

Preserving Hope: Reanimating Working-Class Writing through (Digital) Archival Co-Creation

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Abstract: In this article, I use concepts of *provenance*, *value*, and *representation* to trace how a working-class writing network, the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, hoped and tried to preserve their writing for nearly forty years. Ultimately, their hope for an archive turned into a reality, as they participated in the co-curation of print and digital archives. But each step along the way was met with struggles of labor, finances, and resources. With a focus on materiality and class, I argue that in order to reanimate community literacies digitally, we must also make visible the conditions that allow, exclude, structure, and impede this work.

I'd like to tell a story about preservation—about curating digital archives alongside community members in the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, or the FWWCP. The FWWCP was a working-class, community writing and publishing network that began in London in 1976 and spread transnationally until 2007, often bringing together writers who felt marginalized based on their working-class backgrounds. As one member Roger Mills (2018) noted, “We wrote despite people sneering at us, and we created a community.” Indeed, the FWWCP created a community that was committed to publishing, circulating, and preserving their writing as an act of resistance against people and institutions who dismissed the value of worker writers’ testimony. But, alongside the story of preservation, I *need* to tell a story about materiality, about the precariousness of building archives with working-class communities when resources are unstable: when there is no archival space, no archivist, little money, and sometimes not even the belief that working-class writing is worthy of publishing, let alone preserving.

This story, then, is about an unsettling of which voices get archived, how community members responded to social conditions by advocating for archival curation, and ultimately how community-led actions across decades paved the way for a co-curated digital archive of working-class writing.

In this essay, I draw from work in the areas of community literacy, critical archival studies, and working-class studies to focus on the material factors of co-constructing archives from scratch with FWWCP/FED¹ members. Since 2013, I have worked alongside FWWCP/FED members collecting archival documents and publications, and I have led the effort to sort, organize, index, box, digitize, publicize, and create finding aids so their histories are preserved² ethically and collaboratively. Ultimately, during this partnership, we established the *FWWCP Collection* at the Trades Union Congress Library in London, housing over 2,350 individual print publications (roughly eighty-five boxes) and more than twenty boxes’ worth of administrative material, including meeting minutes, membership files, mission statements, constitutional documents, letters, and more. When I say *we* here, I am referring to some previous FWWCP members, the FED Executive Committee, Nick Pollard, Steve Parks, Jeff Howarth, Vincent Portillo and myself who have been part of the intellectual, logistic, and physical work of curation. Beyond the printed *FWWCP Collection*,

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we have worked to reanimate the FWWCP/FED histories through the *FWWCP Digital Collection* beginning to make these documents accessible across the globe.

In working with the FWWCP/FED, I feel compelled to talk about materiality and class because they have influenced each step of co-curating print and digital archives foregrounded with community-based practices. My hope is to make visible some of the structural and ideological constraints the FWWCP/FED and our community partnership has had to navigate that complicate digital archival work, not only at the moment of digitizing but also beforehand during multiple stages of shifting provenance and processing. While our work is nowhere near complete, digitization feels as important as ever: during moments where archives and libraries are largely closed and travel is discouraged (or impossible), digitization allows for continued circulation of materials. Neither archiving nor digitization, however, are neutral endeavors, especially when archival contents and creators involve people who have been disenfranchised and when the archive materials themselves were nearly lost forever. Multiple authors across disciplines have addressed the rhetorical and ideological power embedded in archival descriptions and choices (Caswell, 2016; Farmer, 2018; Graban, 2010; Rawson, 2018), particularly impacts on community members outside of academic spaces (Cushman, 2013; Monberg, 2017). Choices in archival work are complex, ranging from what to name the materials and why that naming matters (Owens, 2014; Price, 2009; Theimer, 2012) to the possibilities of decolonial archival work that can only occur through “radical praxis” (Ghaddar & Caswell, 2019). As Michelle Caswell (2016) argues, though, an important “gendered and classed failure” is that “almost none of the humanistic inquiry at ‘the archival turn’... has acknowledged the intellectual contribution of archival studies as a field of theory and praxis in its own right” (para 5, 4). Drawing on Caswell’s work, and emphasizing negotiations rooted in class, this essay details the archival processes of reanimating the FWWCP/FED histories.

I explore the following question: what does it mean to collaborate with a community to turn their hope for preservation into the material reality of a digital archive? I use Caswell’s (2016) discussion of archival concepts of *provenance*, *value*, and *representation* to show how the *FWWCP Digital Collection* was constructed with the knowledges, experiences, and collaborative expertise of the FWWCP/FED community in curating and reanimating their own histories. Such work unsettles which voices get archived and how community members participate in co-curation to advocate for themselves. Elsewhere, I have argued that for community-based archival projects, “our methods and methodologies ha[ve] to account for the realities of people involved—the laboring of bodies, fluctuating finances, physical dis/abilities, technological access and changing social conditions that affect not only [an] archive’s creation but also its durability” (Pauszek, 2019, p. 50). I build on this claim, arguing that in order to reanimate community literacies digitally, we must also make visible the conditions that allow, exclude, structure, and impede this work. In this case, I also account for moments of pre-digitization because the digital archive was entirely dependent upon these material histories. In previous writing, I had not taken into account how foregrounding theories and practices in critical archival studies reshapes the work of this project. The language of critical archival studies allows me to show even more overtly how FWWCP/FED community-members advocated for their own preservation. Making visible is a form of unsettling the status quo of archival methods that often privilege academic and institutional needs over community visions and insights. Here, I will illustrate how FWWCP/FED members have been part of the process of changing their own *provenance*, advocating for the *value* of their histories, and shaping the metadata for their own *representation*. We’ve made conscious and ethical efforts to keep community-based desires at the forefront, while making our conditions and choices transparent. The methods we’ve used in the *FWWCP (Digital) Collection(s)* challenge hierarchies in archival work, by drawing from community expertise and knowledge, and enable us to enact a collaborative version of “reinterpretatio[n] of provenance” that redefines “creatorship” in archives (Caswell, 2015, para 15), thereby engaging the community from which the artifacts emerged.

This unsettling—of which voices get archived and how communities actively participate in such work—includes a process of negotiation from what was once a fear of lost histories to the emergence of a

community-engaged print and digital archive. Therefore, I trace the circulation of FWWCP/FED texts across four particular moments of *provenance*, moving from printed texts to digital files, ultimately showing how community members and later our partnership retooled archival practices to respond to social conditions around us: (1) the founding of the FWWCP in 1976, moving to (2) the establishment of a printed collection in 2014, (3) the prototype and ongoing creation of a digital collection from 2015 to present, and (4) the potential reanimations of these community histories. The shift from no archive to a print archive to digital preservation has allowed FWWCP/FED members, friends and family, community activists, and researchers alike to engage with the materials in new ways across backgrounds, disciplines, and countries.

Moment One: The Founding and Provenance of the FWWCP

Hackney, London, 1976. A group of working-class writers and publishers joined together at Centerprise Bookshop in the borough of Hackney to establish the FWWCP. Over the coming months, they developed a constitution, formed an executive committee, and determined that the FWWCP's purpose would be "making writing accessible to all" (FWWCP, 1978). Their group emerged in order to unsettle the dominant narrative of who gets to write and tell their story, specifically including the working class.

While beginning in London, the FWWCP's legacy spans continents, reaching countries such as the United States to South Africa to New Zealand and multiple places in between. Even within the United Kingdom-based writing groups, multiple writers identified as Afro-Caribbean, Ghanaian, Iranian, Polish, Greek, Irish, Bengali and more. Beyond its vast national and geographic scope, the network also brought together writing groups from across languages and cultures to establish an inclusive sense of working-class identity when members of the working class were struggling to find spaces to speak their truths. Many members, for example, felt stigmatized by governmental, social, and educational structures around them, such as the ongoing privatization of housing, as well as social stigmas that disparaged working-class jobs or unemployment, lack of traditional educational experiences, and varying physical and mental abilities. As Tom Woodin (2018) notes, "The Fed was partly a historical reaction [...] by those 'left behind' in the wake of publicized cases of upward mobility during the 1960s" (p. 8). The FWWCP, then, became a community for working-class people to share their experiences with others who also felt dismissed, discounted, or marginalized.

The preservation of FWWCP histories was a significant undertaking in terms of emotional impact and materiality. Members I've met through this partnership have overwhelmingly described that writing within this network provided a sense of solidarity and community so that they had confidence to share their writing. The scope of FWWCP's publications was vast, involving topics of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, migration, disability, mental health, national identity, language politics, labor, and more. Members used genres of memoir or "life stories", poetry, cookbooks, oral histories, and more. Sometimes, FWWCP writings included narratives by people such as Florence Agbah who grew up in Ghana and wrote about having to quit school because of family trauma and then relocating to a new place in Africa (*The Survivor*), or moving to England and navigating work in a new country without knowing how to read or speak in English (*Ways of Learning*). Other writings include the multilingual (in English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and more) *Breaking the Silence* (Centerprise, 1984) by a group of Asian women who "want to make visible some of the experiences that have been hidden" (Preface, para. 2). Simultaneously, FWWCP



Figure 1: Florence Agbah's Ways of Learning. Image credit: Pecket Learning Community

histories include Roger Mills' *The Interview*, which describes the lack of support he had as a seventeen-year-old working-class youth hoping to do something creative with his skills.

Among the publications are also *Once I Was a Washing Machine*, an anthology of working-class writing; *In Exile: Iranian Recollections*, an oral history of Iranian migrants detailing the political, social, and personal reasons why and how they left; *Who Was Harry Cowley?*, a community remembrance of a local chimney sweeper known for his leadership on working-class rights, anti-fascism, and the fight against homelessness.

As the FWWCP network grew, the executive committee and members actively sought out support to fund, preserve, promote, and circulate their work, but layers of precarity prevented this from happening in any sustainable way. The FWWCP was already thinking about the *provenance* of their materials in ways similar to Caswell (2016): "Provenance is not only about the past, but the future of the records as well; this approach to provenance includes all possible potential activations in its scope" (para 13). In other words, just as Caswell describes *provenance*, the FWWCP was constantly considering how they would be remembered and how future generations might take up their work. At various moments throughout 1976-2007, the FWWCP created anthologies of working-class writing and published community-based histories

about specific locations (ex: Brighton; Hackney; Old Poplar), workplaces and vocations, and writing groups to circulate locally. Moreover, the executive committee attempted to create an archive in various locations to preserve the physical texts. The most successful attempt came when the FWWCP had a paid outreach worker in Stoke-Upon-Trent; however, there was never the storage space, the adequate materials, or the money and labor available to sustain an archive.

Ultimately, sustained maintenance could only happen if someone (or a group with financial, technological, and labor resources) determined these texts, histories, and people were, indeed, worthy of preservation. And buy-in from non-working-class institutions was difficult to come by. For example, the Arts Council of England unpleasantly remarked in a funding refusal letter to the FWWCP Executive Committee that members were "amateurs" whose writing had "no solid literary merit" (FWWCP, 1980; Maguire et al., 2010). For years, the FWWCP worked to disrupt narratives that diminished the working class, but this work only went so far. Without a stable physical space, labor, technological resources, and adequate funding, the documents the FWWCP originally hoped to archive ended up in basements and garages, as the organization collapsed. For many, new possibilities of provenance seemed bleak, but some members still had hope for preservation.

Moment Two: A Community's Hope Rekindled and Valued

Holloway Road, London, 2014. Thirty-eight years after the FWWCP began, a series of events made a nearly four-decades-long dream possible. Longtime member Nick Pollard donated dozens of boxes of FWWCP archival material to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Library, an organization that understood the *value* of working-class experiences. When the FWWCP disbanded in 2007, Pollard held on to as many publications as he could, hoping to salvage some of the histories. Pollard's actions represent the *value*, as described by Caswell (2016), that he and other FWWCP/FED members understood the publications to have: "Value refers not to the monetary value of records, but their value in attesting to the events from

which they emerged, their value in representing some important aspect of the past, and, in some strands of archival thinking, their value for present and future users” (para 16). Of course, the FWWCP/FED’s entire existence emerged from a belief in the *value* of working-class identities and writing; however, it took decades for the FWWCP/FED to find others who felt similarly and could make this *value* apparent and accessible to additional communities. Pollard’s partnership with the TUC later enabled Sally Flood, Roger Mills, Ken Worpole and others to follow with donations, beginning the symbolic and literal movement of texts from homes to archival storage. Among those boxes sat *Once I Was a Washing Machine*, *Paper Talk*, *In Exile* (from London), *Who Was Harry Cowley?* (Brighton), *L’atelier typographique et pédagogique de CREAMI* (France), membership files from Buchu Books (South Africa), Storylinks (Canada), and more, which moved from their publication spots across the world to Sheffield where Nick was located, and on to the TUC Library in London.

During this time, members described what an archive³ would mean to them, ranging from personal and familial pride to the opportunity to remember people who had been overlooked to the hopes that others would find current relevance in the FWWCP. One founding member, Sally Flood, described the personal impact of the community, as well as the social consequence of an archive for future generations. Sally, who left school at fourteen, was an embroidery machinist in East London for much of her life and was discouraged from writing by many people. But when she sent poems to a writing group called the “Basement Writers,” she was shocked the group published them in a community booklet. Their encouragement gave Sally the confidence to keep writing, and the Basement Writers ultimately became a founding FWWCP group. In a conversation with me about her FWWCP/FED involvement, Sally described the impact of preservation:

Well, I would like to be remembered, obviously, because I’m so much a part of it, you know, I’ve been on the [executive] committee and co-opted⁴ so many times that I’ve given up counting. And, yeah, the Federation has been a real part of my life and it’s made my children proud, when they see me in print.” (S. Flood, conversation, 2013).

Out of this partnership, Sally published *Paper Talk*, *Window on Brick Lane*, *In My World*, *Writing Together Alone*, and more, connected to themes of motherhood, poverty, and class identity. Sally’s hope for the preservation of these texts, however, was dependent upon concretized actions including the exchange and movement of materials.

The methods and production of the FWWCP/FED materials themselves (premised on low tech and low-cost forms of writing and printing) were meant to be a radical form of democratic publishing; however, this also meant that texts were circulated and shared for use rather than preservation. As the group saw a decline in membership, material conditions—finances, members’ health, lack of technological resources—became structural barriers to creating the archive before 2014. The desire for founding and preserving the FWWCP history, contrasted with the inability to find a structure for years to do so, parallels how working-class studies scholar Sherry Linkon (2018) describes the impacts of deindustrialization. She writes, “the half-life of deindustrialization generates psychological and social forms of disease, as individuals and communities struggle with questions about their identities and their place in a global economy that has devalued workers and their labor” (p. 2). Similarly, the FWWCP emerged during rapid deindustrialization in England and had to fight for their own value in the workplace, in a global economy, and in being preserved. Further, Linkon (2018) notes, “memory may provide insight and inspiration, but it cannot overcome the structural and ideological power of global capitalism and neoliberalism” (p. 25). To borrow from Linkon, the FWWCP/FED’s memories through writing might be able to “illuminate the problematic conditions of work” and promote “inspiration,” but they cannot negate the structural and ideological power embedded in constructing archives including the labor, capital, and resources they involve (p. 25). Still, however, the



Figure 2: Audio recording of Sally Flood quote [click image to play]

FWWCP/FED remained persistent in their endeavor to unsettle whose histories are deemed archivable. Without understanding the materiality and class struggles involved in these processes, we risk erasing very real structural exclusions that impacted the FWWCP/FED's hope.

Archival work pushes us to think not only about the historical and cultural lineage of the texts we use, but also the possibility that such materiality represents. For Sally, the possibility of remembrance is both personal for her children's pride and her own, as well as socio-politically important. She notes the promise of an archive, describing younger people who have said, "If only *we* had groups like [the FWWCP]." Further, Sally reflects, "I think [the FWWCP's] writing is relevant to our times, and we'll become history—and that's from a working-class background. And we don't need education [to make us relevant]" (S. Flood, conversation, 2013). Here, Sally is concerned not only with the recognition of *value* in the FWWCP/FED but also its future potential with working-class communities who have similarly felt marginalized. She forcefully advocates that traditional educational experiences are not the only ways to be relevant. But Sally's hope could only go so far without circulating these texts to larger publics.

The movement of these texts to the TUC illustrates ideological and material components of the FWWCP/FED's preservation hope becoming a reality. This was a tangible moment where a print archive had finally begun to take shape⁵ only because the *value* "in representing some important aspect from the past" (Caswell, 2016, para 16) and future had finally aligned with the materiality of available space and a librarian in a position to act on the value through preservation. About the FWWCP materials, TUC Librarian Jeff Howarth (2014) noted the possibility for multiple future uses:

The Federation often represented groups of writers on the periphery of society, including ethnic groups, lesbian and gay groups, and members with mental health issues. The archive collection contains a large number of the Federation's publications and magazines and will be of great interest to researchers studying adult education, creative writing, community history, social movements, working class culture, oral history, etc.

Howarth alludes to past "social movements" as well as the future possibilities with the changing *provenance* of these materials that are only possible with this outside valuation. While Tom Woodin (2018) has written about the FWWCP as a participating member and education researcher, skillfully documenting the history of the network and its importance as a social movement, such exploration of the FWWCP has previously only been possible for those with direct connection to members or documents themselves. The TUC Library deposit made these documents open for numerous engagement opportunities, for community members, students, and academics alike. Unfortunately, while the TUC Library's sponsorship added resources such as the housing for documents and institutional backing of a library, it did not alleviate material needs such as staff, funding, technological tools, and endowments—resources that many middle class or upper class/elite institutions already have in place.

At the TUC, the FWWCP/FED documents still had to undergo multiple valuations to consider what might be included. One question centered on what documents to keep and what to call them. Materials included letters, reports, financial accounts, minutes, and manuscripts used within and created by FWWCP/FED members. In this way, the material partially aligns with the Society of American Archivists' (n.d.) description of *archives* that includes records: "such as letters, reports, accounts, minute books, draft and final manuscripts, and photographs—of people, businesses, and government." However, administrative documents comprise only a fraction of the full printed materials, with another 2,350+ publications in the form of poetry, chapbooks, life histories, cookbooks, autobiographies, and anthologies.

Given the lineage of the FWWCP/FED's materials, the naming of the FWWCP's representation required some reflection and negotiation to think about stakeholders across the project, including myself and Steve Parks (Writing Studies), Nick Pollard (Occupational Therapy) and the FWWCP/FED, Jeff Howarth (librarian) and more. The group of us leading this project was contending with disciplinary and

international differences in the rhetoric of preservation, as well as the logistical processes. Importantly, the TUC Library is a *library* not an archive (even though it does house some archives) in England, which has different naming conventions, standards, and processes than the United States. Simultaneously, we were navigating how various community members, including librarians, humanists, archivists, and students from multiple countries understood the terminology and might understand the contents. The naming ultimately fell in line with Trevor Owens's (2014) distinction of "[c]ollection," which "clearly implies materials that have been assembled and intentionally brought together" (p. 5).

While the TUC Library sponsorship certainly saw *value* (both historical and future) in the *FWWCP Collection*, they could not provide the labor, funding, and technological tools to construct the archive the FWWCP/FED members wanted. Therefore, the cataloguing of the collection has only been possible through labor by me, Vincent Portillo, and university students participating in three study abroad classes on civic writing and community partnerships. Additionally, Portillo and I have personally volunteered months of work beyond these courses, which we have documented in a blog series (Pauszek & Portillo, 2018). In other words, while concepts such as *provenance* and *value* have been important ideologically for the FWWCP/FED's steps toward preservation, they have only been enacted with a limited budget and largely voluntary or course-based labor.

Labor, capital, and resources are ongoing negotiations for us, but digitization is a priority for multiple reasons. For instance, physical preservation presents complications for accessibility and circulation. The *FWWCP Collection* is dependent upon the physical movement of people to the TUC Library—something not always possible based on access to transportation, mobility, financial resources, geography, age, and more. Therefore, we felt the need to increase the possible uses of the collection. Digital circulation, then, became a means to catalogue information and create free access for users across the globe. In effect, the transition from print to digital format offered a means of reinvigorating working-class histories in an increasingly digital era.

Moment Three: Co-Curating with Community Representation

Syracuse, New York, 2015: Beyond the donations of physical materials, the project team and the FED Executive Committee discussed the necessity of circulating materials digitally. Yet, the FED Executive Committee was comprised of members mostly who were over 60 years old (some closer to 90 years) and unable to do the physical or technological work needed. That meant I would have to take point on this stage of the process. Otherwise, the *provenance* would end with the TUC Library and be dependent on travel to London. Ultimately, I began the creation of the [FWWCP Digital Collection](#) with a website that consists of background information about the print materials in London, and, most importantly, a searchable database of texts by various production elements and thematic qualities. The legacy of the FWWCP/FED is tied to the circulation and use of this work.

In some ways, the creation of the FWWCP Digital Collection provides solutions to many problems of the FWWCP/FED's legacy: a digital format affords the record keeping of these histories and the potential circulation to scholars, teachers, FWWCP/FED members and families, and community organizations. Digital archival work also involves forward thinking about the future of such documents. Digitization creates a central web location accessible by partners in England and the U.S., while also providing a mechanism for securing a version of FWWCP/FED documents in a moment of uncertainty within universities themselves undergoing budget cuts and threats to the humanities. Since the 2014 deposit of materials, for instance, the TUC Library has already relocated buildings, moving FWWCP/FED materials across the city, and has undergone budget cuts that further limit staffing and upkeep. Therefore, digitization is not a wholesale solution: just as creating the physical archive necessitated flexibility in archival methods to account for materiality and collaboration across communities, so too does the digital collection.

Figure 3: Homepage of the FWWCP Digital Collection

Print and digital archives represent the social in/exclusion of people and texts within a discipline as well as within larger communities, and we were committed to continuing the FWWCP/FED's work through collaborative curation in digital spaces. Such decisions for digital archives link to questions of ethics, in a similar way that Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch (2010) note about traditional print archives. Within Writing Studies, scholars have also argued for the need to explore the decolonization of archival work (Cushman, 2013), the use of digital tools for feminist historiography (Enoch, 2013), the use of multimodality to think across print/digital archival representations (Neal et al., 2013), and the need for accessible user-center interfaces (Potts, 2015). With digital archival work, we must continue to build spaces and practices that encourage the cultural importance of collaboration and preservation, particularly as they allow us to think about how we can expand our processes for and "sites of knowledge making" (Cushman, 2013, p 116), as well as "recente[r] cultural stakeholders" (Ridolfo et al., 2010). Said another way, with the proliferation of digital and archival scholarship, we must find ways to prioritize the knowledges and histories of those we work with. In this special issue, I identify with the ideas that Kathryn Comer, Michael Harker, and Ben McCorkle (2021) explore about "how logistics—both the technological back-end of the archive and the administrative process that supports it—are inextricably connected to questions of ethics and access" (p. 203). These logistics motivate what work is able to be accomplished as well as the choices we make and the in/exclusions that happen along the way. With these understandings in mind, a focus on

and articulation of the materiality of the *FWWCP Digital Collection* illustrates an ethical step toward transparency, particularly in community-based archival creation.

The continued maintenance and circulation of artifacts is invariably affected by multiple components of funding, technological resources, physical labor, sponsors, and the use or engagement of such artifacts. Therefore, we must continue to explore methods of representation and sustainability for community-based projects, necessarily focusing on the material conditions and choices that shape such work and our decisions with community members—particularly to talk about in-progress archival curation. Although my digital work and many of the choices I describe here began back in 2013, my hopes for the *FWWCP Digital Collection* align closely with the “community-driven design” ethos illustrated in Cushman’s (2019, p. 117) translation and digital archival work with Cherokee documents for the *Digital Archive for American Indian Languages Preservation and Perseverance* (DAILP). As Cushman (2019) notes, there are both social and technical challenges within community-based digital archival work that we must navigate. I am thrilled to see this model and will continue to deeply consider the implications of community archives that Cushman articulates; however, some of the largest challenges with the *FWWCP Digital Collection* include not having underlying financial support bases, institutional structures, and technical support that can supplement my own labor. We have a shoestring budget and most of the changes are made based on my own learning (ex: how to make .csv files; determining how to catalogue, store, and showcase large amounts of data; watching of YouTube videos; and digitizing documents one by one). Although I am working on finding more sustainable means (grants, tech support, labor), they do not exist yet for this project. (Importantly, during the final processes of writing this article, my own material and professional circumstances changed in tangible ways that will hopefully allow me to build on work with an increased budget and institutional structures. However, this is only a hope at the moment.)

Understanding our constraints, the *FWWCP Digital Collection*’s priority has been to balance making progress on the digital collection while holding on to the FWWCP/FED’s community-driven values. The potential for digital archives to be knowledge-making work led us to collaboratively draw on community expertise as we sought to digitally reanimate the FWWCP/FED. Caswell (2016) notes that

representation is the process by which archivists produce descriptive metadata, or data about the data stored in collections [...] Through representation, archivists name the subject of their collections, creating access points that can aid (or prevent) users from finding collections, bringing certain aspects of collections to the fore (or obscure them through omission), and gaining physical and intellectual control over collections. (para. 17)

FWWCP/FED members made choices about digitization and what metadata was critical. Grounding principles within our partnership require including members in archival discussions of *value* and *representation*, with the hopes of forming an inclusive digital community across discursive, educational, and geographic borders. This digital curation is only possible because of prior moments of provenance the FWWCP/FED fought to make happen. Therefore, we have developed a methodological approach that keeps community values and desires intact while also increasing availability to the materials.

Within discussions of digital archival work, I’m concerned with the maintenance and uptake of this research, particularly because our goal for the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is for it to be used in teaching, research, and community-run projects. Tarez Samra Graban, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne and Whitney Myers (2015) caution that the move from print to digital spaces requires ethical reflection and actions regarding the accessibility of the archives:

The choice of digital space and the means of archival organization are rhetorical acts deploying arguments about relations, power dynamics, and gate-keeping methodologies and should be treated as such... Thus, scholars participating in digital repatriation must critically interrogate

such social and political relations, even while embracing digitization's democratic potential. (p. 237)

The importance of ethical archival practices cannot be discounted; therefore, related to the *FWWCP Digital Collection*, our methodology has constantly included community members themselves as part of the “digital repatriation.” This collaboration aims to destabilize power dynamics and highlight community insights throughout. As such, it has allowed us to collaboratively enhance the archives' audience. One example of such collaboration is through the on-going Archive Presentation at the annual FED Festival which includes past-FWWCP/FED members. This forum allows those of us involved in the *FWWCP Digital Collection* to come together with FWWCP/FED members to discuss progress made and archival hopes for each year. And it represents the transparency and collaboration that are foundational to this project.

Co-Curation in Action

In both the physical and digital *FWWCP Collections*, FWWCP/FED members are co-creators who have shaped, and continue to shape, their construction in tangible ways. But what does this co-creation look like? This centers on reanimating working-class texts with an open understanding of provenance, or what Caswell (2016) describes as “an ever-changing, infinitely evolving process of recontextualization, encompassing not only the initial creators of the records, but the subjects of the records themselves; the archivists who acquired, described and digitized them (among other interventions); and the users who constantly reinterpret them” (para 13). This article's existence is a testimony to FWWCP/FED's shaping of provenance, moving texts from their homes to the TUC and then advocating for digital uses.

Representation of Provenance: To illustrate the shifting provenance of these texts and the community knowledges and actions involved, the *FWWCP Digital Collection* homepage rotates images of FWWCP/FED members, students, and the publications in various home and institutionally run spaces, signaling the importance of everyday spaces such as houses and community centers. The *FWWCP Digital Collection* also narrates the genesis of the FWWCP and the changing provenance between Nick Pollard and the TUC (Howarth, 2014). Such a move emphasizes the community's role in this archival formation.

Structuring the Metadata: Another form of digital co-curation occurred with the Collection Database. Figure 4 illustrates how we have designed the searchable database with an emphasis on regional locations, as opposed to by date, author, genre, or other taxonomies. For members, the choice of regional structure was crucial, as foregrounding the regions in England also allows for a fuller representation of types of labor (such as coal mining or dock work), regional dialects, history, food, community, and culture. The search in Figure 4 represents the main geographic regions within England and then differentiates texts that come from countries beyond England.

Alongside these regional designations, other searchable metadata includes the title, author, writing group, dates of publication, themes, genre, languages represented, and more. This search feature is crucial because, in many cases, these copies might be the last surviving text.

Archive

The FWWCP Archive contains over 3,000 unique publications representing over 80 of the FWWCP membership group. As requested by the FWWCP members, the archive is arranged according to region, then nation, and ultimately, around key themes (such as mental health or economics).

Any book that appears here is available in the FWWCP Collection at the TUC Library at London Metropolitan University. (A smaller sub-set of texts are also available at Syracuse University. Use the contact form for additional information.)

Samples of FWWCP publications are available in PDF form on the Materials page of this website.

Region - Any -
 Admin
 Australia
 Canada
 East Midlands
 France
 Germany
 International
London
 New Zealand
 North East
 Northwest
 Scotland
 Southeast
 Southwest
 USA
 Wales, Ireland, Scotland
 West Midlands
 Yorkshire
 Publisher: Manchester TUC
 NA

Theme - Any -

Figure 4: FWWCP Digital Collection search page with regional tags

For example, Figure 5 shows what comes up when searching “Sally Flood” and choosing from her list of publications. At the bottom of this page, users can access a PDF of her book. Moreover, for any community member wanting to find their text, they can search for their title or writing group. On multiple occasions already, members and researchers alike have done a database search, found an item they want to access, and have asked if their work can be digitized, particularly because of difficulties traveling to London. Even with an in-progress digital collection, the search opens up possibilities for use. These are the tangible realities of what the FWWCP/FED fought to make possible. Yet, digitization remains imperative for future use amidst compounding factors of a pandemic that have closed the TUC Library for multiple months, preventing

Paper Talk

Author: Sally Flood

In this book of poetry, Sally Flood describes life at her home in East London. Here, she writes about sleepless nights with family life, as well as drawn out days working as an embroidery machinist. Her poetry simultaneously draws attention to the beauty and hardships as a working-class woman.

Region: London

Themes: community Genre text: poetry
 poverty Medium text: booklet

Publisher: The Basement Writers

Copies: 1

Location: 08 L 02

Other

Astrolith publishing

File upload

Flood, Sally Paper Talk.pdf	891.38 KB
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Figure 5: Search Page for Sally Flood’s Paper Talk

anyone from accessing the materials. During this time, two Masters students have been writing dissertations⁶ about FWWCP materials without having access to the printed documents. Such work is unsustainable without digitized documents.

PDF circulation: Under such precarious circumstances, the most important feature of the digital collection beyond the searchable database is its ability to showcase PDFs and audio/video files. FWWCP/FED members influenced this idea from the beginning, as they donated CD recordings of poems, tapes of past writing workshops and publication readings, and requested that publications be scanned into digital formats. The PDF feature allows users across audiences and geographic locations to access, use, and circulate materials. Ideally, we will have all publications digitized, but currently we have 25 publications uploaded and another 200 ready for upload⁷. Expanding the digital collection aligns with the FWWCP's ethos of "mak[ing] writing accessible to all"; however, digitization requires a scanner, computer, and Adobe or other programs to create PDFs. Moreover, digitizing also requires time for scanning, manipulating images, uploading each file, and checking that the items are labeled with correct metadata. An updated and extensive searchable database and digitized collection samples are integral to extend usage within and beyond the FWWCP community.

Representing Thematic Diversity: Usage has been a source of constant discussion in our digital work. FWWCP/FED members provided significant insight about choosing themes to represent the collection through the tagging of digital materials to create metadata as well as in the creation of reading guides/finding aids. In this way, community members were part of creating the taxonomies and categories that shaped the use of the database. The goal here was to provide multiple points of entry into the materials so that audiences with varied interests could engage with the collection. Usability was key, as we thought about hopes for use across disciplines and communities; therefore, the themes chosen highlight topics such as "food", "gender"; "migration"; and "work" to name a few. Importantly, even as our tagging increased beyond the themes chosen by FWWCP/FED members, we prioritized the language of the FWWCP/FED rather than academics by using wording directly from the publications. For instance, if someone wrote about "gender," our tagging attempted to stay true to that language as an ethical decision about co-curating with community members rather than describing it as "feminist," even if their discussions of gender might be read as feminist.

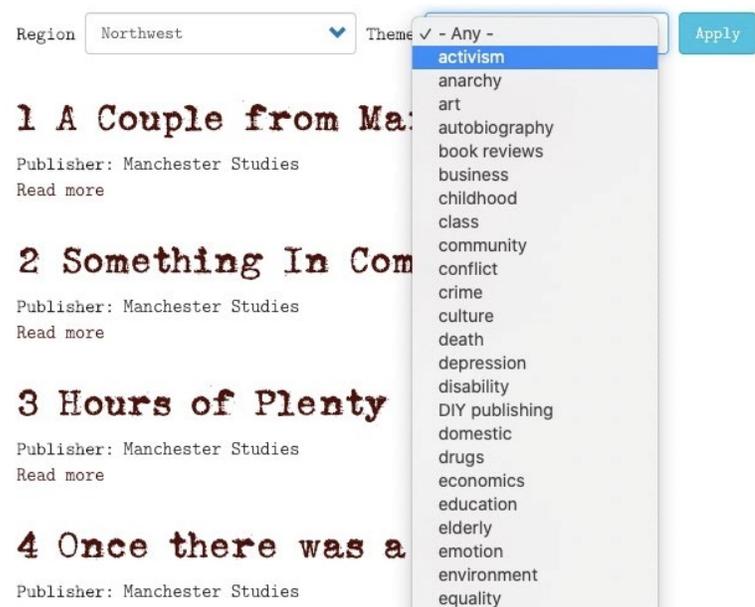


Figure 6: Search page with themes listed

Reading Guides: A final feature of co-curation is the development of reading guides/finding aids that modeled off of an FWWCP genre called "publication lists," which showcased new publications with a short summary and where to find it. These reading guides themes were developed in conversation with

FWWCP/FED members based on their ideas for the collection’s circulation. As part of a study abroad class in London, Vincent Portillo and I worked with undergraduate and graduate students to develop beginning drafts of the thematic guides on the following topics: activism; art; design; disability; food; gender; LGBTQ+ identity; literacy; mental health; migration; publishing; and race. Portillo and I continued this work, produced an overview of the *FWWCP Collection*, a description of contents, directions for navigating the collection, revised and edited the reading guides, created new guides based on FED requests (Jewish life; local London; mining; multi/translingual writing; war; work) and co-published them with students. Students also had conversations with members to learn more about their theme before reading archival publications. Each reading guide includes an overview of a topic and references to roughly ten to fifteen publications, including descriptive metadata and a brief summary of each source, where a user might begin their research.

Local London

The Local London Reading Guide emerged as a way to document the various neighbourhoods, boroughs, and communities in London. Within the FWWCP, many writers write specifically about and from their specific location and emphasise how this space has affected their lives. The FWWCP has deep roots in the East End of London, particularly Hackney, because the inaugural FWWCP meeting was held at Centerprise Bookshop. From then on, London was where dozens of writing groups and publishing groups were founded. These groups include one of the founding FWWCP groups, the Basement Writers. Other groups in London, throughout the FWWCP’s tenure, included Working Press; Black Ink; Centerprise; Stepney Books; Tower Hamlets Arts Project (THAP); Aldgate Press; London Voices; Hammersmith and Fulham’s Ethnic Oral Histories Project, and more.



Images of FWWCP publications

Throughout the publications from London, we see writing about the shops on Brick Lane in the East End to the houses of Hoxton and Bethnal Green. We see stories of activists in Stepney and school children who went on strike to support their teacher Chris Searle. There is history about Old Poplar’s churches and Kennington Park’s political events. Finally, within many of the publications, we see how the various spaces of London are each unique and diverse in their own way from the types of work central to those locations to the dialects used among the community.

Figure 7: Example of the Local London reading guide overview

Remember those texts I wrote about earlier, such as *Iranians in Exile* and *Breaking the Silence*? These and similar texts can be found in the Migration reading guide. Or maybe you’re wondering where Sally Flood’s *In My World and Other Poems* might be? You’ll find it as part of the Gender reading guide, while *Paper Talk* is part of the Work reading guide. Of course, the topics often intersect, as illustrated by the use of multiple keywords; however, these guides are meant to be a resource to aid the circulation of these materials for new users and multiple audiences.



In My World and Other Poems

Sally Flood, 1989

FWWCP/08 L 02

Sally Flood’s collection of poetry looks at the cycles of life, beginning with birth and going through our confrontations with our own mortality. This collection emphasises the importance of experiences and writing, regardless of formal education. She shows that the working class has as much truth in writing as the academic elite.

Keywords: class | children | community | gender | poetry

Figure 8: A section of the Gender reading guide with Sally Flood book, summary, and keywords.



Paper Talk

Sally Flood, no date

FWWCP/08 L 02

In this book of poetry, Sally Flood describes her life at her home in East London. She writes about sleepless nights with family, as well as drawn out days working as an embroidery machinist. Her poetry simultaneously draws attention to the beauty and hardships as a working-class woman.

Keywords: class | community | family | gender | migration | poetry | poverty | work | working-class | women's writing

Figure 9: A section of the Work reading guide example with Sally Flood's *Paper Talk*.

While the *FWWCP Digital Collection* work is on-going, it has been carefully created to include insight from community members themselves at every stage. We will continue to expand these features and include interactive timelines, maps connecting to publications, audio and video interviews and performances, and more.

Moment Four: Possibility in Digital Collections

Commerce, Texas, 2020. In the five years since the *FWWCP Digital Collection* has gone live, I've received multiple emails from users requesting more information and access to additional FWWCP/FED documents. The requests are similar, consisting of a version of: "There is a book in your collection written by my auntie. Can you please help me see it?"; "I am trying to understand my family better. Is there anything you can do to help me find this publication?"; "My mum was an FWWCP member and I had no idea. I'd love to see what she wrote."; "I'm trying to get a copy of the book my dad created. It has pictures of where I grew up."; "I was in the *FWWCP* and no longer have any copies of my work. Can you send me a copy?" Alongside these personal requests for filling in bits of family genealogy have also been academic queries: "I'm interested in 1980's community publishing in London. Do you have any documents that fit this description?"; "Does your Collection have connections to the poetry zines from the U.S. in the 1970s?"; "What documents do you have that touch on the 1984/85 miners' strike?" Such questions illustrate the impact of preserving these documents and their uptake. There are personal implications for members and their families, social and ideological impacts of showcasing the *value* of working-class writing, as well as educational impacts that can shape our teaching and research with an emphasis on precarity, class identity, and the materiality of archival creation.

By making visible the conditions that enabled and constrained our work, I hope to have shown a model of how FWWCP/FED members have been co-creators, actively shaping the *provenance*, *value*, and *representation* of their collection. Throughout this process, members have unsettled dominant narratives that diminished working-class writing and instead have responded with community-based insights that live on in the possibilities of digital archival circulation.

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Notes

- 1 Due to various economic and social factors, the FWWCP ended in 2007. Out of this group, a newly aligned group emerged a year later called TheFED: A network of community writers and publishers. FWWCP/FED refers to members of the pre- and post-2007 groups as part of this collaboration.
- 2 My interest in preserving working-class archives connects closely with my upbringing near Buffalo, New York during the time of deindustrialization. When I heard about the FWWCP, it was the first time I felt a personal connection to the academic work I might be able to do about valuing working-class literacies. I traveled to England to meet FWWCP/FED members and was quickly welcomed into this community, and we became friends through these identifications. By the end of our visit, they co-opted me onto their Executive Board, excited for what work we could accomplish together with my labor and resources and their insights, knowledges, and histories. (See Pauszek 2018, 2019 for more on this relationship). Co-opted is a common term in the FWWCP/FED that signals support. Co-opting someone in this context means appointing or inviting them into a group or committee, which illustrated an important moment of acceptance and trust for our partnership.
- 3 I use the term “archive” because it is the wording the members themselves used.
- 4 See note two for meaning of co-opting.
- 5 For a fuller history of the creation of the FWWCP Collection, see Pauszek, 2019; Pauszek and Portillo, 2018.
- 6 British terminology for a Masters project.
- 7 Our current platform does not allow such storage and ease with uploading, which has led to us transitioning platforms.

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