Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County (IL)
Howard County Historical Society (MD)
Huntley Project Museum of Irrigated Agriculture (MT)
Iroquois County Genealogy Society (IL)
Jackson County Historical Society (IL)
Jessie Porters Heritage House and Robert Post Cottage (FL)
John Jay Homestead State Historic Site (NY)
Johnson County Historical Society (IA)
Kansas Heritage Center (KS)
Kerr Place Historic House Museum (VA)
Lake County Historical Society (OH)
Lake Hopatcong Historical Museum (NJ)
Lombard Historical Society (IL)
Maine Maritime Museum (ME)
Marshall County Historical Museum (MS)
Midwest Old Settlers and Threshers Association (IA)
Monona Historical Society (IA)
Mountain Heritage Center (NC)
Museum of Automobile History (NY)
Museum of West Louisiana (LA)
Old Homestead House Museum (CO)
Oyster and Maritime Museum (VA)
Pendleton County Historical Society (WV)
Pine-Strawberry Archaeological And Historical Society (AZ)
Plymouth Historical Museum (MI)
Pony Express Historical Association (MO)
Red River Valley Genealogical Society (ND)
Rogers Historical Museum (AR)
Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center (OH)
Sacramento Room, Sacramento Public Library (CA)
Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation (CA)
Saratoga County Historical Society/Brookside (NY)
Scarsdale Historic Society (NY)
Shaker Historical Society and Museum (OH)
Stamford Historical Society (CT)
Superstition Mountain Historical Society Inc. (AZ)
Tennessee Historical Society (TN)
Tioga County Historical Society (NY)
Valley Community Historical Society (NE)
Village of Thornton Historical Site (IL)
Waseca County Historical Society (MN)
Winters Heritage House Museum (PA)
## Appendix A.2: Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of repository</th>
<th>Local history collection/historical society</th>
<th>Research library</th>
<th>Genealogical society</th>
<th>Museum, historic home, history museum or site attractions/activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Structure and Construction Elements</th>
<th>better</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>worse</th>
<th>absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible &quot;alt&quot; tags for images</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick to load (image management)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succinct and scannable (use of text blocks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate metadata in source code (keywords, title)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-friendly navigation scheme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visually appealing color scheme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business-Related General Content</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours of operation are stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General contact info present/easy to find</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly selective and contextual links from this site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important information at top of page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content is presented in a logical fashion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last updated date</td>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>&lt; 6 mos.</td>
<td>6-12 mos.</td>
<td>&gt;12 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission, vision or statement of purpose present</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related governing entity</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Type:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archives-Specific Content</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online domain is unique to the archival institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User instruction/orientation/archival literacy efforts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of fees charged for service is present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopy/reproduction policy stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formats of materials available is stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access restrictions are stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major subjects of collections are stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference request form present</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search collections/search site function?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding aids present</td>
<td>EAD:</td>
<td>Non-EAD:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A.3: List of Repositories with Ten Best Web Sites

The Berkshire Museum (MA)
URL: http://www.berkshiremuseum.org/

Brookfield Museum and Historical Society (CT)
URL: http://www.brookfieldcthistory.org/

Concord Museum (MA)
URL: http://www.concordmuseum.org/base/home.html

Des Moines Historical Society (WA)
URL: http://dmhs.org

Howard County Historical Society (MD)
URL: http://www.hchsmd.org/

Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History (GA)
URL: http://www.southernmuseum.org/

Maine Maritime Museum (ME)
URL: http://www.bathmaine.com/

City of Rogers Historical Museum (AR)
URL: http://www.rogersarkansas.com/museum/

Tioga County Historical Society (NY)
URL: http://www.tiogahistory.org/

Waseca County Historical Society (MN)
URL: http://www.historical.waseca.mn.us/
## Appendix A.4: Percentage of Sites Employing Archives-Specific Content Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>All Sites</th>
<th>Top Ten Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding aids available</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search collections or site option</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference request form available</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photoduplication policies stated</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access restrictions stated</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to archival literacy efforts</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a unique archival domain</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees for services explanation/schedule present</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formats of materials in the collection are stated</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major subjects of the collection are described</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix A.5: Percentage of Sites Employing Business-Related General Content Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>All Sites</th>
<th>Top Ten Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last updated date present</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly selective and contextual links are provided</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important information is near the top of the page and visible during loading</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission, vision, or statement of purpose present</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content is presented logically</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate contact information is easy to locate</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of operation are stated</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix A.6: Percentage of Sites Employing General Structure and Construction Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>All Sites</th>
<th>Top Ten Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate metadata is included in home page source code</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Alt&quot; tags for images are used throughout the site</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-friendly navigation is employed</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content is succinct and scannable</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealing color scheme employed</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick to load</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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