ABSTRACT
The Florida Memory site first came online in 1996, and today it enjoys over forty-eight million page views each year from folklorists, historians, musicians, teachers, students, and others who use this collection of documents, photographs, film, and sound recordings. The Florida Folklife Collection, launched online in 2003, has become one of Florida Memory’s most popular components, in part due to the popularity of the sound recordings it includes. Funding for Florida Memory, which has consisted of federal grants, has been steady for over a decade. Support for Florida Memory and for specific collections within it—such as the Folklife Collection—has made possible several upgrades over the years, including the addition of audio files, upgrading of the user interface, expansion of social media and outreach initiatives, and the migration of all collections on the website to a common platform. To date, the overarching strategy for continuing to attract funding for Florida Memory has been to make the website an indispensable and beloved part of the Florida cultural landscape.

INTRODUCTION
The Florida Folklife Collection is an online collection consisting of over fifteen thousand digitized photographs, films, and sound recordings. The audio component includes vocal and instrumental music, ethnographic field recordings, and interviews that document Florida’s diverse cultural traditions. Created in 2003 with funding from a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Studies (IMLS), the Florida Folklife Collection is one component of the online platform called Florida Memory. Florida Memory was created and is managed by the State Library and Archives of Florida. In addition to the Folklife Collection, Florida Memory includes Spanish Land Grants, World War I Service Cards, Confederate Pension Applications, the Call and Brevard Family Papers, Florida’s Early
Constitutions, the Florida Photographic Collection, educational resources, and many other collections. Even within this richness, Florida Folklife stands out for its audio/visual collection, which consistently ranks as the most popular part of the Florida Memory website, and for the fact that it is a collection that is fed by an ongoing research program in folklore.

The roots of the Florida Folklife Collection run deep. Housed in offices down the hall from those of the State Archives, the Florida Folklife Program consists of a team of academic folklorists whose responsibility, since 1975, has been to “document and present the folklife, folklore, and folk arts of the state.” The Program’s efforts are responsible for such assets as photographs and interviews documenting the vanished art of hand-knotted fishing nets; an interview with railroader Tom Watson recounting thirty years with the Jacksonville railroad, including civil rights issues, working conditions for African Americans, and the impacts of integration; and audio recordings capturing the traditional chant of a tourist-boat captain at Rainbow Springs. Other parts of the collection, not yet digitized, trace the development of the folklife field in Florida, including the work of some of the nation’s most prominent folklorists and one of the country’s earliest state folklife programs.

Each year in Florida trained folklorists conduct field work, gathering print, audio, and visual documentation of traditional arts throughout the state, focusing on a specific topic chosen by the State Folklorist. The process has yielded a rich panorama of life in Florida, from the 1930s, when the process of collecting first began, to today. Each May the survey culminates in the Florida Folk Festival, “the nation’s oldest state-sponsored folk festival,” where musicians, crafts people, and other practitioners of folk arts gather at the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park in White Springs for four days of concerts and demonstrations.

BACKGROUND

While the Folklife Program officially began in 1975, the development of the archival collection dates to the 1930s, when supporters of the park at White Springs began collecting material, and folklorists were working in Florida as part of the Florida Federal Writers Project of the WPA. In 1972, Albert Head was appointed to manage the Folklife Center at the Stephen Foster State Park and saw that trained folklorists were needed to expand the program. Peggy Bulger was hired as the State Folklorist and set off to survey the state’s native arts, from “Key West to Pensacola.” As Bulger describes it, she started in a grant-funded role doing fieldwork, and “stayed for twelve years.” Early on at the Stephen Foster Center, she discovered a “building at the park that was just full of recordings, reel-to-reel tapes; no climate control, in disarray, piled in there, and [I] started listening to these…They were old recordings of the festival from 1954 and on up…We started an archive—at least got them into an air conditioned room!” And so began the Florida Folklife Collection.

In 1995, it was decided that the collection should be managed by the State Archives. In that year, the Bureau of Folklife was disbanded, merged with the Bureau of Historic Preservation, and moved to Tallahassee, the state capital and location of the State Archives. The Folklife Collection was then accessioned by the State Archives. The first twenty years of the Program’s collection were absorbed at once: 150 linear feet moved over to a new facility and managed by professional archival staff.
The Folklife Program continues to conduct annual surveys and gather field recordings, interviews, notes, ephemera, photographs, and other documents, and it determines what new material will be sent over to the State Archives. It is up to the staff at the State Archives, and specifically the Florida Memory team, to determine what to put online. While the decision to move the archive may have caused some concern at the time, it was largely seen, even by the folklorists, as a necessary step to preserve the collection. According to Tina Bucavalis, former State Folklorist, “sending the archive to Tallahassee was better in the long run, [as it meant] more involvement with the state museum. But a lot of staff felt strongly about staying in White Springs; they were a renegade, independent entity there....They were not thrilled about its moving to Tallahassee.”

When the collection arrived at the Archives, it was very carefully cataloged, according to Project Director and Archives Supervisor Jody Norman. Still, while the collection was considered to be popular, based on the number of on-site visitors who came to consult it in Tallahassee, for anyone outside the building it was virtually “nonexistent.” According to Norman, most of the researchers who made the trip to Tallahassee, and thus constituted most of the “obvious demand at the time,” were folklorists, historians, and musicians.

In 2003, Judith Ring, Director of the Division of Library and Information Services that oversees the State Archives, sought an IMLS National Leadership Grant to support further digitization work in the Archives.

The digitization of the Folklife Collection was not the first digitization effort undertaken by the Archives, but it was seen as an opportunity to further develop what was already a strong program. The Florida State Archives Electronic Imaging Project had begun in 1995, when the Bureau of Archives and Records Management obtained Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding to hire a consultant to assist in the development and implementation of an automated delivery system for photographic images and an accompanying bibliographic database. In 1999, this project was further expanded to include an educational outreach program. Modeled after the Library of Congress’s American Memory Project, it was renamed the “Florida Memory Project.”

The first grant for digitization of material from the Folklife Collection was from IMLS and was for $155,752. The project, which went by the title “Folklife Digitization and Education Project,” included the following plans:

- Select 10,000 photographs for digitization
- Create an online index providing “item-level access to approximately 50,000 photographic images and approximately 5,000 audio recordings”
- Create four new educational units using digitized materials from the Folklife Collection
- Make all these available via the Florida Memory website

The first phase of building the online Folklife Collection did not include digitizing the audio recordings, but in the process of the project it became clear to the team that there would be real value in making audio directly accessible through the website. In applying for a subsequent LSTA grant, therefore, they included plans to digitize audio and hire a sound archivist to support this effort.

The decision to integrate audio was a major turning point for several reasons. First, it provided a direct tie-in with the Florida Folk Festival, which presented an opportunity for publicizing the collection. Second, the grant...
included funding to produce audio CDs as an additional promotional tool. The first audio CD was released on March 25, 2005, and staff at the Archives reported that within a month, they began hearing from people around the world, requesting CDs. As of early 2013, they still get about one request a day. In the several years since they started producing CDs, five have been created, each produced with the help of grant funding, and fifty to sixty thousand units in total have been distributed.

The Folklife collection has continued to grow since 2003. Every three to four years, the Folklife Program transfers new material to the State Archives. And Florida Memory itself continues an ongoing and award-winning digitization program, with the goal of digitizing five thousand new photographs, creating new educational units, and digitizing an archival collection each year. In 2013, the focus is on digitizing court cases from Florida’s territorial and early statehood period (the cases selected date from the 1830s to the 1860s). This project involves scanning and transcribing fragile originals. The topics covered in the cases include slavery, wrecking, personal injury, and inheritance. The finished collection page will include essays that provide brief historical context on each case.

**SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

The Florida Folklife Collection is inseparable from the larger Florida Memory website where it resides, and the successful aspects of both the collection and the platform have been mutually reinforcing. Florida Memory has continued to grow and develop since the mid-1990s, with each phase of work bringing in new collections, creating new infrastructure, or updating the tools already there. The Florida Folklife Collection is just one of dozens of collections on the site. It offers high-demand content, particularly the audio component, which drives usage and draws national attention to Florida Memory.

The sustainability of the Florida Folklife site, then, is dependent upon the ongoing health of the Florida Memory website, and the attention to supporting and promoting it that staff from the Archives continue to offer. In turn, Florida Memory is supported by ongoing grants, specifically the LSTA funding it consistently receives each year.

According to Norman, even “if grant funding ended, our computer system could keep the resource alive, with nothing changing, without great cost,” given the current infrastructure of the Florida Memory site. Then again, as Gerard Clark, Chief of Archives and Record Management, has pointed out, “if it’s not changing, then maybe it’s not sustainable.”

**Economic Model**

Today, the staff at the State Archives who launched the Florida Digitization and Education Project that led to the online Folklife Collection primarily consider themselves the “Florida Memory team.” But the Folklife project required bringing in specific expertise that the team did not have, such as a sound archivist, to fully realize the potential of the collection.

The Florida Memory team consists of staff within the State Library and Archives of Florida (itself a bureau within the Division of Library and Information Services, with a staff of approximately forty). The team now includes the following positions:
• The program director (60 percent of whose time is spent on FM–related work)
• A photographic archivist (15 percent of whose time is spent on FM-related work)
• An archives historian
• An education officer
• A sound archivist (devoted to the Folklife Collection)
• A systems analyst
• A cataloger
• Several scanners (1 FTE)
• A photo liaison officer (1 FTE)
• A social media and marketing coordinator (0.75 FTE)

Funding for Florida Memory as well as for the Folklife Collection has consisted primarily of LSTA or National Leadership grants, both administered by IMLS. LSTA funding has been a reliable source for twelve consecutive years, while National Leadership grants have been sought for specific new developmental projects as needed.

Currently, only one Florida Memory position—the sound archivist—is devoted exclusively to the needs of the Folklife Collection. Most of the positions are funded through Florida Memory’s yearly LSTA grant, and some key staff members, including the project director, are covered by the core State Library and Archives budget. That organization receives its funding from three sources: 1) general revenue, provided by the state each year to cover core operating expenses; 2) the Records Management Trust Fund, which derives from revenue generated mainly by the records storage business that the Archives operates; and 3) federal grants that the unit secures to undertake new projects.

Neither Florida Memory nor the Folklife Collection have sought to generate revenue due to their mission- and grant-based imperatives to keep their content freely available, but also due to some logistical difficulties related to their being part of a government agency. They create and distribute CDs, but these are within the terms of the grants they receive, and are distributed freely. In the past, staff have considered trying some revenue generation, but they quickly ran into internal obstacles. For example, an ongoing effort to add a shopping cart feature has been difficult, due to the refusal of the Department of State to use PayPal in order to accept credit card information online.

**Public Benefit**

*The program is so highly visible and highly liked, politically, it is likely to be sustained. It is such a visible part of the Department of State. . . . Florida Memory is the public face of the Archives.*  

~ Gerard Clark

The goal of the Florida Folklife Collection and of Florida Memory as a whole has always been to share the cultural history of Florida. Doing this well is part of the Archives’ mission, but it is also an explicit part of its strategy to attract ongoing support. The Florida Memory team sees its goal, in part, as making the site as valuable as possible to its users, so that it becomes and remains “indispensable . . . current, part of what is going on.” As Education Officer Katrina Harkness points out, “If people care about us, we are more likely to continue.”

The Florida Memory team is well aware that its continued ability to attract funding depends on its ability to remain current and highly visible, and so recent social media and outreach initiatives are designed to make Florida Memory, and in turn the State Library and Archives, an indispensable part of the state government’s commitment to promoting historical and cultural resources. As Archives Historian Jonathan Grandage points
out, “As the public face of the Archives and Library, the success of Florida Memory bolsters the case for continued funding for State Library and Archives programs more generally.”

When budgetary issues have threatened those programs, Florida Memory has proven to be an important symbol of the success possible with recurring funding. For example Jody Norman points out that in 2003, the Florida legislature considered closing the State Library and moving the State Archives to the Department of Environmental Protection (State Parks), essentially defunding the program. According to Norman, when this happened, people protested, and “eighty percent of the emails we received said ‘we can’t lose Florida Memory.’” Support for Florida Memory, and by extension the State Library and Archives, proved critical in preventing this from taking place.

The impact of the digitized collection is measured in several ways. While in a typical year the physical collection receives approximately ten thousand calls, walk-ins, and other patron requests (in 2012 the exact total was 10,785), the Florida Memory website boasts four million visitors per month.

Initial plans for the Florida Folklife project assumed that the audience for the website would mirror the users that the archivists (and others) had noted used the physical collection the most: genealogists, historians, and folklife experts. Instead, they quickly realized two things: that the scale of the audience was beginning to grow beyond expectation, and that there were new segments emerging, including music enthusiasts. In fact, usage has “mushroomed,” and the team reports seeing the numbers grow and shift over time.

Accurate measurement of usage has not been easy, however, and in 2012 the Florida Memory team chose to revamp their method of measuring usage, which until then had relied upon SurfStats. In December 2012 they began using a new log parser application developed by the department’s IT unit, which has resulted in lower, but they believe more accurate and reliable, statistics.

Even if some of the early usage figures are subject to debate, the relative strength of the Folklife Collection is not. Web analytics for the first two years following completion of the project demonstrated that Folklife’s audio collection garnered by far the most page views, displacing Florida Memory’s main Florida Photographic Collection, which in earlier years, as the largest collection, had been considered the most popular and frequently visited. In 2012, often over 70 percent of the total Florida Memory page views in a given month were for the Folklife Collection.

The Florida Memory team also seeks to understand their users using qualitative methods, such as:

- **Feedback at conferences and through social media.** Earlier grants made it possible for staff to attend academic conferences, where users as well as key stakeholders would offer the team direct feedback. Due to travel restrictions, feedback from patrons now comes increasingly from social media and/or local outreach opportunities.

- **Polls of users.** One of the largest efforts to gather data from users was undertaken in 2012. The team identified primary users of Florida Memory and asked them to take a survey on SurveyMonkey. The responses led to the decision to redesign of the site; the home page now features six main buttons to help
users easily navigate to photographs, video, audio, specific collections, topical exhibits, and classroom resources. In addition, space was added on the page offering highlights of the collection, which rotate daily or so. A “features” section changes weekly, and throughout the site, social media options are clearly offered.

The State Archives has established several key partnerships that help promote the website to the widest possible audience. Some of the key partnerships include Florida iTunes U, the World Digital Library, Opening History from IMLS, and the Library of Congress’s National Digital Stewardship Alliance.

**KEY FACTORS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

1. **Platform improvements over time; iterative process.** The Florida Memory site has continued to be developed over time. The types of upgrades have included both major infrastructure improvements and the addition of new features for users. Both types of changes have resulted in increased usage, with the number of unique visitors increasing 163 percent from September 29, 2011 to June 23, 2013.

While the original grant proposal for digitizing the Folklife Collection outlined the ways in which the new project would build upon technical expertise and infrastructure already in place at Florida Memory, at the time the newly acquired collection was digitized, each collection on Florida Memory was still using its own “custom made” system, and data was still held in multiple, separate databases. In 2010, a new grant permitted staff to migrate the Florida Memory site to a new platform. After considering Fedora Commons, Drupal, and Omeka, the team chose Omeka, which they saw as easier to implement.

Based on feedback from conferences and through social media, the team has implemented upgrades specifically to facilitate use. The changes they have made recently include:

- Permitting downloads of audio files in MP3 format, not just streaming
- Offering more search options (e.g., by year, by type of image—color or black-and-white), some of them customized for specific collections
- Smoothing the ordering process for images: an ordering tab that displays whenever a photograph is clicked on, added in 2012, resulted in a jump in sales from about $35,000 to over $52,000 during the fiscal year
- Optimizing the site for mobile devices using responsive design

2. **Outreach to key stakeholders.**

*Florida is a state full of transplants; part of Florida Memory is to document the history of this. You can be from someplace else and still be a Floridian.* ~ Katrina Harkness

Florida Memory staff take very seriously the need to reach out both to the key constituents who advocate for them in government, and to the wider public who engage with their site.

- Key stakeholders include educators, legislators, librarians (public, academic, school), museum professionals, cultural institutions, and media outlets. Staff members reach educators through the Department of Education’s mailing list and website, webinars, and through the State History Fair’s mailing list. They connect with legislators via tours and outreach venues. And they reach the general public through social media and webinars. They have made a strategic choice to “go where the users are” and have developed a regularly updated blog on the main site (three to five posts per week), and built a presence on social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Pinterest, and Tumblr. Several team
members, including the social media and marketing coordinator, contribute to social media initiatives. Team members monitor analytics and user comments and other feedback when devising social media strategies.

- Perhaps the most fruitful strategy involves the ongoing editorial work to make the site relevant. Every so often this process has significant results. In 2005, the sound archivist happened to notice that a promotional clip created in 1964 by Florida State University used a young, then-unknown actor named . . . Jim Morrison. When word got out about the clip, the volume of news media and fans visiting the website crashed the servers.

- The whole team works together to create a site design that is organized and intuitive. Participation in projects such as the World Digital Library and the Flickr Commons makes Florida Memory part of a vibrant worldwide community of archives, museums, and libraries sharing unique historical documents. The education officer and the archives historian work together with the rest of the team to create exhibits and learning units using photographs, documents, audio recordings, and video. The sound archivist produces a regular podcast focusing on various genres and artists found in the audio collection.

- Web statistics are analyzed regularly to determine who is using the content. Photographs are regularly used by national and international news outlets, such as the New York Times, Forbes, and ESPN. Television shows such as Burn Notice and CSI use photographs in sets. Using these web statistics, Florida Memory can promote popular and timely material.

3. **Aligning with educational partners.** The education component of Florida Memory supports both state and national standards. The educational units are designed to support the Sunshine State Standards, as the core curriculum for Florida public schools is known. As educational requirements change—for example, through the emergence of Common Core State Standards, which Florida adopted in 2010—the Florida Memory team adapts their approach when adding materials in order to deliver appropriate resources to teachers and students. The sustainability of the educational component of Florida Memory is directly tied to remaining abreast of shifts in the Common Core and Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

The Classroom section of the website contains guides for Black History Month and Women’s History Month. Florida Memory also works closely with the Florida History Fair every year to provide primary source materials for History Fair participants appropriate to that year’s History Fair theme. Teachers have requested that this list be available on the very first day of school. History Fair winners have reported that they always use Florida Memory in their research.

Four Folklife learning units were created under the original grant for developing the Folklife Collection site. These units are four of the total of just nine units that the Library of Congress’s American Folklife Center lists for Florida in its Folklife Resources for Educators section.

**ONGOING SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES**

- **Dependence on grants.** Despite its success, Florida Memory is heavily reliant on grants, which are not guaranteed. As Chief of Archives Gerard Clark points out, “Florida Memory is part of the Archives. If the State Archives are defunded, this will have an impact on Florida Memory as well.” New grants will be needed, going forward, to continue to scan new content (including new additions to the Folklife
Collection). While Florida Memory provides access to five hundred thousand objects, that is only roughly 2 percent of the total holdings of the Archives.

- **Preservation and storage issues.** Florida Memory staff also have concerns about preservation, storage, and keeping up with emerging trends and technologies. Master digital files for Florida Memory are currently stored on RAID (Redundant Array of Independent Disks) stations, and Archives staff are exploring cloud storage as an alternative.

- **Limited data about users.** The staff’s ability to understand users of the site is limited, due to web software inconsistencies and difficulties in measuring traffic, something they are actively working to remedy.

**LESSONS FOR OTHERS**

1. **Align with the mission of stakeholders.** The mission of the Folklife Collection, and of Florida Memory more generally, is directly aligned with the goals of the State Library and Archives of Florida.

2. **Go where the audience is—don’t expect them to come to you.** The Florida Memory team saw significant growth, both in use by Florida residents but also in interest from more distant places, as a result of placing the collection online and actively engaging with social media. Active editorial work in developing blog posts tied to current events has helped the site to continue to increase usage over time.

3. **Iteration is important.** The team has not rested on its laurels, but continues to iterate in subsequent phases of work, based on feedback from users. Critical to this is having staff with sufficient technical expertise, so that fixes, upgrades, and tweaks can be tried and implemented as needed.

4. **Demonstrate success.** The project team is very clear on its goals and very careful to meet them. This sounds obvious, but it provides critical bedrock for applying for subsequent grants and other support. Whether or not they are required by an external board, outcome-oriented goals and metrics can help a project not just to accomplish its aims, but to clearly communicate its accomplishments to others.
APPENDIX

Interviewees

Tina Bucavalis, former State Folklorist (1996–2009)
Peggy Bulger, former State Folklorist (1975–1989)
William Chase, (former) Sound Archivist
Gerard Clark, Chief of Archives and Records Management
Jonathan Grandage, Archives Historian
Katrina Harkness, Education Officer
Joanna (Jody) Norman, Project Director, Archives Supervisor
Christopher O’Toole, Systems Analyst
Blaine Waide, State Folklorist (2011–present)

Resources Consulted

Digitization Guidelines for the Florida Memory Program, Copy on file, supplied by Jody Norman.


Florida State Library and Archives (FSLA), application for LSTA Grant for Florida Memory Project, 2012.


Organization chart, Division of Library and Information Services, Office of the Division Director. Copy on file, supplied by Jody Norman.

NOTES


7 The Fund derives its revenue from fees charged for records storage, microfilm vault storage, and electronic records storage at the state records center; fees for duplication of archival records, photographs, video, and sound recordings; and records management training. The Records Management Program is currently stable, with sufficient funds being received to support the operations of the records center (staff, supplies, rent), several records management positions, and several positions in the Archives, including the education officer who works with Florida Memory.


9 http://floridamemory.com/blog/


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